

TIPP Project – Teachers in Practice and Process

Nr.134222-LLP-1-DE COMENIUS-CMP

Project action realization group of Vilnius College:

Elida Aršavskienė
Rima Bačiulytė
Stefanija Filipovič
Vitalija Gražienė
Dalia Kulytė
Marytė Mikelionienė
Kazė Verbickienė

Individualization of Pedagogical Process in the Heterogenic Pre-primary Groups and Primary Classes

Actuality of the problem: Education is treated as a very important field in the long lasting strategy of the development of Lithuanian state. On the way back to the space of Western values, education is a tool that can help to strengthen creative potential of the society, to keep and develop national identity and to bring up democratic society. Today is obvious: changes of economic, cultural, social life in the country and impact of globalisation, sustainable development, expansion of informational technologies, also shift in the system of values implies educational community to suite it's objectives very carefully with the needs of children, their families, community and the state.

Development of the sector of education of Lithuania in the period of 2003-2012 year has aims and objectives that will serve as criterions for general quantitative and qualitative growth, also as criterions for the evaluation of the results of this period. There is such a mission defined: to help a person gain a concept of the modern world, to gain socio-cultural competence, to grow as independent, active and responsible human being, to be willing to meet life long learning challenges and capable to face them, to be responsible for the creation of personal and community development, to ensure development of national and regional culture and it's identity, openness and dialog with other cultures.

In the „Concept of Lithuanian Education“ [3, pg.5] is noted, that „the main mission of the school is to bring up independent, creative person, able to expand maximally his abilities“. Today we can notice positive changes in the attitudes of the teachers of Lithuanian main school (and primary school teachers – in particular) towards the importance of understanding the needs of children and development of their competences. The need to bring up a person with skills of critical and creative thinking is connected not only with a role of a teacher, but also with pupils, because both will be involved into the creation of changing world and into the integral European space. Comenius program provides teacher trainers from Vilnius College some valuable tools for reaching these objectives. General aim of the Comenius program is: by encouraging international cooperation of schools and mobility to raise quality of schooling and to strengthen European dimension. Research, done by the working group of Vilnius College on TIPP Project – Teachers in Practice and Process, Nr.134222-LLP-1-DE COMENIUS-CMP, was provided, keeping in mind mentioned dimensions.

Description and methodology of the research: research was separated into 2 blocks, first of them was based on analysis of scientific and other resources and screening of attitudes, knowledge and notions of student teachers and young teachers. Results of it are assessed in the evaluation report to the TIPP project management group. Second research was made as supplementary one and the essence of it is analysis of the study programs for teacher training of Vilnius College.

Research No.1

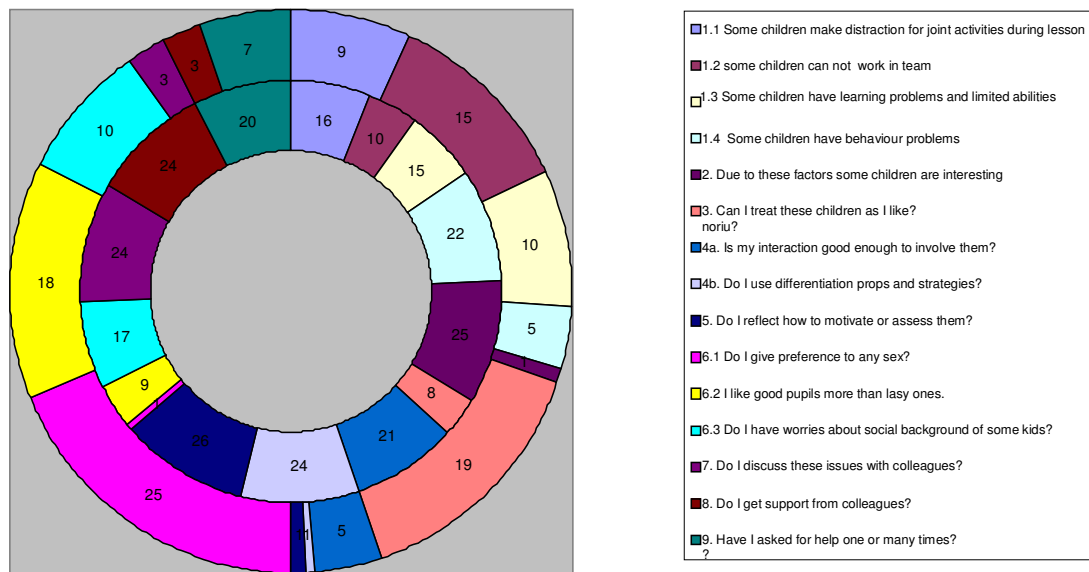
Goal of the research: to analyze possibilities of individualization in heterogenic pre-primary groups and primary classes.

Objectives of the research:

- to analyze general and professional skills of student teachers and teachers, affecting individualized approach in educational process;
- to analyze self-evaluation, evaluation and reflection of educational environment, influencing individualization in heterogenic pre-primary groups and primary classes.

Parameters of research screening: 46 student teachers for pre-primary and primary education of Vilnius College and 40 young teachers working in kindergarten and primary grades in different regions of the country (job experience – 5 years) have answered systemic questions.

Reflection of educational environment by student teachers



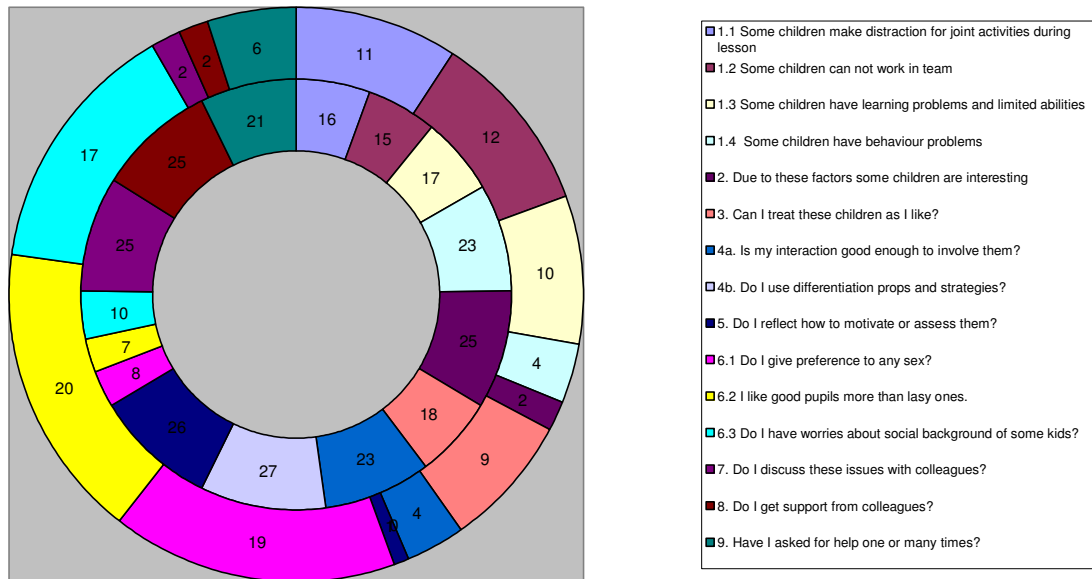
Picture No.1

Research showed that almost half of student teachers notice exceptional children and problems they are causing. Some children make distraction for joint activities during lesson, can not work in team or have learning problems and limited abilities, also they have problems of behavior.

Most student teachers treat such children as interesting enough, that means, they do not have negative attitude towards them. There is an interesting fact, that even if student teachers do not notice exceptional children and problems they are causing, they also do not have such an attitude.

Two thirds of student teachers during pedagogical practice period are trying to motivate such children. Almost all student teachers during lesson use differentiation props and strategies, like individual assignments, work in groups, team work, special questions, etc. This proves the fact, that students notice heterogenic children and have quite positive attitudes towards them. On the one hand, that is very natural: they are just learning class management ABC. Most of the student teachers discuss these problems with colleagues, but only around half of them are asking for help. Research data shows, that all students who have asked for help gets it.

Reflection of educational environment by teachers



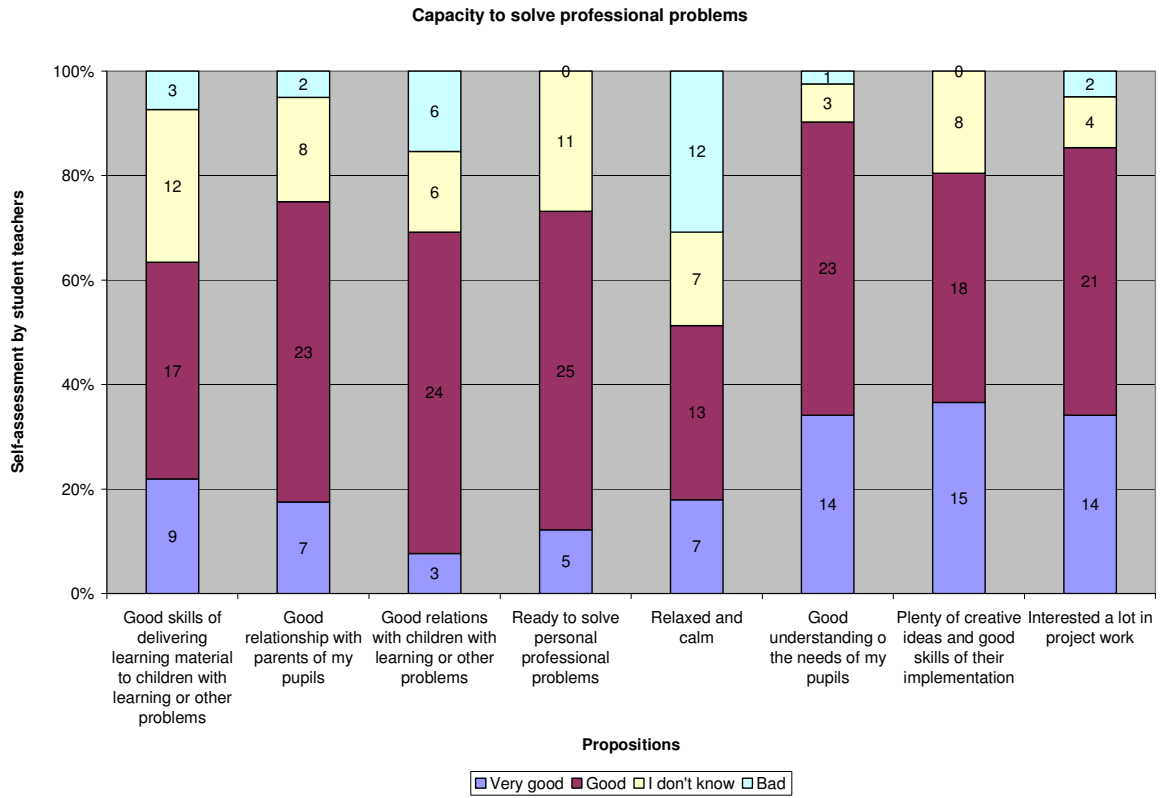
Picture No.2

Research showed (pictures 1,2), that almost half of student teachers and most of young teachers notice exceptional children and problems they are causing. Some children make distraction for joint activities during lesson, can not work in team or have learning problems and limited abilities, also they have problems of behavior.

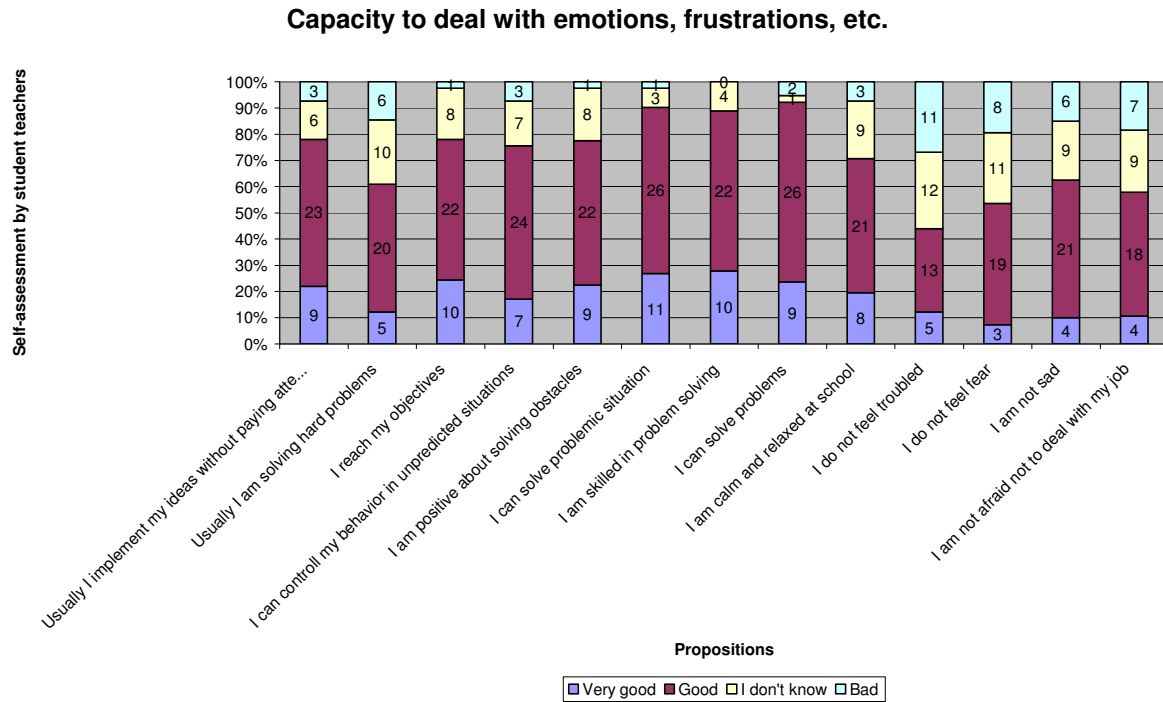
While only two thirds of student teachers during pedagogical practice period are trying to motivate such children, almost all young teachers do that. Almost all student teachers and absolutely all young teachers during lesson use differentiation props and strategies, like individual assignments, work in groups, team work, special questions, etc. This proves the fact, that students notice heterogenic children and have quite positive attitudes towards them. On the one hand, that is very natural: they are just learning class management ABC. Young teachers manage to solve this problem much better.

Most of the student teachers and young teachers discuss these problems with colleagues, but only around half of student teachers, but majority of young teachers are asking for help. This means that together with growing experience grows also skills of class management and perhaps teachers help each other. Information or knowledge obtained about the ways of differentiation of pedagogical process is not the same as a capacity to use that information.

Students notice heterogenic children and have quite positive attitudes towards them, but the reasons of such approach are rather emotional, but not professionally based. In the case of young teachers this professional approach is not reached, too. Research data shows a very serious fact – most student teachers and young teachers do not care about children from social risk families, as they should.



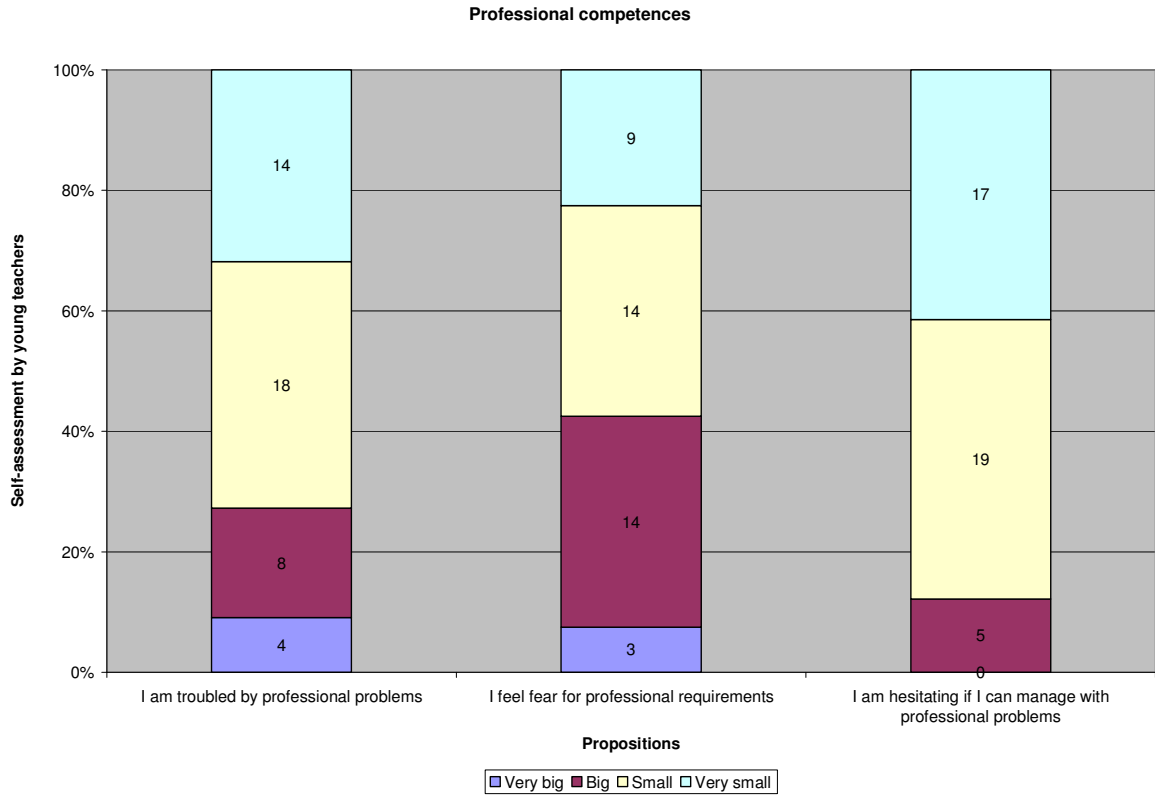
Picture No.3



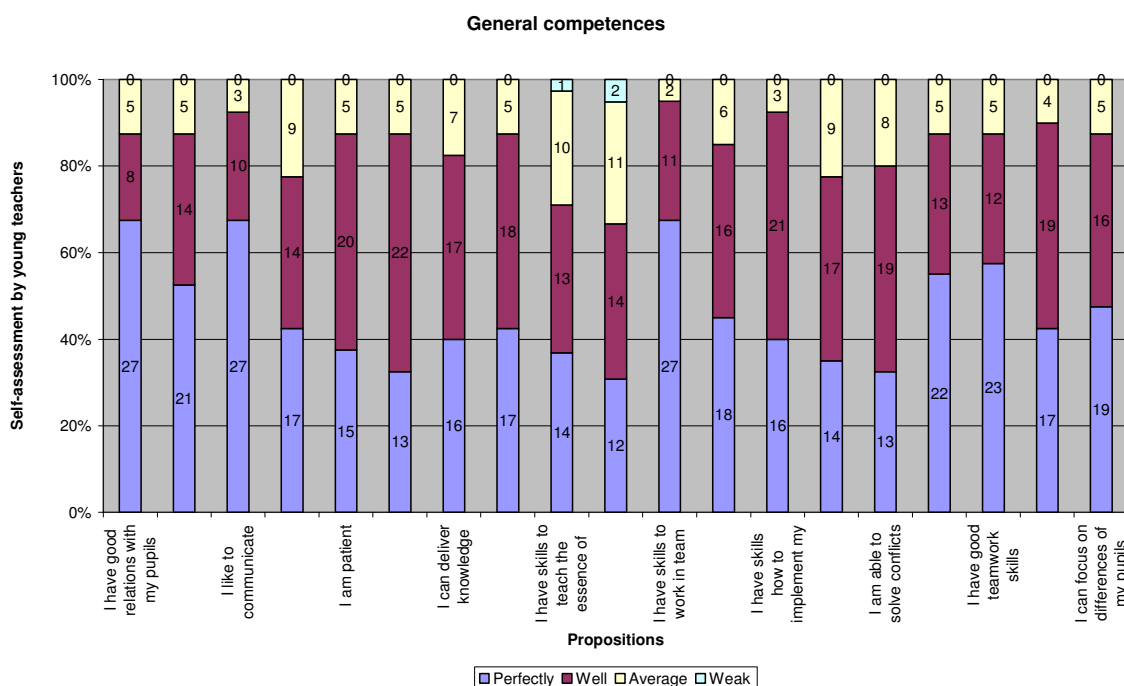
Picture No. 4

That is a paradox, but young student teachers do not feel abused by professional problems, but they feel pressed by quite high and still growing professional requirements. Most of student teachers believe they have good skills of delivering learning material to children with learning or other problems, also they can keep good relationship with parents of their pupils. Only minority agrees they are facing some problems in that area. A big trouble are student teachers who can not say how they are dealing with that. Future teachers are sure that they are ready to solve personal professional problems; half of them believe they are relaxed and calm; the biggest part of respondents say they understand needs of their pupils well. Most of student teachers think they have creative ideas and can implement them very well or perfectly. Many students are interested in project work very much. In general: attitude of student teachers to the management of problems is quite optimistic.

Again - a big trouble is a quarter of student teachers who can not say how they have to control problematic situations and what to think about their abilities, qualities and emotions.



Picture No. 5



More than half young teachers think they are empathic enough; they are sure about high or very high level of their creativity, capacity to communicate. One third of teachers think they lack patience, skills of behavior analysis, skills of knowledge delivering, organizational skills, skills to teach the essence of the topic, skills to teach the same topic in different ways.

Most teachers are sure that they can perfectly (more than in average) work in a team and engage pupils with the material of lesson. Teachers are sure that they in average can implement their ideas, face conflicts, solve conflicts and motivate children for participation and work.

Young teachers are basing their professional success on general skills. But at the whole data of the research is quite contradictive and shows some disbelief of young teachers in their might. More attention should be paid into such areas of teacher training sector: skills of self-analysis of behavior; skills of knowledge delivering; organizational skills. Teachers mention skills that they think has to be stronger: empathy; skills to teach the essence of the topic; skills to teach the same topic in different ways; engage pupils with the material of lesson; implement their ideas; face and solve conflicts; work in team and motivate children for participation and work.

Conclusions of the research No.1

1. The new role of a teacher is connected with high level of responsibility and new requirements for didactic competence and professional skills. Research showed that information or knowledge obtained about the ways of differentiation of pedagogical process is not the same as a capacity to use that information. On the one hand, young teachers know basics of how to pace to the needs of their

pupils and can select what is necessary for professional work in a huge float of information. On another hand, teachers have to base on reflection and analysis of changes, on the observations of children and to preserve and develop constant human values in a changing world.

2. At the whole data of the research is quite contradictive and shows some disbelieve of young teachers in their might. More attention should be paid into such areas of teacher training sector: skills of self-analysis of behavior; skills of knowledge delivering; organizational skills; skills to teach the essence of the topic; skills to teach the same topic in different ways; skill of the implementation of ideas; facing and solving conflicts; working in team and motivating children for participation and work.

3. That is a paradox, but student teachers and young teachers do not feel abused by professional problems, but they feel pressed by quite high and still growing professional requirements – the connection between these two issues are not tight enough.

4. Today we are facing a shift of the roles of teacher and a pupil when both student teachers and young teachers treat children as more active partners in teaching-learning process. A chance given to a pupil to choose level of assignment, style of learning, kind of activity forms a basement to teach focusing on the phylosophy of differentiation. Learning in small homogenic groups leads to the more effective heterogenic learning. Teachers are able to know their pupils well, to notice differences, but they still lack practical skills and experience in the field of teaching individualization.

5. Research showed a very problematic situation of young teachers, when: 1) their expectations do not fit to the reality and their possibilities and 2) general competences are not balanced with professional ones.

Research No.2

Goal of the research: analysis of the study programs for teacher training of Vilnius College, focusing on issues of differentiation and individualization.

Objectives of the research:

- to analyze new national standard for pre-school and pre-primary teacher training and standard for primary teacher training;
- to analyze pre-school and primary education study programs at the point of systemic development of general and professional skills of student teachers, affecting individualized approach in educational process;
- to give recommendations for the improvement of mentioned study programs focusing on issues of developing skills of differentiation and individualization of student teachers.

Parameters of research screening – 2 study programs analyzed

Part A – pre-primary group teacher training study program

Actuality of the problem and review of the Standard.

The new era of Lithuanian kindergarten (pre-primary teachers are trained in a study program for pre-school teachers) is connected with the reconstruction of independent Lithuanian state. Even before that, in 1989 there was created a new “Concept of the of bringing up kindergarten – aged children” [2], opposing to the naturalistic theories in education, when education was treated as development of purely biological or psychological side of individual. The less focus was made also to social pedagogy in the narrow understanding of it – when the main objective is to integrate individual into group life, social traditions, etc.

The new paradigm of child concept had a direction to restore national and cultural identity of the child, actively involving into this process family and also this way influencing changes in the system of values of adults – parents and pedagogues. The main ideas of humanism and democracy in kindergarten education became a must. Pedagogical principles of holism, integration and individualization started to be implemented. The process of education was planned to become child – centered, child – oriented and goaled towards activeness, creativity, independency and self-expression of the child, understanding him from the point of view of philosophy of constructivism.

The goals and objectives of a pre-school and pre-primary establishment are the following: to foster all the powers of the child (intellectual, emotional, physical and those of will) which are decisive in the maturing and socialization of a personality; to encourage the child’s self-dependence, initiative and creativity, reveal and cultivate his/her various skills and foster life; to help children understand common human values and cherish their integrity as an indispensable basis for a democratic way of life; to ensure continuity of pre-school and primary education.

Teacher’s role is less traditionally dominant, less visible, methods – less based on verbal instructions. The very important function is dedicated to the teacher as a creator of functional, stimulating, aesthetic, safe and playful environment.

Lithuania’s entering EU in 2004 made and still is making indirect positive impact on the development of Lithuanian kindergarten system. The more clear **focus have to be placed again on the animation of principle of individualization: in teacher training curriculums, kindergarten and pre-primary education (the very new part of the system) curriculums individual needs of different groups of children should be seen and fulfilled – children with different learning styles, with different special needs (and gifted children), children with different social, cultural, religious, language background, etc.**

Principle of individualisation is clearly declared in the „Standard for kindergarten and pre-primary teacher training“ [4], that appears a basement for the phylosophy and implementation of teacher training program. Implementation of this principle is logic continuation of direction of the pre-school and pre-primary education, announced in the „Concept of bringing up kindergarten – aged children“ (1989)[2].

New Standard prescribes such **competences** of pre-primary group teacher:

- To know and be able to recognize general and individual features of child development;
- To know main needs of children and be able to individualize ways of serving them;
- To recognize sick child and provide the first medical aid;

Meaningfully individualize and integrate content of education;
To be able to plan, organize, evaluate, analyze and document interactive pedagogical process;
To create environment, positively stimulating physical and spiritual potential of the child;
To involve family into active and constructive cooperation;
To follow up moral and democratic values;
To take active part into socio-cultural changes.

There are **new study objectives** included into the Standard, focusing teacher training system to the principle of individualization:

Analyze descriptors of child culture;
To be able observe and notice individual needs of different groups: children with different learning styles, with different special needs (and gifted children), children with different social, cultural, religious, language background, etc. and have skills of their fulfilling;
Create equal opportunities for all children;
Be able to balance interests of group of children and individual child;
To model or create curriculum suited to the needs of children and their learning styles;

In this new document focus is given to practical skills of the teacher, and **the main competences today are the ability to notice needs of each child and ability to individualize education.**

Description of the research and data obtained. After the very detailed examination of study program, designed for three years of study, appeared that **148** hours are devoted to the issues of individualization. The list of study subjects and time (topics excluded):

Policy and management of education - 4 hours;
Basics of didactic and kindergarten pedagogics – 23 hours;
Psychology of personality and social psychology – 12 hours;
Developmental and pedagogical psychology– 20 hours;
Basics of psychology – 5 hours;
German language – 8 hours;
French language – 30 hours;
Strategy of physical development of children – 10 hours;
Education of children with special needs – 10 hours;
Introduction into speciality – 4 hours;
Music and movement – 22 hours.

It is necessary to mention that in the curriculums of all practice periods – objectives, content, assessment and credible results - principle of individualization, comparing with programs of study subjects, is animated much stronger.

Part B – primary school teacher training study program

Actuality of the problem and review of the Standard.

Primary school teacher training study program is purposefully following the ideas of constructivism, that are based on the respect to the phenomenon of child culture, on the understanding of the

exceptionality of this period of human life. Individualization of education in primary school and renewed understanding of a role of a teacher are the mile stones of the study program.

„Primary school is taking care about sustainable intellectual, emotional and moral development of a child, that started in pre-school and pre-primary education phase. Relation with environment, with other people and with self are under the construction, too“ [5, pg.3].

There are such basic ideas underlined in the Standard: „education should be differentiated and individualized and based on the understanding of phases of physical and psychical development of a child. The goal is defined to know individual features of every pupil – abilities, attitudes, skills, etc. – and to construct pedagogical process that suits to the needs of individs or for groups of them. Goals and objectives of education should be diferentiated and individualised; teaching and learning resources and assignments shuld be paced to the needs of children (gifted, having learning problems, physical or psychical disabilities, etc.)[5, pg.3].

Standard (2001) prescribes such **competences** of primary school teacher:

To know methods of how to observe and notice needs of the child and be able to use them in practice;

To create appropriate environment for adaptation of a child to the school life – to base on his needs, level of maturity to school and individual features;

To know and notice special needs of a child and to be competent in possibilities of correction, rehabilitation and integration into the main stream;

To be able to differentiate and individualize curriculum and pedagogical process, focusing on social experience of the child and his abilities;

To create positive environment and atmosphere for holistic development of the child and development of his individuality;

To ensure balanced development of social, physical, mental and cultural growth of a child;

To know learning needs of a child and be able to serve them;

To create and apply individual and integral programs for the child, if this is needed;

To analyze and assess pedagogical interaction and be able to predict perspectives;

To create appropriate conditions for a child with special needs;

To be able to give first aid for children from social risk families.

Description of the research and data obtained. After the very detailed examination of study program, designed for four years of study, appeared that **274** hours are devoted to the issues of individualization in the main curriculum and **538** hours – in the curriculums of specializations (specializations are obligatory to choose). Totally: **902** hours. The list of study subjects and time (topics excluded):

Phylosophy – 4 hours;

Informational technologies – 6 hours;

Policy and management of education – 3 hours;

History of education – 8 hours;

Basics of psychology – 5 hours;

Developmental and pedagogical psychology – 9 hours;

Psychology of personality and social psychology – 5 hours;

Basics of didactics – 20 hours;

Didactics – 38 hours;

Education of children with special needs – 80 hours;
 Project management – 5 hours
 Lithuanian language and strategy of teaching – 2 hours;
 Science and strategy of teaching – 10 hours;
 Strategy of physical development of children – 31 hour;
 Ethics and strategy of teaching – 14 hours;
 German language and strategy of teaching – 30 hours;
 Informational technologies. Application of them in school - 4 hours

Study subjects, designed for specializations:

Pre-primary education – 51 hour;
 Basics of multicultural education – 12 hours;
 Social, pedagogical and psychological support for family – 32 hours;
 Speech therapy – 240 hours
 Differentiation and individualization of teaching and learning – 160 hours
 Basics of kineziotherapy – 40 hours
 Practice of foreign language – 3 hours

Conclusions of the research No.2 Parts A and B

1. Even if there is some focus on the implementation of the principle of individualization in study curriculum for the training of pre-school and pre-primary education teachers – 148 hours during 3 years, - it is a need to present this issue for students **much wider and deeper**.
2. Principle of individualization **has to be implemented** into all study subjects in study curriculum for the training of pre-school and pre-primary education teachers, in particular: Law of child and family; Health of the child; English language, Lithuanian language and children literature; Theory of play and it's application; Art and crafts; Drama; Socio-cultural environment of the child; Mathematic; Informational technologies. Application of them in the institution; Nutrition.
3. Study program for the training of pre-school and pre-primary education teachers should be **revised and marched** to the requirements of the new pre-school and pre-primary teacher training standard and **new study objectives**:
 - Analyze descriptors of child culture;
 - To be able observe and notice individual needs of different groups: children with different learning styles, with different special needs (and gifted children), children with different social, cultural, religious, language background, etc. and have skills of their fulfilling;
 - Create equal opportunities for all children;
 - Be able to balance interests of group of children and individual child;
 - To model or create curriculum suited to the needs of children and their learning styles.
4. Even if there is visible focus on the implementation of the principle of individualization in study curriculum for the training of primary education teachers, designed for four years of

study - **274** hours are devoted to the issues of individualization in the main curriculum and **538** hours – in the curriculums of specializations (specializations are obligatory to choose), - it is a need to present this issue for students **much wider and deeper**.

5. Principle of individualization **has to be implemented** into all the rest study subjects in study curriculum for the training of primary education teachers.
6. It is a real danger, that students of primary teacher training program, choosing one of specializations or study fields without bigger focus on individualization, will be left with minimum knowledge and skills in this area (even if **538** hours are given for this in the curriculums of specializations).
7. The very big priority should be given to the objective, that is not reached yet both in pre-school and pre-primary teacher training and also: to develop concept of learning styles and skills of students to notice in practice and individualize different styles of learning of children.
8. Pre-school and pre-primary teacher training and also primary teacher training study programs need to be revised searching for sustainability of main curriculum and curriculums of practice periods, because there are a lot and well managed assignments for students regarding individualization, and separate study subjects do not lead and guide students to this final phase.

General conclusions of both research No.1 and research No.2, made for TIPP Project

1. Data obtained from both research showed that there good methodological basis and modern guidelines for the application of the principle of individualization in Lithuanian system of teacher training. Updated standards for pre-school and pre-primary teacher training and also primary teacher training are constructed and child oriented study objectives are defined.
2. Nevertheless, results of both research enclosed existing problems of the implementation of the principle of individualization in teacher training sector and in educational institutions, too.
3. Teacher training sector and educational institutions – kindergarten and primary schools - are two integral parts of educational system, so both of them have to interact more closely, solving a very problematic situation of young teachers, when: 1) their expectations do not fit to the reality and their possibilities and 2) general competences are not balanced with professional ones.
4. Teacher training sector has to focus on better fulfilling of national requirements, prescribed in the standards of teacher training and review study programs for pre-school, pre-primary

and primary teacher training avoiding a problem, when information or knowledge obtained about the ways of differentiation of pedagogical process is contradicting and not balanced with the capacity of student teachers and young teachers to use that information.

5. There is a sharp need to improve system of tutoring and mentoring of young teachers.
6. Having in mind that state approach to the problem is systematic and having in mind that complexity of the problems and tasks related with the animation of the principle of individualization in practice, recommendations follow: to make institutional changes step by step
7. The first step is to help student teachers and young teachers to get skilled and able to model or create curriculum, suited to the needs of children and their learning styles.

Reccomendations

Understanding of individual differences will help teachers respond to children in ways that make every child feel comfortable and ready to learn. Perhaps the most obvious difference in children is gender. Children also have different temperament, interests, learning styles, and life experiences. They also are strongly influenced by their cultural background. And some children have special needs or are bylinqual.

Learning styles. Every person has a preffered way of learning. Some people are visual learners. Some learn better by listening while others have to handle something physically before they can understand it. One style is not better than another – it's simply the way a person learns best.

Auditory learners, or children who learn best by listening, are attuned to sounds and words. They solve problems by talking about them. Auditory learners can follow verbal instructions and explanations. You can build their knowledge base by describing in words what they do: „When you added coffee grounds to the paint, it changed the way the paint feels whwn ir dries.“ You also can ask open-ended questions to encourage children to verbalize their thoughts: „What's that you are making for the baby dolls' breakfast?“ The more oppotunities you provide listeners to hear and verbalize concepts, the more they will learn.

Visual learners, or children who learn best y looking, are drawn to color, shape, and motion. They actually think in images or pictures, taking in what they hear and see and transforming it into images in their brain. It is as if they have a movie camera in their mind.

Visual lerners benefit when you show how things are done, rather than just telling them verbally: “Come here, Jonetta. Kate can show you how to put interlocking blocks together so that you can build with them.“ Visual learners also remember ideas and concepts better when they are attached to an image: „Let's make a graph of all the different types of shoes we are wearing today.“ „Zach, I know that you are sad that your Daddy had to go away. Why don't you draw a Picture about the way you are feeling?“ Children who learn by looking need to make visual representations of their

thoughts and feelings to learn.

Kinaesthetic learners, or children who learn best by moving, are generally well coordinated and confident in their bodies. Touching and feeling things and transforming ideas and information into movement boosts their memory and understanding.

Have you ever seen a preschooler twirl around as she tries to remember something? This twirler might be a kinaesthetic learner. Something in the process of physically moving triggers her brain to learn a concept or idea. Kinaesthetic learners benefit by knowing that it is okay to get up and move around. You can facilitate their learning by relating concepts to their bodies, “When I push down on your head, Setsuko, you can feel the pressure. That’s what a vise does to a piece of wood...it holds it down and in place.”

Since not all children learn in the same way, teachers should take all styles of learning into account. Traditionally, schools have appealed primarily to auditory learners, and to a lesser extent, to visual learners. Kinesthetic learners have had to adjust their natural way of learning to do well in school.

Rather than expecting children to adjust, teachers should make sure that they present information so that children who are listeners, lookers, and movers can all be successful learners. Moreover, brain research shows, that the more ways you allow children to explore a concept, the more likely they will remember what they learn. So, in addition to meeting the needs of all children, you can maximize learning by crafting learning opportunities for children with every learning style – the listeners, the lookers, and the movers [Recommendations based on:1, pg. 31-32].

List of quoted resources

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