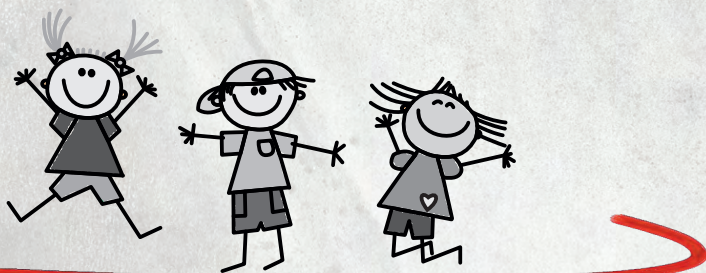


KATARZYNA SADOWSKA
KINGA KUSZAK

THE EDUCATION OF A CHILD UP TO SEVEN YEARS OF AGE

The Polish Perspective



WYDAWNICTWO NAUKOWE UAM

The Education of a Child up to Seven Years of Age

UNIwersytet im. Adama Mickiewicza w Poznaniu

Katarzyna Sadowska
Kinga Kuszak

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Reviewers: dr hab. Ewa Kochanowska, prof. UBB
dr hab. Lucyna Telka

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Introduction

The changes in the world, the dynamics of life, the anxiety, uncertainty, fluidity, unpredictability and risk that have always accompanied it encourage reflections on the essence and meaning of existence, the meaning of the world, as well as reflections on the nature and role of education, its mechanisms and phenomena. Education and educational institutions have always been and remain embedded in specific contexts. These contexts create various elements (conditions of schooling): universal, unchanged through all eras and societies; and individual, creating the unique conditions of a given country along with its possibilities and limitations. Examples of these would be its geographical location, size and terrain, access to natural resources and the possibility of exploiting them, the importance of these resources at a given moment of historical development for the region and the world, the resulting economic growth and related demographic development, and the changing social structure. The individual context of a given country is also shaped by broader regional conditions, as well as macro-scale changes of a political, religious and cultural nature. At the global and local level, this context is shaped by critical situations and turning points, such as natural disasters (earthquakes), epidemics, revolutions, and wars, as well as scientific achievements (medicines, e.g. penicillin, X-rays, the discovery of the structure of DNA, COVID-19 vaccine), technological achievements (e.g. steam engine, telephone, bicycle, typewriter, computer), and cultural achievements (the Internet and via the access it affords to global cultural goods, social networking sites), all of which changes lives on a global and local scale.

Education in a given country “is not an isolated island, but part of a larger whole and does not exist in isolation from the historical, social, geographical, political and economic reality that brings it to life” (Boroń, Czech-Włodarczyk, Hildebrandt-Wypych, Johnsson, Misiorna, Mańkowska, 2020); it is always part of regional and global processes, hence the authors present the historical and social contexts of the education of a child up to seven years of age, focusing on what they consider the key determinants of the Polish tradition and Polish con-

text in this area. Understood in broad terms, these contexts evolve over time, determining changes in thinking about education, influencing educational ideologies and formulating education goals at the country level. Educational ideologies and the resulting local solutions are always influenced by wider trends and ideologies present in a given cultural area as well as at the global level.

As Polish researcher Marta Łukawska points out, the right to education is a basic human right, and one which public authorities are obliged to implement. However, the legal system of a given country must be consistent with international legal regulations (Łukawska, 2017: 69). The authors therefore present Polish solutions with regard to leading concepts in Europe and the world, and reflect on these Polish solutions' coherence with international guidelines.

English-language publications on early childhood education (up the age of 7) years in the Polish context are lacking. The authors of this study therefore aim to present the key issues and factors shaping the Polish education system, as well as pointing out the current directions of change relating to Polish educational policy.

In this study, the authors reflect on three main problems:

- the child as a subject of Polish education;
- children's education in the Polish nursery;
- children's education in the Polish kindergarten.

The authors employ the pedagogical monograph method, assuming that: "pedagogy is an open discipline, both in terms of theoretical and methodological perspective," one of the features of which is, among others, "multi-paradigmatic" (Ciechowska, Szymańska, 2018: 81). The authors also refer to the mega-paradigm – humanistic and idiomatic-oriented pedagogy, concluding that to examine the research problem, it is necessary to refer to qualitative research. The pedagogical monograph method involves analysing existing and cited sources. Thanks to the sources collected, above all, a focused interview conducted by Katarzyna Sadowska and Kinga Kuszak with nursery caregivers from the Wielkopolska (Greater Poland) region, the authors discover the perspective of practitioners who identify numerous systemic limitations hampering the introduction of new solutions in children's education.

It is worth mentioning that the monographic method involves "a detailed study of an individual case, i.e. a statistical unit, which may be an institution, plant, workshop, ... (a specific community, population), where information in the form of qualitative – descriptive. It serves the scientific exploration of isolated features and qualitative elements of a specific structure, system or process, determining their nature and even size, and characterizing their functioning and development" (Apanowicz, 2002: 67). The choice of method, according

to the authors, allows for a potentially deep insight into phenomena that are of interest to educators. One such phenomenon discussed here is the construct of educating a child up to seven years old in the Polish education system.

The authors were guided by the principle that “qualitative research includes studies on the use and collection of various empirical materials – case studies, personal experience, introspection, biographies, interviews, cultural products, cultural texts and products, materials from observations, materials historical materials, materials derived from interactions, visual texts, materials that describe everyday life and difficult moments in the lives of individuals.” The authors also leaned towards qualitative orientation, because this makes it possible to diagnose and analyse phenomena in their historical, social and subjective context (Milerski, Śliwerski, 2000). When formulating the methodological assumptions of the research, the authors were also guided by the belief that “the social construction of reality takes place” through the qualitative interpretation of the research results, and that “qualitative analysis of phenomena may be of particular importance for the characterization of educational phenomena” (Urbaniak-Zajac, Piekarski, 2001). Data collection in this study is based on existing sources, both printed and electronic, on education issues in Poland, the social situation of Poland throughout history, magazine articles and guides and child education programmes. This study also draws on the legal basis, past and present, which determines the child’s education in Poland.

The presence of both researchers brings the value of a special narrative to this monograph, which is important in the field of pedagogy, as this scientific discipline requires a narrative, as argued by writers such as Mirosława Nowak-Dziemianowicz (2014). As she points out: “The belief in the narrativity of pedagogy is related to several issues. The first concerns the subject of this discipline of knowledge. Pedagogy as a science of upbringing needs access to a specific type of experience shared by every person. It needs access to experiences related to being the subject of education: both as an educator and as a student” (Nowak-Dziemianowicz, 2014: 8–9). She goes on to emphasize that the narrative nature of pedagogy stems from its commitment, which “distinguishes this discipline from all other fields and disciplines traditionally rooted in the positivist paradigm.” Research in pedagogy, as Nowak-Dziemianowicz points out, involves understanding, explaining, modifying, improving, or even changing the social world, its institutions, but also the rules on which they function, the norms on which they are based, values to which they refer” (Nowak-Dziemianowicz, 2014: 9). It is assumed that the research structure consists of four stages: collecting empirical data, insight into the data, interpretation of the results, preparation of a research report, and the “transition

from one stage to the next” (Malewski, 2017:111) “through three processes: 1) reflexivity, 2) theorizing, and 3) narrativity” (Malewski, 2017: 111).

The importance of narrative in this study is based on the belief that it is a retrospective creation of meaning – giving shape to past experiences or organizing them. Narrative is therefore a way of understanding one’s actions and those of other people, a way of organizing events and objects into a meaningful whole and connecting them and looking at the consequences of actions and events over time (Nowak-Dziemianowicz, 2014: 12). A narrative, as Nowak-Dziemianowicz notes, “is not a simple, chronological description of events. It places the narrator in the foreground; it is a story from their point of view, and includes justifications for why it is worth telling. Therefore, in addition to describing what happened, it contains emotions, thoughts and interpretations” (Nowak-Dziemianowicz, 2014: 12). The authors of the monograph follow Nowak-Dziemianowicz in assuming that the above-described treatment of narrative in pedagogy and its importance become something of a justification for understanding research, whose aim is not to search for cause-and-effect relationships between facts referred to as variables, but which refers to knowing, describing and understanding the subjective worlds of human life. This understanding becomes possible thanks to narrative giving us access to how people construct their life worlds, how they perceive what is happening to them and what surrounds them. Narrative also allows us to understand all manifestations of human actions – from their individual and social conditions to their individual and collective consequences. Moreover, narrative discourse, unlike scientific discourse, looks for what is unique in each human action, and not for what is common, universal, and generalizable (Nowak-Dziemianowicz, 2014: 12). The authors also attribute significant value to the narrative presented in this publication because for the narrators it is “a form of action – at the same time as the story is told, the narrator does something, testifies about something, demands something. Hence the importance not only of ‘what’ and ‘who’ tells the story but also what position it occupies. It is a question about where, in what place in the social structure, in the power structure, the ‘voice’ is located” (Nowak-Dziemianowicz, 2014: 12–13). The value of narrative also stems from the fact that it is associated with specific contextuality – placing researchers in a specific cultural context. This is particularly significant because, as Nowak-Dziemianowicz emphasises, social resources and circumstances are what stories are anchored in and what makes them possible. At the same time, the same resources and circumstances constitute specific limitations of each narrative. Narrative provides insight not only into the story being told – it also allows us to learn about all the circumstances surrounding it, augments the individual perspective with a social perspective,

and connects what is local with what is global or universal (Nowak-Dziemianowicz, 2014: 13). The narrative contained in this study can also be assigned a meaning related to the need for expression, with a specific presentation of the individual, their situation, and their reasoning.

The authors also seek to show the relationships between selected discourses and the experience of reality (Deleuze, 1992: 159–168; Agamben, 2010: 82–100), which involves the local reality of the country in whose culture and education they are immersed as researchers and careful observers. They do this with the belief that in the international space, the Polish perspective can be inspiring for research conducted in a similar socio-political context. We cite here our own experiences in a multi-author team of researchers representing the Visegrad Group of countries, which allowed for the exchange of experiences and perspectives and resulted in a monograph (Janik, Porubsky, Chrappan, Kuszak, 2020). Moreover, the experiences presented in this monograph may be interesting in the context of publications by such authors as J. Kropackova, M. Capek, Z. Syslova, (2019), L. Cerych (1997), M. Podhajecka, M. Minova (2015), C. Birzea, (2008), G. Halasz (2007), B. Kosova, S. Porubsky (2007), S. Porubsky (2012), E. Walterova (2004), and T. Janik (2011; 49–84). These represent a similar political and historical context and, at the same time, different solutions at the level of individual countries of the Visegrad Group. The Polish perspective on the education of young children may also be interesting with regard to available research results and scientific studies presenting historically and culturally different experiences embedded in local challenges and illustrating other solutions, e.g. C. Sanchidrian-Blanco (2021: 301–322), C. Sanchez-Blanco (2000; 2018), K. Alaniz-Hernandez (2021: 31–60), A. Gomez-Ferreira (2021: 241–262), N. Restrepo-Restrepo (2022: 1–18), V. Didonet (2021: 27–39), M. Valeska Concha Diaz, M. Bakieva, J.M. Jornet Melia (2012: 113–126).

In this monograph, the authors present not only the Polish perspective on the education of young children, which is unique in the international space, but also trace its evolution throughout the 20th and 21st centuries. By making the child the subject of education in the first chapter, the authors produce a synthesised description of the constructs of the child and childhood in the history of the 20th and 21st centuries, thereby attempting to show the sources of Polish ideas regarding child education. They also refer to selected assumptions of Polish prenatal pedagogy, drawing attention to the ways children achieve independence. They also describe the importance of support from teachers in connection with the challenges of the modern world.

The second problem is discussed in Chapter Two, entitled “Child education in a nursery.” Here, the authors introduce the concept of early childhood edu-

cation, describing the first nurseries in Poland, and indicating the discourse on mother and childcare undertaken in Poland in the interwar period. They also characterize Polish nurseries during communism, how nurseries functioned during the political transformation period, and the effects of nursery evolution related to Poland's accession to the European Union.

This chapter also reflects on the theoretical assumptions underpinning the education of children up to the age of three, which in Poland are still deeply embedded in directive educational concepts. To address these dilemmas regarding "opening" Polish nurseries to concepts that place the child at the centre of education, the authors present the results of focus research carried out with nursery caregivers from the Wielkopolska region and outline a new regulation on care standards for children up to the age of three.

The third issue is presented in the final chapter, entitled: "Education in Polish kindergarten – contexts, challenges and dilemmas." The analysis is based on a discussion of the historical conditions of pre-school education in Poland until 1939. Kindergartens in post-war and contemporary Poland are presented, the current core curriculum for pre-school education in Poland is analysed, and issues related to the teaching profession are presented.

This part of the publication offers valuable insights into the changes that have taken place throughout history in terms of the importance, role and tasks of kindergartens in Poland, as well as changes in the area of the formal language used to describe the education of children up to the age of seven.

The authors preserve a significant number of quotations from the sources in their original form. This is a deliberate measure and aims to show the specific language of early childhood education pedagogy in Poland and how this language has changed throughout history. The authors hope that the publication will perhaps reach not only Polish but also foreign readers, and wish to present the linguistic picture of the problems discussed in the publication as clearly as possible.

The child as a subject of education – introductory reflections

1.1. The child and childhood throughout history – an attempt at synthesis

For many years, the child and childhood, including the prenatal and perinatal period, remained a niche topic. We read about the “difficult” history of childhood itself, as a theoretical construct, in Philippe Ariès’ publication: *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life* (Ariès, 1995). However, educationalists, sociologists, historians and other researchers increasingly, and more importantly, clearly refute this model of childhood. They argue that it portrays an unfavourable image of a person’s educational potential at the beginning of their life. This belief held for many years that a child is a kind of “semi-finished product,” one that only gains independence and attains fully human development under the influence of adult “training.”

Katarzyna Gawlicz (2011), an advocate of democracy in the process of supporting child development, refers to two constructions of childhood which are also written about by Gunilla Dahlberg, Peter Moss and Alan Pence (2008). She notes how the first model of perceiving childhood is deeply rooted in the modernist perspective and is based on the belief that a child is weak, poor in competencies, and requires adult help and support to become a fully-fledged being (Gawlicz, 2011). In this vision of childhood, a child is a reproducer of knowledge, identity and culture. A child – a raw “semi-finished product” – will only become a human being on successfully undergoing certain pre-established “standardised processes”: “processing,” “repairing,” and “correct shaping” (Dahlberg, Moss, Pence, 2008). It will appear weak until adults verify the effects of this “servicing” of the child. In the model, childhood perceived in this way, goals and pre-adopted normative outcomes are defined by “strong” adults around the child (Dahlberg, Moss, Pence, 2008; Gawlicz, 2011).

In the second concept – corresponding to non-directive, permissive pedagogy – we are dealing with the image of the child as the subject of his or her actions. A child is an extremely competent person, with extensive competencies distinct from those of adults. In this concept, the child appears as an active agent, a co-creator of knowledge, identity and culture. This model emerged within a new paradigm in the sociology of childhood, in which it is assumed that children have the power to act and process the world and take an active part in the process of constructing their own lives and the society in which they live (Segiet, 2011).

Nowadays, as educators, we are fully convinced that to be perceived as a “full person,” a child does not have to become one, because he or she is one. Thanks to the pedagogy of upbringing and the achievements of developmental psychology, medical sciences, sociology of childhood, social pedagogy, neurobiology and other areas of scientific knowledge, we now see capital and potential in children: we can even call this “initial” capital, which, as adults, we are obliged to extract and sustain. Like the eminent Polish educationalist Janusz Korczak (real name Henryk Goldszmit), we should stubbornly continue to argue that children are people with their voice, able to make their own, socially “wise” choices, and can even “govern themselves” if we create an appropriate environment for them and support their development from the very beginning (Ciesielska, Puszkina, 2009).

This line of thought is followed by Gawlicz, who also explains that in the second model (of a “strong perpetrator” child) young people are to be listened to and engaged in the decision-making process. Turning towards this way of defining the construct of childhood and the children themselves along with their potential, including educational potential, leads to the adoption of a philosophy of development support, the rejection of authoritarian “domination” over the child on the part of an adult, and the rejection of instructions, prohibitions and orders in favour of a sensitive and continuous observation leading to non-invasive supervision of the individual’s development progress (Telka, 2017d: 18). The model presented in the sociology of childhood assumes that all children are intelligent and actively learn from the moment they are born. In this approach, they need space, concentration on the present, the right to initiate solutions and projects, and the right to be taken seriously. Childhood and the child are therefore in no way defined through the prism of adulthood.

This type of concept was already used in the period of “new upbringing” pedagogy, also known as “progressivism,” “new school,” “active school,” “school of life,” “pedagogy of pragmatism,” “functional pedagogy” (Jamrożek,

2019: 693). Among the factors leading to this pedagogical reform movement were the achievements in the field of biomedical and psychological sciences in Europe and the United States of America. These studies carried out at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries provided reasonable knowledge about children and their nature. It was then that the first laboratory (founded in 1892 at the Sorbonne by Alfred Binet) was established for the purpose of research on child psychology (Jamrożek, 2019: 693). The historian of education Wiesław Jamrożek, citing the opinion of Kazimierz Sośnicki, points out that Binet is considered the “father” of child psychology, experimental pedagogy also called “pedology” or “child science” (Jamrożek, 2019: 693). The key here seems to be pedagogical naturalism, which, according to Ellen Key, described as the heir to the views of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, exposed and emphasized “respect for the child’s individuality, perceiving the upbringing process as natural, analogous to other processes taking place in the natural world, perceiving upbringing as spontaneous, natural “development from the inside” (Jamrożek, 2019: 695).

As Jamrożek points out, “the aspiration characteristic of this ‘new upbringing’ to ... educate in the spirit of taking maximum account of the child’s characteristics (his individual needs, interests, abilities, spontaneous activity), supported at the beginning of his development by the achievements of biomedical and psychological sciences, was reflected in interwar Poland...” in the concepts outlined by Henryk Rowid or Jerzy Ostrowski (Jamrożek, 2019: 701). In this context, it is impossible not to mention the extraordinary merits of Henryk Goldszmit, known in interwar Poland as Janusz Korczak. Clearly leaning towards naturalism in its ontological and epistemological version, as well as the biopsychological concept of upbringing, it was Korczak who “created an original educational system in a care facility” for orphaned children (in the “Dom Sierot” and “Nasz Dom” facilities) (Jamrożek, 2019: 701). It is also to Korczak that we owe the strong emphasis placed on the child as a complete person, not a “deposit,” and the fact that in the process of raising a child, children’s rights should be respected:

- today;
- for the child to be who he or she is;
- to respect (Jamrożek, 2019: 701).

Korczak (also known to Poles as ‘The Old Doctor’) convinced adults that they should “... instruct, direct, show the right path, restrain, stop, justify, warn, prevent, force and fight” (Tschope-Scheffler, 2011: 54) not the child but the behaviour of educators. He believed that the way of influencing children aimed at “putting to sleep, suppressing and weeding out everything that is the will

and freedom of the child, the strengths of his soul, the strength of his desires and his intentions” leads to children becoming “polite, obedient, good, comfortable ...; but we do not think about the fact that it is internally bound and incapable of life” (Tschope-Scheffler, 2011: 54).

When writing about the child as a strong co-author of his or her education, we currently refer to two concepts of the birth of human intelligence. “The most eminent of the 20th century’s developmental psychologists, Jean Piaget, claimed – observing his own three children – that intelligence is born in and through action. When a child has the opportunity to actively experiment, he or she gradually constructs his or her knowledge of the world, his or her model of the world. His greatest opponent – Lev Vygotsky – wrote that a child is not a lone researcher, but a socio-cultural being who, in a relationship with another person, by learning a language, enters the world of culture and becomes an element of the community” (Białecką-Pikul, Białek, Rynda, 2011: 6–10). Nowadays, a relatively similar discourse is conducted by “... two of the most famous researchers in the development of young children – Alison Gopnik and Katherine Nelson. They ask whether the child is a scientist in the cradle, a philosopher and explorer of reality, or rather an inhabitant of the planet Mind; is it an experimenter and statistician who constructs theories or is it social by nature and through interactions with other people becomes a competent inhabitant of the planet Mind, i.e. a planet inhabited by other beings endowed with internal worlds” (Białecką-Pikul, Białek, Rynda, 2011: 6–10).

Perceiving a child as a strong co-creator of his or her education and life allows for “(co)operation,” which in the concept of educational constructivism we call scaffolding (Brzezińska, 2015). This scaffolding denotes a process of responsive learning in cooperation with an adult, which proceeds according to shared action programmes taking place in mutual interaction – balanced, characterized by observation, readiness to enter into dialogue with a sense of children’s needs, in mutual motivational closeness. This point of view also applies to the way of thinking about human education in the prenatal period.

Embedding the beginnings of human life in the concept of educational constructivism, “we can express the belief that early childhood education is of fundamental importance because a child enters each subsequent stage of its development with competencies acquired earlier, so all these skills present «at the start» are its specific initial capital” (Brzezińska, 2015: 130). This foundation is the basis of the scaffolding, the basis for “building new skills and acquiring new knowledge” (Brzezińska, 2015: 130), which an adult can multiply or waste during subsequent interactions with a child, depending on their own competences and personal motivation.

1.2. Child education – at the sources of Polish ideas

This discussion will address the historical context important for the development of the Polish tradition of child pedagogy.

One of the first educators who believed in universal access to education was the 17th-century Czech philosopher John Amos Comenius, whose ideas were significantly ahead of their time. Comenius saw not only the need for universal education but also recommended ecumenism and European integration. Comenius wanted to “create man through upbringing, through the objective requirements of knowledge and society, by developing his mind and his ability to act, for the common good, he tried to fight the existing social order so that every child has the possibility of developing fully” (Sitarska, 2014b: 119–140; 2014a: 149–174; 2007: 71–82). Comenius expressed the belief that man is “born to learn”; he also attached importance to the relationship between one person and another, noting that these relationships should be accompanied by respect and acceptance (Pavlu, 2013: 290–293). The idea of expectations from the educator in educational activities also proves to be extremely relevant, because the educator, according to John Amos Comenius, “is expected to create appropriate conditions for the student to reflect and seek further stimuli to acquire knowledge. Specific rules must be given to the people being taught with great clarity, to allow them to discover the world and help them find their place in the world and in the society of which they are a part” (Pavlu, 2013: 290–293). He claimed that “there is nothing in the mind that has not previously been in the senses,” and that is why we must ... draw wisdom not from books, but from heaven, earth, oaks and beeches. He recommended using the senses as much as possible, e.g. combining listening with looking, and the use of the tongue with the use of hands. It would also be good for lecture content to be presented in the form of abridged texts, images or symbols on the walls of the classroom so that students could exercise their senses, memory and mind daily. Regarding children up to six years old, the author formulates the following proposals, in which the school should be understood metaphorically (as a school of life):

- “School of birth,” whose task is to give useful tips to parents on initial care of the future human already in the mother’s womb;
- “Childhood School,” which is to provide caring education for children from birth to the age of six.

In the opinion of John Amos Comenius, childhood, both early and middle childhood, is an important period in human development because it is during these periods that “lasting habits are formed.” Therefore, it is recommended

that first impressions be consistent with the principles of true wisdom, and initial habits with ideal virtues.

Despite Comenius's contribution to the history of child education, a more transparent recognition of the value of childhood could be observed in the 18th century with the educational ideas of Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Until that time, childhood had been considered "both a guilt and a punishment that the Creator imposed on man for his pride. By condemning him to childhood, He removed him from Himself, distanced him from His perfection, and lengthened the path to salvation" (Waloszek, 2003: 953). Rousseau gave rise to the idea of "giving" a child the "features" of a human being, because, as he wrote, "a child is smaller than an adult; it has neither his strength nor his sense, but it sees and hears the same or almost equally well, it also has a sensitive, though less exquisite taste, and it distinguishes smells equal well, although it does not put the same sensuality into it" (Waloszek, 2003: 953). Władysław Tatarkiewicz (1993) argues that for 18th-century Europe, Rousseau remained a relatively troublesome man, who "shook the order of that time, also in the field of education" (Tatarkiewicz, 1993: 150). Tatarkiewicz "induced his contemporaries, but above all, the successors of the New Education trends, to think and reflect on various aspects of human life, including the child as a person and its education" (Kamińska, Szybiak, 2012: 273). Rousseau expressed the belief that "education should take place outside civilization, in a rural environment, as the closest state of nature. However, his concept of education, addressed to the aristocracy, broke with the tradition of estate education – it was a vision of educating not an aristocrat, a politician, etc., but simply a person capable of living in society" (Kamińska, Szybiak, 2012: 274)

Rousseau's work was continued by Jean Henry Pestalozzi, who considered the postulates about natural education to be valid. Pestalozzi's achievements offer many "insights, especially about the spontaneous and free shaping of character and mind traits. He subordinated these features to general social goals and the rigours imposed by relationships and interdependencies in interpersonal relations. Both thinkers argued that the child should remain himself, and they made upbringing a matter of both the child and human nature.

Rousseau and Pestalozzi's educational ideals initiated a discourse on the subjectivity of the child and education appropriate to the child's needs. The analyses conducted by both educators also became the source of the search for "a proposal for a formula of mass, institutionalized education, education as a means of raising the level of education of all, not only selected people" (Waloszek, 2003: 953). The views of Robert Owen (a representative of social pedagogy) were also significant in drawing attention to children's rights and

protecting children against exploitation (Waloszek, 2003: 953–954). Owen's activities were related to what was broadly understood as utopian socialism, which emerged at the turn of the 18th and 19th centuries. This was a time of “dynamic changes, feudalism is transformed into capitalism, the development of science changes the existing ways of life in the blink of an eye, and the static image of the world is shaken. However, the machinery of modernity means an improved fate for minorities. Most people fall into its trap and are sacrificed on the altar of economic progress, which is particularly visible in the economically leading countries: England and France. The industrial revolution creates the largest group of people in history without any means of subsistence. Wage labour, not yet subject to any regulation, can be exploited on an incredible scale because the supply of labour released in agriculture and cottage industries exceeds the demand for it. Women and children are employed on a massive scale and are paid much less than adult men. The fate of children from poor backgrounds is often terrible. Deprived of parental care due to the exhausting work of their parents, abandoned for economic reasons, put into service which de facto means slavery, losing their health in factories, they do not know what the joy of childhood is, they have no access to education” (Szumilewicz, 2011: 88).

Owen, along with other utopian socialists, emphasizes the importance of public education for children. Robert Owen and Flora Tristan thought “that children under six years of age are to be brought up much more by society than by their parents; then the school takes over” (Szumilewicz, 2011: 91). At that time, due to the views of the above-mentioned thinkers, the first orphanages for children of working mothers were established.

Ovide Decroly (1871–1932), a Belgian pedagogue, psychologist and doctor, also made significant contributions to the foundations of preschool education, notably through formulating the foundations of a comprehensive science known as the interest centre method. Decroly believed that in the initial period of education, the centre of interest should be the child, their needs, living conditions, games and activities” (Kowolik, 2012: 42). Decroly offered children “educational games that included ones that exercised the senses and motor skills (exercises in recognizing colours, shapes, directions, sounds, movements) and ones that facilitated understanding and mastering arithmetic concepts, practising thinking and attention skills” (Kowolik, 2012: 42).

Another representative of the trend derived from the concepts of Rousseau and Pestalozzi was Friedrich Froebel, the creator of the first “children's gardens.” The first “garden” was created in 1840 and is still considered the prototype of a kindergarten. In his concept of child upbringing, Froebel emphasized the important role of playing. Although the system he created may raise several

concerns (rigid framework of action, little creativity on the part of children, questionable ideological assumptions), Froebel described clear differences in the learning of preschool and school children, emphasized the importance of cooperation with parents as the first educators of children, “presented a coherent concept of goals resources, physical and personal conditions of the child’s teachers, formulated the principles of raising children in an educational institution, and what is particularly important, pointed out the need to maintain the continuity of the work of the kindergarten and the school” (Waloszek, 2003: 954). In early 20th-century Poland, Froebel’s achievements were referred to by thinkers such as Bronisław Trentowski, August Cieszkowski, Jan Władysław Dawid, Henryk Rowid, Konstanty Uszyński and Paweł Błoński (Waloszek, 2003: 954).

Prototypical kindergartens in the form of ‘protection centres’ (‘Ochronki’) (a place stay for the protection of children, kindergarten nursery, childcare place) were already organized in England at the beginning of the 19th century, and in 1816 at the initiative of Robert Owen, while in 1824 Samuel Wilderspin founded the Society of Infant Schools (Wróblewska, 2021: 16). In France, the first centres for children during middle childhood were established as a result of the educational activities of the evangelical pastor Jean-Frédéric Oberlin. “Their task was to provide children with care and prepare them for elementary school by developing speech and a love of work, regularity and order.” The first nursery modelled on the English Infant Schools was established on the initiative of Jan Cochin, author of the lauded book *A Manual for the Founders and Managers of the First Schools Known as Nurseries* (this was an orphanage and building that can also be described as a place to stay for the protection of children, kindergarten nursery, childcare centre). It was a complex of educational institutions for four hundred children, including a kindergarten, a school and a seminar for Ochronka educators. The first typical school for security workers was founded by Maria Pape’-Carpantier, who also authored a textbook entitled “Advice for Ochronka heads.” The author raised the issue of appropriate teaching methods based on guided observation of objects and phenomena from the surrounding world. She proposed assigning children to groups according to age and increasing the number of teaching staff. Nurseries were also set up in Germany at the beginning of the 19th century, which were modelled on English and French nurseries. One of the first orphanages was founded by Paulina Lippie-Detmold, following the example of kindergartens in France. Moreover, in 1819 in Berlin, Friedrich Wadzeck organized an orphanage for children of nursery age.

Wider initiatives in organizing nurseries were also undertaken by Johann Georg Wirth in Augsburg and Teodor Fliedner in Kaiserswerth, who followed

the example of schools for small children established in the Netherlands and England. The flourishing of German “children’s gardens” coincided with the work of Friedrich Wilhelm Froebel, the theoretician and main creator of humanistic preschool education, and initiator of the first preschool education system. In Italy, the first orphanage for children was established in Cremona in 1827, founded by Aperti Ferrante; children from wealthier families were admitted to this facility, where gymnastics exercises and sensory training classes were organized for them, and time was allocated for free play. However, the intensive development of kindergartens in Italy dates back to the years of Maria Montessori, a doctor and creator of a system of raising children based on free development. She believed that the main task of pedagogy was to support children’s spontaneity and creativity and to enable their harmonious and comprehensive physical, intellectual, moral and social development. She espoused views and pedagogical concepts based on respect for children and supporting their development, with incredible educational success in the first kindergarten, Casa dei Bambini, founded in 1907 in Rome’s working-class district of San Lorenzo. Also in Eastern Europe, the first protections were organized in St. Petersburg in 1837. The institutions were philanthropic, established by private individuals, and their financial well-being depended on the so-called ‘curator’, usually a wealthy merchant. Over time, a care committee was established, whose task was to develop regulations and principles for operating orphanages in Russia.

1.3. Perception of the child in the prenatal period from the point of view of the achievements of social sciences in Poland

According to Maria Przetacznik-Gierowska (2011), when the face of scientific knowledge changed fundamentally in the 19th century, certain strongly developing directions and scientific currents transformed “the previous image of the world – extremely non-uniform and diverse – into a large field of empirical research” (Przetacznik-Gierowska, 2011: 12). Among these scientific discoveries and theories, “disciplines that had not previously existed on their own, previously subordinated to other fields of knowledge, emerged and developed. This is how scientific psychology was created at the end of this century and its various branches emerged, including developmental psychology. Its foundations can be found in the 19th century, primarily in the natural sciences and the methodology they developed” (Przetacznik-Gierowska, 2011: 12).

Within developmental psychology, an area has emerged called prenatal psychology, which aims to learn, describe, explain and apply knowledge “concerning the subject of its interests” (Kornas-Biela, 2007: 17). Kornas-Biela points out that: “The most specific subject of research in this field is human development in the first, intrauterine phase of life, with physical development, especially the development of the nervous system, considered in the aspect of the structural and functional basis of mental development and the ability to acquire various competences” (Kornas-Biela, 2007: 17). Therefore, thanks to prenatal psychology, we learn about such issues related to human competences at the beginning of life as “... anatomical and functional development of individual body structures (e.g. nervous, muscular and neurohormonal systems and senses), development of psychomotor skills, acquiring competences in the field of all sensory analysers (including pain and smell), intersensory, remembering and learning, manifestations of consciousness, activity rhythms (biorhythm, sleep and wakefulness phases), behavioural states, emotions, reacting in social contact, emergence of various manifestations of the functioning of the psyche, as well as diversification of development” (Kornas-Biela, 2007: 17). What is also important for prenatal psychology are issues related to “the transfer of the mother’s mental experiences to the child” and “their mutual influence on the physiological, psychological and behavioural path” (Kornas-Biela, 2007: 17). Research also focuses on how various emotional experiences of the mother, including experiences of stress, depression and anxiety impact on the development of her child.

Kornas-Biela explains that prenatal psychology “... also explores the issue of the causes and consequences of various forms of violence (e.g. abuse, neglect) towards a prenatal child (foetal abuse)” (Kornas-Biela, 2007: 17). Also within this field are such problems as normal or abnormal development of mental processes and “child’s behaviour before birth, during childbirth, in the first days after birth, as well as in difficult situations, including special care pregnancy” (Kornas-Biela, 2007: 17). We also read that: “The subject of prenatal psychology as developmental psychology of the prenatal period also includes problems such as regularities and mechanisms of development; critical periods; graduality, continuity and stability of development; development factors acting after conception and in the past, directly or indirectly (determining, modifying, stimulating, optimizing, hindering, disturbing), different expression of their action, changes in their meaning during development, as well as the consequences of their actions and cooperation” (Kornas-Biela, 2007: 17).

Modern prenatal psychology researches the prevention of child developmental disharmonies and the treatment of problems that have their source in the prenatal period of life. Thanks to the progress in knowledge about human

life in the pre-birth period, researchers also devote great attention to “psychological aspects of the functioning of people who take care of children” (Kornas-Biela, 2007: 17). Since the psychological approach to humans emphasizes the continuity of their development, even the earliest influences and experiences are important for the overall perception of life. This is expressed metaphorically in the following statements: “The body remembers,” “the brain does not forget anything,” and “it is not true that what you are not aware of cannot hurt you” (Kornas-Biela, 2007: 20). This author also develops the issue of prenatal education understood in the broad sense and transfers theoretical premises from prenatal psychology to a new area of educational sciences – prenatal pedagogy.

Maria Przetacznik-Gierowska (2011) points to Jędrzej Śniadecki (1768–1838) as one of the Polish precursors of developmental psychology. Śniadecki drew attention to human development in the prenatal period and was an enthusiast of naturalism and empiricism, professor of chemistry and medicine at the University of Vilnius (Przetacznik-Gierowska, 2011: 11). He also defined the prenatal period in human life as “the period from conception to birth,” i.e. “the life of the foetus” (Przetacznik-Gierowska, 2011: 11).

Despite the difficult historical conditions at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, Polish developmental psychology developed dynamically. In 1901, one of Europe’s first psychology laboratories was established in Lviv by Kazimierz Twardowski (1866–1938), another in 1903 in Cracow by Władysław Heinrich (1865–1957), and yet another was established in Warsaw in 1910 by Edward Abramowski (1869–1918) (Przetacznik-Gierowska, 2011: 19). We also know that “the development of the child’s psyche was then primarily dealt with by Jan Władysław Dawid (1859–1914) and Aniela Szygówna (1869–1921)” (Przetacznik-Gierowska, 2011: 19). It is also worth mentioning the great interwar achievements of Polish developmental psychology, whose development is associated with the establishment of the respective Departments of Pedagogical Psychology at the universities of Warsaw and Cracow in 1928. The heads of these departments, Stefan Baley and Stefan Szuman, were two outstanding figures at that time. Drawing on the existing domestic and foreign traditions, they educated generations of psychologists and educators, who understand the complex problems of development in childhood and youth” (Przetacznik-Gierowska, 2011: 25–26).

Further discoveries in this area appeared after 1956, when “... there was an opening to the world and contacts with Western psychology were resumed, as well as new academic centres educating psychologists were opened ... After 1956, frequent trips contributed to the growth of this branch of psychology for researchers through research internships and international conferences, as well as access to new journals and books” (Przetacznik-Gierowska, 2011: 27). In the

face of mass post-war orphanhood, in the 1950s, Western researchers were already undertaking research into the effects of early separation of a child from its mother. One of the leading researchers of this issue was Rene A. Spitz (1946), and his achievements found “... their continuation in John Bowlby’s attachment theory (1969) and M.D.S. research. Ainsworth (1969) on the socialization process of children” (Przetacznik-Gierowska, 2011: 27). Psychoanalytical and behavioural inspirations were, in turn, reflected in the achievements of Robert R. Sears in several centres in the United States. What is important for the topic discussed here is that “Attention was paid to the role of early experiences that the child gains through care and upbringing in the family, as well as to the mutual, multilateral relationships between parents and children, which gave rise to various varieties of interactional theories” (Przetacznik-Gierowska, 2011: 27–28). During this period, ecologists’ concepts were also developing, which resulted in “... research on the phenomenon known as imprinting, and experiments conducted by Donald Hebb and H.F. Barlow on higher animals” (Przetacznik-Gierowska, 2011: 28).

Drawing on Maria Tyszkowa’s ideas (2011), it is important to clarify a key assumption in traditional developmental psychology: that “developmental changes in the psyche are causally related to the biological maturation processes in the body, and therefore occur only during childhood and adolescence” (Tyszkowa, 2011: 31). Consequently, research in psychology perceived in this way focused on developmental changes in the psyche and behaviour of children and adolescents. It was assumed that “...development processes end with the achievement of maturity and the mental life of an adult is characterized by stability and lack of developmental changes” (Tyszkowa, 2011: 31). Nowadays, this type of assumption is rejected, with the prevailing view being that a person’s psychological development lasts throughout his or her life – from the moment a person comes to life until the moment of death. “Paying attention to developmental changes taking place in adulthood, as well as in the prenatal period, entails a significant change in the way contemporary psychology of human development approaches this subject compared to traditional developmental psychology, which studies the mental development of children and adolescents” (Tyszkowa, 2011: 31).

1.4. The educational potential of the prenatal child

The fact that development in the prenatal period occurs at an extraordinary pace and that this development can be indirectly supported is of interest to an increasing number of scientists.

The position of the French obstetrician Frédérick Leboyer, who in 1974 drew attention to the need for ‘non-violent birth’, is extremely important for the issue in question. This issue remains relevant, because, despite advanced knowledge in this area, it still occurs that instead of being a unique experience, saturated with the culture of work of medical staff, emotional peace and joy of parents, a sense of security and the opening of one of the most beautiful chapters in the lives of adults, the birth of a human being leaves so much to be desired that, after the first delivery, mothers decide against having another child due to the perinatal trauma they have experienced. Increasingly, a need for psychotherapy regarding the prenatal and perinatal bond is recognised. Difficult emotional experiences can make such therapy very necessary, as it offers a person who was conceived and born without choice a chance for a harmonious future.

Therefore, selected areas of obstetric psychoprophylaxis, prenatal psychology and prenatal pedagogy are related to the developmental and educational potential of the child in the prenatal period. They deal with factors affecting the psychophysical well-being of the mother and child during pregnancy and childbirth (Kędziora, 2014: 289).

Laboyer’s groundbreaking publication *Birth Without Violence* aroused many emotions, especially regarding “routine activities” undertaken by medical staff accustomed to treating their youngest patients as objects; showing the newborn as a sensitive being for whom childbirth may become an empowering or traumatizing experience proved to be completely new perspective. Every person who has had the opportunity to assist during childbirth is perfectly aware that childbirth is not a physically pleasant experience – neither for the woman giving birth nor for the baby being born. This situation often involves severe pressure, a tense atmosphere, a sense of fear, anxiety, and particularly intense physical pain. In such difficult circumstances, birth participants need an atmosphere of kindness and a sense of security, which can also be created by medical staff. Ewa Lichtemberg-Kokoszka, in focusing on the perinatal experiences of the child, points out that: “The immensity of suffering during birth is caused by the enormity of experiences, their diversity and traumatic richness. A newborn feels everything – completely, without choice, without any filter, without selection. The freshness and sharpness of the senses and the fact that the sensations are not yet organized into perceptions make the stimuli stronger, more violent, and almost unbearable. Moreover, when a child is born, he or she enters an unfamiliar world of contrasts, where everything is good or bad, warm or cold, pleasant or unpleasant, dry or wet. These impressions become mixed” (Lichtenberg-Kokoszka, 2017: 25).

Laboyer (1986) encourages childbirth in silence, concentration, respect and dignity. He also presents the optimal conditions for a dignified birth, leaning towards respecting every moment, including appreciating the moment of cutting the umbilical cord, which, in his opinion, should be cut only when it stops beating, for the physical and mental well-being of the child (Laboyer, 1986). All medical procedures should focus on the well-being of both child and mother.

Thanks to the progress of medical sciences, neurobiology, psychology and other related sciences, we now have significant knowledge that a prenatal child “has specifically human characteristics: it perceives with all its senses a wide range of stimuli appropriately, it can remember some of them, it is cognitively active and emotionally. The child communicates their needs using movements that vary in intensity and nature. Pushed by an inner need, parents learn about the child’s competencies and realize the importance of non-verbal language through which they can communicate with their offspring” (Wojaczek, 2017: 44).

In Poland, the perception of men in the prenatal and perinatal period was significantly impacted by Włodzimierz Fijałkowski. Like Laboyer, Fijałkowski emphasized the individuality, personality and value of a human being as an independent entity at every stage of its development, including the prenatal period (Lichtenberg-Kokoszka, 2017: 22). Fijałkowski argued that it is not the child who is mute: adults are often insensitive and “deaf” to the child’s “speech” (Lichtenberg-Kokoszka, 2017: 22).

One of the contemporary advocates of finding ways to support human development and its early education during foetal life is Dorota Kornas-Biela, mentioned many times in this study. She has made a significant breakthrough in the perception of the child’s developmental potential in the prenatal period, and is currently introducing the concept of prenatal pedagogy into the area of pedagogical sciences, which she defines as an area of pedagogical science closely related “to the development of other specific sciences dealing with human procreation and the earliest stage of human life” (Kornas-Biela, 2009: 11). In her publication on prenatal pedagogy, which is extremely important for contemporary pedagogy, Kornas-Biela emphasizes at the very beginning that procreation in a broad sense is not only related to the generation and birth of offspring: it is related to providing care and supporting the integral development of the child (Kornas-Biela, 2009: 7). She emphasizes that the perception of prenatal pedagogy in terms of the science of upbringing, including training, education and self-education, is consistent with the European cultural tradition, according to which “upbringing is understood as a concept relating to the influence of one person on another, changing each participants of interaction

and for learning and teaching,” because – as she states, basing on Dariusz Stępkowski, “learning and teaching is always ‘educational’” (Kornas-Biela, 2009: 11). She also emphasizes the importance of the prenatal relationship with the child, drawing attention to what Laboyer and Fijałkowski also noticed. Like them, Kornas-Biela highlights the problem of the increase in various forms of violence against prenatal children, but goes a step further by producing a detailed classification of this violence (Kornas-Biela, 2009: 43–88). This classification is important for prenatal pedagogy because “unconscious knowledge” and “unlearned knowledge” results in particular predispositions, preferences, tendencies, inclinations, as well as complexes, obsessions and fears in subsequent stages of life (Kornas-Biela, 2009: 20).

The author rightly notes that becoming parents entails a long-term process starting from the moment of the child’s conception, noting that the problem of the prenatal relationship between parents and the child poses an undoubted challenge for modern pedagogy as a science (Kornas-Biela, 2009: 43). We learn that the most common form of violence against a child in the intrauterine period is neglect, which may be of a medical, physical or emotional nature (Kornas-Biela, 2009: 43). As Kornas-Biela shows using reliable empirical data, each of the forms of violence she discusses, whether intentional and unintentional, is not without consequences for the born and postnatally developing child. What is particularly valuable in the publication is the proposal to embed certain detailed problems in the assumptions of Martin E.P. Seligman’s positive psychology, to undertake, with pedagogy, reliable analysis of factors that will provide the child with optimal conditions for development in the prenatal period. Everything that prenatal pedagogy proposes as a new area of educational sciences from Kornas-Biela’s perspective proves that the period of prenatal development is not a “defective norm” for the development of the postnatal period (Kornas-Biela, 2009).

In contemporary developmental psychology, encompassing prenatal psychology, and prenatal pedagogy, it is noted that a person needs development support from the very beginning of life, i.e. from the moment of being brought into the world. It is also extremely important in the first period of life because development then occurs at an extraordinary pace, which is difficult to comprehend, given that over approximately 280 days, corresponding to 40 weeks of a woman’s pregnancy, from just one fertilized cell an organism is created consisting of over 200 million various cells with a high degree of specialization. “From the first division, it is the development of a psycho-physical-social being that, from conception on, reacts with the environment” (Skotnicka, 2014: 68–69).

Empowering the child in the prenatal period, caring for the quality of its development while maintaining respect for its right to development and respect is particularly important from the perspective of what is broadly understood as humanism, since each person is unique and their life is of undeniable value. This uniqueness is determined by "... the fact of creation – as one of billions of possible combinations – from the father's and mother's sex cells. The record of all the features of the body, regarding the structure and functioning of each body cell, external appearance, abilities, temperament, personality predispositions and susceptibility to diseases, is contained in an egg cell of 0.15 mm and a sperm, which is five times smaller than it" (Skotnicka, 2014: 68–69).

To realize the development in the prenatal period and the potential of a person already at the beginning of their existence, it is important to remember that modern knowledge divides the prenatal period into the following periods:

- pre-embryonic (foetal egg) – from fertilization to the end of the 3rd week development,
- embryonic (embryonic) – from the 4th week to the end of the 8th week of pregnancy,
- foetal (foetal) – from the 9th week of pregnancy until birth" (Skotnicka, 2014: 69–70).

The pre-embryonic period (relatively short in the context of pregnancy) is the first stage of prenatal development. This refers to a zygote consisting of a sperm and an egg. Just a few moments after fertilization, the fertilized egg cell divides, followed by implantation and subsequent intensive transformations. In the next period (also very short in the context of pregnancy), rapid growth occurs, and at the end of this period, i.e. at the end of the 8th week of prenatal life, the embryo begins to resemble the shape of a human being. During this period, all organs and systems necessary for post-uterine life are formed. The second stage of prenatal development is therefore a time of intensive organogenesis, and thus a critical period for the possible occurrence of developmental defects (Skotnicka, 2014: 69–70).

The last period of prenatal development is the longest-lasting foetal period. During this time, the human body develops harmoniously, and the organs and systems formed in the second phase of development improve, develop and mature. "At the end of the foetal period, approximately 38–40 weeks of pregnancy, the baby is fully formed and ready to be born" (Skotnicka, 2014: 70).

Skotnicka emphasizes that "the prenatal period is one of the most important periods for the proper development of the human body. This is when our entire body, all its organs, systems, functions and capabilities, is created and developed. This is an extremely important period to ensure the proper and

peaceful development of the child. It should be remembered that depending on the environment and conditions we create for our child in the prenatal period, it will develop” (Skotnicka, 2014: 70).

Nowadays, we are fully aware of the fact that the first person with whom a child should establish a bond is its mother. We also believe that all mother’s emotions, both positive and negative, conscious and unconscious, are perceived by their child in the prenatal period and are not without consequences for development. The feelings of peace, love and joy will be favourable for the child developing in the mother’s womb. If the mother is experiencing grief, trauma, stress, depression or sadness, these feelings will be transmitted to the child. The foetus has no way to escape from its mother’s difficult feelings and experiences, it is constantly immersed in them. When the mother is afraid, the foetus in her womb is also afraid; when the mother suffers, the foetus suffers with her (Rubinowska, <https://psychoterapia.1b1.pl/psychoterapia-wiezi-prenatalnej>). It should be noted that: “Many children conceive against their parent’s wishes and experience the trauma of rejection while still in the womb. Many are in mortal danger, either because of a threatened miscarriage or because their parents are considering the option of abortion. They also often suffer when they disappoint their parents with their gender, beauty, resemblance to a disliked person in the family, etc. They are affected by their mother’s life problems, anxieties, losses (e.g. death of a parent), marital problems, abandonment of the child by the father and other issues” (Rubinowska, <https://psychoterapia.1b1.pl/psychoterapia-wiezi-prenatalnej>).

The achievements of contemporary researchers dealing with the scientific subdisciplines mentioned in the study and focusing on the needs and capabilities of the child in the prenatal period are used in such fields as music therapy, because the baby hears music during its mother’s pregnancy. Music therapy considers the importance of music in the prenatal period both for the pregnant mother and the child about to be born. These two perspectives overlap because the period of pregnancy is a time of biological unity – symbiosis of mother and child” (Kędziora, 2012: 289). We also know today that music appropriately matched to the mother’s preferences has a positive impact on her psychophysical condition and thus has a positive impact on the development of the foetus.

As a result of conception, a “whole existence” is created, as it is defined in prenatal psychology, a whole “which came into existence with the formation of the zygote, and which is separate from the mother, genetically original and unique, built of structural elements constituting the conceived child” (Kornas-Biela, 2007: 18). Kornas-Biela argues that “genetic information received at the moment of conception will be transferred to each of its cells for the rest of

the life of the resulting organism, and what is genetically determined will always (although to a varying degree) interact with environmental factors and activity the entity itself” (Kornas-Biela, 2007: 18). Although still immature in our “earthly” understanding, this entity “from conception is entitled to durability, continuity, always being itself, despite the multiplication of specific experiences and maturing and undergoing modifications over time” (Kornas-Biela, 2007: 17–18). Contemporary knowledge about the developmental possibilities of the child in the intrauterine period and knowledge about the importance of early attachment relationships, together with the progress of biomedical sciences, has a chance of providing lasting scientific principles for Polish prenatal pedagogy. This is especially important because both education and human development should be considered in terms of lifelong learning, taking into account the experiences of the prenatal period, which are of particular significance for further life.

Although not doing so voluntarily, humans develop most spectacularly during the entire ontogenesis in the prenatal period. Kornas-Biela rightly notes that interest in the earliest stage of human mental development is a new phenomenon in the history of science, because “for centuries ... childhood was not recognized as a separate and important stage in development. The context for the emergence of these interests was determined by many cultural and social factors, but undoubtedly the greatest stimulus for the emergence of prenatal psychology were achievements in the field of medical techniques enabling insight into the intrauterine environment” (Kornas-Biela, 2007: 14). She is convinced that the progress in medical sciences and technology, which contribute to the continuous improvement of research using “increasingly complex devices,” has made it possible to present a human being, even before birth, as a subject of activity who is “... capable of reception of stimuli, response, orientation and expression, competent in relation to the requirements and possibilities of the womb environment” (Kornas-Biela, 2007: 14). Both the improved techniques for understanding the intrauterine environment of a person’s life during the course of the mother’s pregnancy, as well as the formation of a new trend in psychology “focused on human development throughout his life (life-span developmental psychology), motivated us to deal with the development of the child before birth” (Kornas-Biela, 2007: 14). Currently, thanks to ultrasound examination, one can see the baby in the mother’s womb, observe its movements. Moreover, using the latest 3D and 4D ultrasound, the baby’s face can be observed up close.

Kornas-Biela notes that an ultrasound examination not only has medical significance, but also allows for establishing a bond with the child before its

birth, which may have a particularly favourable impact on the course of the pregnancy and preparations for parenthood, and, importantly, on a father who does not directly participate in the woman's sensory experiences due to the development of the foetus in her body. She goes on to point out that the beneficial consequences of ultrasound examination for the course of pregnancy include:

- a sense of realization of the child as a separate human person;
- changing the way the mother's body is perceived – it becomes, as it were, a safe "home" for the child, conducive to development;
- becoming more concrete about the child's appearance and behaviour;
- sensitivity to its early movements as a result of seeing the baby;
- shifting attention to the child;
- improvement in the well-being of the mother suffering from pregnancy-related symptoms;
- the need for emotional bonding and communication with the child, often also in the case of people who did not accept the pregnancy;
- awareness of the child's health condition, which, in the case of positive experiences in this area, reduces anxiety about the child's health;
- the need (desire) for touch contact with the child develops, which will facilitate the forging of a bond immediately after birth (the need for hugging, stroking, etc.) (Kornas-Biela, 2002: 161).

To see the human potential at the beginning of life, including educational potential, defined as human development and educational resources, one should realize that: "Human life is a kind of miracle of nature. For it to develop properly, it is necessary to create appropriate development conditions and provide future parents, and especially the mother, with sufficient knowledge on how to properly care for them" (Skotnicka, 2014: 68). Importantly, human development, from the moment of conception to birth, can and should be indirectly supported in the surrounding social space.

Social pedagogy and the interpenetrating directions within this subdiscipline, namely, social and cultural care, are also helpful in creating optimal social conditions for the development of a child who requires proper support from adults to function harmoniously. According to Katarzyna Segiet (2019), "social pedagogy as a practical discipline has two basic processes – prevention and compensation implemented by various social entities" (Segiet, 2019: 29). The author also emphasizes that "every child must be supported in their development, everyone should be helped, without knowing whether they need this help" (Segiet, 2019: 29). It can therefore be concluded that when seeking the educational potential of a child in the prenatal period and focusing on the importance of forging relationships between adults and the child in this period,

the goal is to create optimal conditions for supporting development. This aligns with certain experiences and traditions in social pedagogy, which is largely concerned with family problems because “New’ social pedagogy looks for sources of threats, explaining the meaning and consequences, and showing the deepening extremes and social differences. When analysing the social consequences of transformation, social educators draw attention to the link between social change and the source of individual changes. They analyse the living conditions of families and children as well as existential problems and the possibilities of facing them in their living environment” (Segiet, 2019: 29).

1.5. Allowing children to make choices is a way to build a responsible 21st-century society. The role of the teacher – educational and social challenges of liquid postmodernity

We live in a dynamically changing reality, which the philosopher Zygmunt Bauman (2006) describes as fluid. Fluidity, as he notes, is a characteristic of liquids, which, unlike solids, find it difficult to retain their shape. “Liquids do not retain their shape for a long time, constantly ready (and willing) to change. For them, it is the passage of time that matters more than the space they happen to occupy – only ‘temporarily’ anyway ... Liquids move easily. They ‘flow’, ‘spill’, ‘flow out’, ‘splash’, ‘overflow’, ‘drip’, ‘flood’, ‘ooze’, ‘leak’. Unlike solids, they are not easy to contain – they bypass obstacles and barriers, dissolve them or make their way, seeping through them or dripping them drop by drop” (Bauman, 2006: 6). The metaphor of fluidity of reality in the 21st century refers primarily to its unpredictability, as “the circumstances of action and the strategies of conduct subordinated to them grow old quickly and are overdone before anyone can know them thoroughly. Drawing knowledge from experience and referring to strategies and tactics that have proven themselves in the past is therefore unwise, since the old tests did not take into account the rapid and generally unforeseen (or simply unpredictable) changes in circumstances” (Bauman, 2007a: 5–6). It is also difficult today to grasp reality as a coherent, logical whole and to form a generalised attitude towards it. Human activity is highly fragmented and “consists of a series of short-lived projects and episodes, the number of which is infinite, and they do not combine into any sequences ... Such a fragmented life stimulates ‘transverse’ rather than ‘vertical’ orientations. Each successive move in life has to respond to different opportunities and a completely different distribution of chances and thus requires different skills and a different streamlin-

ing of resources” (Bauman, 2007b: 9–10). Adopting Bauman’s terminology, it should be noted that all “life moves” require people to be able to make choices, including the choice of one option from among several equally attractive parallel (transversal) options. This means that an individual, when making choices, does not have to climb upwards at all: to develop, he or she can simply take advantage of successive chances, and successive opportunities in life. In doing so, they may experience the illusion of change, the illusion of development, and the illusion of influence. However, he or she makes such choices: changes his or her job, not to a better one or one offering opportunities for promotion, but due to being bored with the previous one. In addition, the choices modern humans make bring short-term satisfaction because current successes, temporary satisfaction, do not necessarily mean success and satisfaction in the future. Choices made today are not necessarily beneficial in terms of a person’s future life. On the other hand, it is certain that past ways of doing things, and skills developed today must be constantly reviewed and modified, as they may prove to be quite useless in new circumstances, or may even prove to be harmful. What may turn out to be important for future success, in contrast to the experience of previous generations, is the “sudden and profound forgetting of out-of-date information and quick change of habits” (Bauman, 2007a: 10), including the ability to make quick choices, flexible change of decisions, anticipation of consequences of choices and the ability to accept them.

People today have many options to choose from, “each of which turns out to be more alluring and tempting than before, each compensates for the lack of the previous one and prepares one to accept the next one – it is an exciting experience” (Bauman, 2006: 95–96). Never before have people had so many opportunities to make choices. One can choose almost everything at any time: from the programme one wants to watch on television, the book one intends to read (listen to), the music, the film in the cinema, the menu in one of many restaurants specialising in cuisines from all over the world, through the model and colour of a mobile phone, tablet, camera, choice of car body shades and seat upholstery colours, to the choice of a kindergarten, a school, a university, a job, a lifestyle. People choose a way to function professionally, privately and socially that is convenient at a given moment in their lives and surround themselves with objects and people that most closely match their needs and preferences at that moment in their lives. At any moment, another choice can be made, and life can be changed for another lifestyle, encouraged by omnipresent advertising. There is a range of consumption options spanning two radically different lifestyles: the first of these is defined by the metaphor: “allow yourself a bit of luxury, take a break” and a style metaphorically outlined as: “I am fit:

a total renewal of body and mind.” Consumption underpinning modern human functioning involves a multitude of different possibilities and options. It does not necessarily concern the satisfaction of functionally important needs, but rather involves the fulfilment of artificially awakened desires. At the same time, the satisfaction of one desire usually entails the need to satisfy another one. We choose constantly and quickly because, as Bauman (2006: 96) emphasises, “if the possibilities are to remain unlimited, none of them can be allowed to solidify into a permanent reality.” It is obviously worth noting that far more choices are available to residents of large cities compared to residents of small towns and villages, as indicated, for example, in studies conducted by J. Arcimowicz, M. Bieńko and B. Łaciak (2015). However, regardless of one’s place of residence, socio-economic position, actual preferences and needs to avoid frustration, it is best not to get attached to what one has chosen and not to make any lasting commitments. “The best thing to do is to use the object of desire on the spot and throw it away immediately; the market will see to it that how this object is used allows for immediate gratification and forgetfulness ... For every choice can be changed to another at any moment. As a result of this, people are trained to see the world as a container full of impermanent objects, disposable objects” (Bauman, 2008: 190). The choices of modern people, their attitude to their own decisions and their consequences are shaped to a great extent by media culture. Both adults and children participate in virtual life. They make several choices that have few or no visible consequences, or these choice are apparent or of little consequence, e.g. losing points in a game, not moving to the next level, having to start the game over again, etc. Their life attitudes are modelled by unreal game characters and artificially created idols. If a virtual game protagonist makes a decision that is unfavourable, he or she returns to a lower level of the game, or starts over from the beginning – a virtual life can be recreated with a “clean account.” Meanwhile, in reality, an unfavourable choice carries the risk of consequences that are often severe for the individual or others. The virtual world, including the world of popular films, series and programmes, shows that today’s decisions and commitments are superficial. A well-known popular music star takes up the challenge of participating in a popular show, only to drop out after the second episode, due to other choices made and commitments undertaken. The protagonists of popular programmes, TV series, films and games do not suffer any consequences for their choices and actions, they transform from villains without any cost to themselves into almost crystalline characters. Situations from the television or computer screen are particularly dangerous models of behaviour for children who learn from television programmes that choice does not involve consequences. So choice is not associated with respon-

sibility. Meanwhile, the consequences of today's choices and decisions made by individuals and entire social groups will be felt in a few, several or several dozen decades. This group includes choices and decisions concerning consumption, for example, (the choice relates to whether another blouse should be bought or a long-lost one should be refreshed, whether to throw away yesterday's food or use it to prepare a new dish), objects we do not use (e.g. the choice concerns whether to wear a blouse we do not want to wear for a long time or whether to use it to prepare a new dish). The choice might concern whether a blouse we are bored with should be thrown away or used in some way, whether a book we are not reading should be recycled, donated to a library or given away to be read in the form of bookcrossing), rubbish (throw away organic waste or start a home composter), emissions (choose public transport, a bicycle or travel around the city by car), etc. Each of these choices is made by the majority of the population, but not many people make them consciously. In a small number of cases, the decision is preceded by reflections not only relating to the present but taking into account future consequences. Perhaps our thinking concerning responsibility for the choices one makes is erroneous. In fact, as Ulrich Beck (2012) puts it, this is simply a question of who sees that "responsibility for the state of nature (and not only) lies in the hands of ministers and managers. Showing the 'side effects' of choices and production processes that threaten human life and its natural substrate can annihilate markets and destroy both social trust and economic capital" (Beck, 2012: 123–124). The discussion that follows attempts to prove that investing in developing individuals and a society capable of making choices quite simply pays off. However, Beck's words ring true, in that anticipating the future can lead to a change in the current action, "namely, the action of governments, managers and ultimately all people around the world" (Beck, 2012: 129).

Hannah Arendt claims that making a choice is a resolution between two things given *in status nascendi*, as potentialities. Thus, there are at least two issues involved in making a choice: what is the object of the choice and how the resolution is made (cited according to Sotwin, 2010: 18). In the real world, a choice is an attitude to a certain situation, which contains alternatives, and its effect is to decide on one of two (several) potential possibilities, according to one's preference. As Antoni Damasio (2017: 103) writes, "Deciding a typical personal case embedded in the social environment is a complex task, with consequences that are difficult to foresee." Each alternative faced by the individual leads to a set of possible outcomes, i.e. potential consequences of the choice (action). These outcomes always have value for the individual making the choice: some options are more, others less preferred. Making a choice, making

a decision, therefore requires knowledge, and this knowledge includes facts about objects, persons and situations of the external world. Making a choice also involves the skill of anticipation, which is the ability to “face situations that are new and unprecedented; it is the ability to cope with the future, to anticipate upcoming events and to assess the consequences” (Bałachowicz, 2017: 29). Anticipation, as J. Koziński (1987: 129) points out, refers to three issues: determining future outcomes, external conditions and one’s capabilities. The individual making the choices performs complex mental operations which consist in the fact that the images on which reasoning is based (images of specific objects, actions, patterns of relations as well as the words that allow the former to be translated into a linguistic form) not only have to be in the “focus of attention” (which is achieved through the ability to concentrate) but also have to be “kept in the mind in an active form” (which is achieved through higher-order working memory) (Damasio, 2017: 104). An important role is played by the conditions that determine what outcome will be achieved when an individual chooses a particular alternative. After all, people make choices under more or less favourable conditions. As psychologists point out, among the possible alternatives, people choose those opportunities that bring them some benefit, while rejecting options that, from their perspective, are unrealistic and disadvantageous. When making choices, they therefore take the following into account:

- representation of the decision task, which is a subjective image of it (leaving out and ignoring certain alternatives and their consequences);
- the subjective value of what is useful to them in a given situation; based on an evaluation according to several criteria, people choose which gets a higher global total;
- the subjective probability of the results (consequences) of a choice about the near or distant future;
- preferred strategy of choice (action, reaction) e.g. in simple tasks people choose the strategy that maximises subjectively expected utility;
- factors controlling the decision-making process (Koziński 1975: 19; Nęcka, Orzechowski, Szymura, 2008: 574; Damasio, 2017: 188–189).

The knowledge stored in memory in the form of dispositional representations, which is the basis of the choice made, can be accessible to consciousness in both verbal and non-verbal forms. However, this knowledge needs to be reflected upon, and what is required is deeper reflection combined with an analysis. Meanwhile, the decisions that people make in everyday situations are often taken under the conditions of great uncertainty as to what options are at stake and, in particular, what the consequences of these choices will be. In

addition, choices vary in terms of importance: from crucial ones, which are essential for a person's future and functioning, to less important ones, even sometimes insignificant. Important choices, such as the choice of a life partner, the choice of profession or type of career, and the choice of treatment for a serious illness, are associated with a high degree of uncertainty about the results and consequences of the decisions made. Therefore, they require particular reflection. Józef Koźielecki (1975), writing about the choice of a career path, noted that in the 19th century, deciding on the choice of a profession was not a major problem for an individual. A young person chooses from a limited set of alternatives. Nowadays, as Koźielecki writes, "in connection with the advanced process of professionalisation – the list of professions consists of several thousand items and at the same time this undergoes constant changes – certain traditional professions disappear and at the same time new job opportunities emerge" (Koźielecki, 1975: 8). Meanwhile, as Thomas Leoncini notes, "occupational flexibility is not at all compatible with today's youth, as it requires considerable responsibility: we have moved from subsistence work to work as a means of finding a better job, perhaps a better paid one" (Bauman, Leoncini, 2018: 99–100). Moreover, as T. Leoncini adds, for those representing the fluid generation, it is impossible to follow the changes, and it is difficult to have so much flexibility. Moreover, this generation feels that it is unfair that this lifestyle is imposed on them by those who experience a certain stability, as they have a permanent job that is secure and financially attractive (Bauman, Leoncini, 2018: 100). Thus, it can be said that nowadays making choices is a challenging task requiring a great deal of attentiveness and anticipation of the future. One should also be aware that "fluid times" do not guarantee that the choice made today will be perceived as successful tomorrow. As Koźielecki (1987: 219) points out, "What was valuable and significant at the moment of taking action (making a choice – K.K.'s annotation) may lose its valency and value in the future. It may transpire that the consequences of a decision made today will be borne in a few years' time and it will be difficult for us to accept them then. For this reason, anticipatory processes play a key role, thanks to which "man moves from what is real to what is possibilistic" (Koźielecki, 1987: 219). It should be noted, however, that many choices are made by modern-day individuals without delay, immediately, and under time pressure, since a postponed decision will be useless. The choice is particularly challenging in a situation which is independent of the individual and, at the same time, urgent, e.g. treatment of an illness, dealing with an emergency, an accident, or a disaster, but also, for example, the choice of a job placement offer, when one has to decide and sign the relevant commitment immediately, without a possibility of

reflection or consultation. In addition to the time pressure in such a situation, the individual may lack the possibility to cognitively process all the options, with all the consequences of accepting them. The individual therefore does not have the opportunity for in-depth reflection. “The assumption of having the cognitive resources necessary to check every option can only be fulfilled in the case of large, specialised teams” (Nęcka, Orzechowski, Szymura, 2008: 575); in everyday life it is simply impossible. When making choices, people are rather guided by intuition and personal experience. Certain criteria that they subjectively adopt when making choices are in practice more important than others. When choosing a flat, for example, they choose one located in the city centre, in a crowded, noisy area, because the proximity of the school for children, the health centre, the possibility to use public transport, etc. will be more important in their subjective assessment. From the perspective of an individual making the choice, it is the “totality” of the situation that is more important, rather than the mechanical sum of points assigned to individual options. When making choices, individuals opt for what has worked before in a similar situation. For example, when dining at a new restaurant, we choose a familiar dish because we know what to expect.

As the above description shows, decision-making is a complex process. Cognitive, emotional and motivational elements are involved. The individual’s knowledge and experience also influence this process. The process of making a choice itself consists of the following consecutive stages:

- pre-decision phase – defining the situation (problem) and gathering information about this situation and possible alternatives;
- the decision-making (choice-making) phase – choosing a particular option, not necessarily the best one, and the process of distinguishing it by “favouring” it over competing options – reassuring oneself that one has made the best choice. In this phase, an important element is to assess the validity of the information previously gathered about the available choices. Some of the data available to the individual may be considered more relevant at this stage. At this stage, prior knowledge is recalled from the permanent memory, mental operations are performed, and the brain creates scenarios of possible paths of accidents of their consequences, which ultimately leads to a decision;
- post-decision phase – demonstrating doubts about the legitimacy of the choice made. In defending their choice, the decision-taker reinforces their belief in having chosen the correct option by enhancing the appeal of that option selected and decreasing that of alternatives. At this stage, ‘post-decision regret’ might appear, which increases in line with the im-

portance of the decision to the individual. The choice of a flat may cause extensive post-decision regret, contrary to the choice of bread in a bakery (Nęcka, Orzechowski, Szymura, 2008: 584–588).

The choices people make relate to matters that are more or less relevant to their future functioning, and success, but also relevant to other people. Among the choices that adult members of society make is that of individual values. This is the crucial choice people make, as it involves adopting attitudes towards themselves and the surrounding world that determine how individuals and whole societies function. As Koziński notes, the individual value of a particular state of affairs (and this is, after all, the choice that an individual makes) depends on the relationship existing between the state of the subject and the state of the object, between the degree of satisfaction of individual aspirations and the configuration of external stimuli (Koziński, 1987: 25).

Decisions and choices shape people's lives. Every individual makes them many times every day. Thanks to the fact that we make choices, we can develop, writes Błażej Smykowski (2013), and it is impossible to disagree. It is safe to assume, as he points out, that "the mechanism of functioning at the disposal of modern humans is because in the past he experienced a situation forcing him to define himself, to make a choice" (Smykowski, 2013: 15). In personal development, the number of choices available to an individual increases with age, and these choices also become more significant, since involve consequences both for that individual and others around them. The older and more experienced we are, the more aware we are of the consequences of our choices. During early childhood, individuals can control their impulses, which can be regarded as elementary skills for making choices. This disposition is best illustrated by an example described by Edward B. Titchener: "When a young child unexpectedly comes face to face with a strange dog, two impulses arise in its consciousness ...: an impulse that pushes forward (exploratory instinct) and an impulse prompting it to run away (instinctive fear of something unknown). The child approaches the dog, retreats approach again, etc." (from Sotwin, 2010: 19). In the child's behaviour, the decision-making process taking place is visible. Of course, which decision is taken depends on various factors, which will be mentioned in the discussion that follows. Certainly, the ability to divert attention and, in this case, to step back is an important achievement of the child requiring executive attention (Goleman, 2014: 91). This skill is achieved by children around the age of three. "Parents sometimes notice this milestone in a child's development when it consciously decides to overcome temptation, e.g. wait to eat a dessert until it has eaten a few more bites off the plate" (Goleman, 2014: 92). Pre-school children make choices concerning the here and now. Thus, they can choose

the toy they want to play with and give up playing with another. They can also select the garments from their wardrobe to wear in kindergarten, and choose a birthday present for a friend based on their preferences and experience. The classic experiment on children's ability to make choices was conducted by Walter Mischel (in Zimbardo, Boyd, 2014: 186). He put four-year-olds in a situation where they could make a choice: eat a tasty, fragrant, colourful marshmallow immediately or wait and get two marshmallows, thereby deferring the gratification. The children were given a choice, but they also experienced the consequences of their actions. Those who were able to defer gratification received a double reward. This early ability, mastered by some children to make choices and give up what is immediate, tangible and more pleasurable in favour of what is deferred is a predictor of the development of more advanced emotional and social competencies. These children were more able to cope with adversity and stress in later years and were more confident, hard-working and independent (Zimbardo, Boyd, 2014: 186). As children grow older, they learn to reflect on what each choice involves. As Anna Matczak (2003) notes, a child then goes beyond what is available and embraces with its mind what could be. "Orienting the child's thinking towards the realm of possibilities (choices – K.K.'s annotation) means that the first solution that comes to mind is no longer treated as the only one" (Matczak, 2003: 84). Around the age of 6–7, children's thinking becomes more flexible and efficient. They stop comprehending events as they have occurred in reality up to this point; they begin to reflect and anticipate. However, their mental operations are still based on specific objects and events. The script is a mental representation of particular daily events and appropriate behaviour and emotions, and by the end of the pre-school age this contains alternatives (Schaffer, 2005: 273–274). The child knows, for example, that at McDonald's one can order a hamburger or a cheeseburger. The script makes it possible to anticipate what to expect in similar situations in the future. Children at this age are susceptible to suggestions and pressure from adults and, under the influence of their suggestions, exchange an earlier choice for another (Kuszek, 2006: 67, 95–97). Maria Tyszkowa (1977) includes pressure from significant persons in the group of conditions that children find difficult in performing tasks (Tyszkowa, 1977: 201). These conditions lead to subordination and loss of confidence in one's competence to make choices. On the other hand, making a satisfactory choice according to one's own previous experience, which brings with it a sense of satisfaction, shapes the belief in one's effectiveness. According to Tyszkowa, success increases e.g., perseverance, while failure effectively decreases motivation in children (Tyszkowa, 1977: 213). When making choices, pre-school children learn to assess their choice-related competence and

learn to accept the consequences of their decisions. During the school period, the ability to make decisions, and active self-control increases. When making a decision, the school child refers to his/her experience (recalls previous situations and events) e.g. *Mummy, pack me two sandwiches today because I have more lessons than yesterday*. He/she can also choose another solution: *Mummy give me some money, so I can buy something to eat in the shop if I am hungry*. The child makes inferences by analogy, i.e. using what he or she already knows about the subject. School age is a time when a sense of obligation develops. Children increasingly accept the consequences associated with their decisions. In daily school situations, they experience the consequences of more or less conscious choices and decisions. A lack of art materials, for example, entails having to borrow them from a classmate. However, they often fail to see the connection between the past, the present and the future. Consequently, it is sometimes difficult for them to relate consequences to their own choices or past actions. It should be noted, however, that once a choice has been made, younger school-aged children can actively pursue the chosen solution and overcome obstacles. That being said, they sometimes experience difficulty in persevering for a longer period in pursuing an intention. It should be added that there are individual differences between children in this respect. Around the age of 12, children recognise the world in terms of the values, possibilities and necessities associated with action, and treat themselves as agents capable of various possible actions, together with the potential effects of the choices they make (Stefańska-Klar, 2001: 143). However, it is only at the stage of formal operations that children are capable of theoretical analysis of various possibilities without performing them, digging deeper into problems and posing inquisitive questions. They can cope with hypothetical situations and anticipate the consequences of choices. Adolescence is a time of intensive testing of one's possibilities and those of the social environment, a time of making choices important for the future life whose consequences will be borne not only here and now, but also in years to come. It is also a time of preparing for decision-making in adulthood, for choosing values, deciding on one's lifestyle, etc.

The ability to make choices must be accompanied by responsibility for the consequences of the decisions made. Although the concept of responsibility itself has a much broader meaning, part of it is certainly the conviction that my decisions depend on me, and that I am willing to accept their results. These results may be more or less desirable and expected by the individual; in certain situations, they are easier to accept and bear. However, there are times when it is difficult to accept the consequences of one's own choices. The reason is that when one has made them, it is difficult to anticipate that the

decisions made would have an unfavourable outcome. Unexpected and unfavourable consequences for the individual are particularly difficult to accept, and yet they also occur.

For an individual to develop an attitude of responsibility for their choices and decisions, they should be able to experience the possibility of making choices. They should also be able to influence the surrounding reality through the decisions made and the results adopted. It is difficult to disagree that “the experience of choice promotes control and change of one’s behaviour” (Krzyszowski-Rynkiewicz, 2007: 41). Experience, understood as traces of past activities and experiences, is accumulated from the earliest stages of life. An important element regards how the social environment (parents, further family, teachers, friends) reacts to the individual’s first attempts to make decisions and choices. Children may find themselves in a situation where they can make a choice, but may not experience such a situation where those around them know better. When making their first choices, the child may encounter different reactions from their environment, which will determine subsequent decision-making. The child may gain acceptance and understanding of their attempts and efforts. Alternatively, they may face criticism, reprimands, or indifference, or attempts at relief, providing help, or giving guidance or advice. Different individuals’ experiences of similar or comparable situations will therefore vary. According to Otto Speck (2005), “A child can understand the need to adapt to social realities and to submit to constraints in satisfying the need for pleasure, provided it can recognise the values behind this” (Speck, 2005: 164). This means that for a child to achieve the ability to make choices and take responsibility, it needs to see the meaning behind its decisions.

In different situations and at different places, the same person may accumulate different experiences. For example, in the family home, he or she is encouraged to make decisions not only concerning himself or herself, but also on matters of importance for the family, and to take responsibility for the choices made. In contrast, at school the individual may not have such opportunity, as the expected course of action is to submit to the teacher’s decisions and choices. It also occurs that adults (parents, grandparents, teachers) do not accept the choices made by children and try to persuade them to change their decisions. Persuasion can take many forms: explaining and arguing, bribery, manipulation, etc. It can also be the case that a child makes a choice based on a momentary desire (“I want”) and then tries to change the decision (“I want something else”) and their social environment allows this change without any good reason. This behaviour is not conducive to maintaining the belief that every decision has certain consequences. An individual does not have the opportu-

nity to experience the results of his or her own choices and develop personal responsibility. The experiences an individual accumulates determines the individual's position of control. When we observe ourselves in various situations concerning the course and effects of our own choices, we perceive the amount of control we have throughout events occurring with our participation. These perceptions form the basis for the formation of standards about one's control (Badora, 2001: 27). Individuals with an internal locus of control are convinced that they can exercise control over their behaviour and the events in which they participate. They are not afraid to make decisions and accept responsibility for the consequences. On the contrary, people with an external locus of control develop the belief that what happens in their lives depends on other people, on a combination of circumstances, and fate. They believe that "no matter what they do, external factors, often unpredictable, will still have a significant impact on their lives" (Wosińska, 2004: 83).

"Democracy must be based on individuals who learn from an early age what freedom is, how to make their own decisions, accept responsibility for their own lives" (Liebel, cited in Lewandowska, 2017: 142). It is adults (teachers) who create conditions in which it is easier or more difficult for children to make decisions, who through their actions model children's behaviour, and show them how to accept the consequences of choices. They also help children understand that disregarding the ability to decide is "giving in to chance on which our future will depend" (Bubrowiecki, 2012: 411). As Irena Obuchowska (1996) points out, the choices and decisions given to a child should take into account the child's age and individual capabilities but, as the author stresses, the child's capabilities are usually underestimated (Obuchowska, 1996: 67). In this part of the concluding discussion, I will focus on three issues: creating conditions for a child to make choices, methods and techniques facilitating decision-making, and modelling responsibility for decisions and choices.

1. The first aspect – creating conditions in which children make choices. Research shows that it is much more difficult for an individual in a state of exhaustion to make a choice; it is harder to resist an impulse. The child's state of excitement in the decision-making situation is therefore important, and whether the child is tired or calm, focused or distracted. The more stressful the situation preceding the moment of choice and the choice situation itself, the more energy is required. Research findings indicate that the greater the level of emotional, physical, or psychological stress, the more difficult the choice, and the more challenging it is to defer gratification. Stuart Shanker and Teresa Barker (2016) write about this situation as follows: "It is like the accelerator and brake in

a car: when the amygdala registers a threat, the hypothalamus presses the accelerator; when the amygdala turns off the alarm, the hypothalamus presses the brake. The problem arises when the amygdala releases the alarm too often, to which the hypothalamus responds by pressing the accelerator continuously, and the brake pads wear out - then the recovery system loses its flexibility” (Shacker, Barker, 2016: 41). This observation is significant because modern-day children (like adults) live in a world of multiple stimuli and situations of constant choice (a point dealt with in the first part of the discussion): they are constantly rushed and yet, as we all know, in a hurry it is difficult to make choices and anticipate their consequences. This implies that a child needs focus and calm. As D. Goleman (2014) points out, “children who cannot focus their attention ... cannot regulate themselves effectively” (Goleman, 2014: 217) The task of adults, including teachers, is therefore to create conditions in which children can focus on the choices they make when they are not urged and overstimulated. One of the principles for making choices that Bubrowiecki proposes is the principle of “giving yourself time to think.”

2. The second aspect – methods and techniques for making choices. Even younger children can be offered simple techniques related to making choices, such as rehearsing an individual narrative about “what will happen when...” In this way, children (pupils) have the opportunity to imagine and verbalise the potential consequences of decisions and choices. Older children and adolescents can be offered one of the several techniques described by Bubrowiecki in his book *Ucz się i myśl* (Learn and Think), among which he distinguishes the Franklin method, questions to the “mind” and the “heart,” Tepperwein “traffic lights,” “letters to a friend” or mind maps in decision-making. One might also draw on the suggestions of Edward de Bono (2008) and his concept of the six thinking hats.”
3. The third aspect – modelling responsibility. Individual will not form a sense of responsibility when choices are imposed on them or obvious choices are made. They can form an attitude of responsible decision-making when they can face the consequences. However, it is also important what behavioural patterns an individual has the opportunity to observe in their environment, above all, those of their parents, who might not always act responsibly. Such examples include breaking traffic laws, travelling without a ticket, taking office materials out of the workplace, throwing rubbish into the forest or a meadow near a neighbour’s field, burning plastic waste in household stoves, etc. These behaviours are accompanied by evading the consequences, as in the story quoted

by Beata Krzywosz-Rynkiewicz (2007), whose protagonist is a lady who, among her friends, described her “adventure with a policeman”: *I’m a bit late for an important meeting, so I’m speeding, I don’t know how much – 140, 150 km per hour ... And suddenly I see: the police. They stop me. With a squeal of tyres, I brake. A policeman approaches and I think to myself that I’m not going to let him get to the point and I start to do it myself: – Sir, policeman, I know, I was driving too fast, it’s my fault. I know I should be punished and I will take any punishment, but what I would like most is that you forgive me. – How many points have you already got? asks the policeman. – None. Because they always forgive me* (Krzywosz-Rynkiewicz, 2007: 45) Children and adolescents witness such events: they observe that not only is it possible to make a morally wrong choice that endangers others but it is also possible to avoid the consequences. It is therefore hardly surprising that young people try to avoid the consequences of their decisions in school or home situations. Meanwhile, responsibility is one of the values fundamental to human and institutional social life. Social order, as Małgorzata Bogunia-Borowska (2015) points out, is made possible by people and institutions accepting certain obligations (Boguni-Borowska, 2015: 99).

We would like to conclude by stressing that, although it might seem obvious, we often forget that the choices we make today, the decisions we make and how responsible we are will determine the quality of life for future generations, and not only children or young people today. Our children will be responsible for the shape of the world in the 22nd century. How this responsibility will look largely depends on the attitudes of adults around them. In this context, it is therefore important that contemporary people are not overwhelmed by Baudelaire’s “universal stupidity” manifested in “modernity belief in itself, in its irresistible progress” (Beck, 2012: 302), and that the conduct and decisions that precede it involve thought and prudent considerations.

1.6. Achieving independence as a developmental task for children and adults

In each period of development, the individual is subject to two types of influences: internal – from the biological clock, and external – i.e. the influence of the social clock. The biological clock determines the processes of biological maturation, while the social clock concerns what happens outside the individual’s body, i.e. the social context understood in broad terms. Every person

is faced with the need to meet two types of needs: firstly, those that are determined by the changes of a maturing, changing organism, and secondly, those that result from expectations and social pressures.

Throughout life, a person is engaged successively in development tasks resulting from changes taking place in their body and new social requirements. As a result, they improve their skills and develop competencies, reaching an increasingly higher level of mastery. In turn, achieving a specific level of skills and competencies at a given stage of life allows the individual to undertake subsequent tasks at higher stages of development. The nature of these tasks in later periods of life is related to changes in “the internal environment (the organism – the soma area) and in the individual’s surroundings, i.e. the external environment (mainly social relations – the polis area). Moreover, the individual’s competencies gained in the previous stages of development and their current resources related to coping with various life situations (the area of intellectual, emotional and social resources and the level of awareness of their possession – the area of the psyche) are also of importance” (Brzezińska, 2000: 28).

In addition, it should be noted that the tension between the three types of pressure (psyche-soma-polis) is felt by the individual as an internal conflict and usually generates negative emotions. As a result, individuals take action to reduce the emotional discomfort they feel. However, this may prove difficult because the currently available competencies and solutions that have hitherto proved effective do not produce the expected result. On the contrary, these often lead to deterioration and increased discomfort for both the individual and their environment. The culmination is a crisis, which can be solved with the social environment’s support. Such support that meets the individual’s needs helps them develop new ways of functioning that are more suited to the situation and requirements. Conversely, the inability to cope with the crisis and the lack of support from the social environment not only cause discomfort but constitute a serious obstacle to the individual mastering subsequent development tasks, delaying or halting developmental changes.

Mastering each development task means that the individual reaches a point where he or she can combine previously developed competencies with new ones and use them harmoniously and comprehensively. Anna Brzezińska (2000) points out that in terms of the further personal development, what is crucial is how each subsequent developmental crisis is ultimately resolved, that is, “whether the individual has mastered new competencies in the struggle with himself, his own body and the environment, or has not mastered or mastered others – also allowing for weakening or eliminating the felt tensions, but in a less constructive way, not enabling it to satisfactorily meet its

own needs and/or the expectations of the environment” (Brzezińska, 2000: 230). It should therefore be noted that the characteristic features of developmental changes, including those that lead to the achievement by various individuals of specific competencies expected and desired at a given stage of development, are their equifinality and multifinality (Schaffer, 2010: 11). The former concept refers to the fact that there is more than one developmental pathway leading to a specific outcome. This means that different people may gain new competencies in a various ways because they experience slightly different educational practices and their educational opportunities at the beginning of their educational journey differ, for example, and they face different pressures, e.g. peer environment. Moreover, people do not achieve the same developmental results at the same moment, because various factors determine the pace of change. In turn, the multifinality of development means that identical experiences of individuals in the early stages of life do not necessarily lead to the same results in later stages of life, because they are largely determined by such factors as a person’s individual resources, their adaptive skills, and the ability to cope with new and different situations. Factors contributing to undertaking development tasks include:

- accelerated child development;
- strength and energy above average for a given developmental age;
- intelligence above average for a given period of development;
- an environment conducive to gaining experience;
- the individual’s internal motivation to experience their agency;
- the individual’s desire to change;
- the individual’s desire to stand out from the environment (Kuszek, 2017: 21–23).

In the context of the above assumptions, it can be assumed that achieving a higher level and greater scope of independence is a development task for an individual at subsequent stages of life. While characterizing the subsequent developmental tasks that lead an individual during childhood to achieve an increasingly higher level of independence, it is important to emphasize that the tasks that a child faces are also those tasks faced by caregivers. A child will not achieve the expected, desired nor potential level of independence without the active participation of adults in this difficult process. Therefore, we recognize that achieving independence is a task both for the child themselves and their social environment. It should also be emphasized that achieving independence is a long-term, indeed lifelong, process covering various spheres of development, which begins in the first months of life. The first measurable achievements can be regarded as a child’s ability to overcome space and mas-

tery of elementary manipulative activities enabling them to put a spoon in their mouth, drink from a cup, for example. Mastering these skills requires not only internal resources – the body's motor skills and the existence of a need that the child seeks to satisfy, the motive to want to overcome the space, which stems from a readiness to explore the immediate environment, which does not require but rather can provide appropriate support (adapted to the needs and possibilities). The environment's support for the individual in carrying out this developmental task means that adults (guardians) create a space for the child that inspires locomotion and manipulation activity. At the same time, however, they are obliged to ensure the child's safety. Therefore, social requirements and expectations towards the child will, on the one hand, encourage them to overcome space and reach and manipulate objects, and on the other hand, set boundaries that cannot be crossed for safety reasons. Around the first year of life, the individual must cope with the following pressures: biological ones related to the increasing strength of their body and motor skills (both gross and fine motor skills) and social ones related to encouraging the child to move and manipulate. At the same time, the child's activity is inhibited and limited by the social environment in order to comply with safety rules - the child may be encouraged to move and manipulate objects but this activity is limited. This situation leads to a developmental crisis in which the child must learn to move towards people and objects and, at the same time, react to a prohibition expressed verbally or in the form of a physical limitation. The prohibition or restriction that an individual in movement encounters triggers negative emotions. However, the child cannot cope with these emotions, and proven methods of action are ineffective. Therefore, the child must develop completely new ways of acting and reacting emotionally, facilitating solutions to the crisis and, as a result, enabling the child to engage in the development task. This is an essential condition for individuals to be able to undertake and complete tasks at the next stage of life (between the second and third year). Consequently, social expectations towards an older child change.

First of all, independence related to controlling physiological activities, volitional activity, and basic self-service is expected. This is likewise a time when children's readiness to act in their own way and manipulate objects allows them to combine the causes and effects of actions, to test the limits of their abilities and the limitations of objects. The child learns what can and cannot be done. During everyday activities, they encounter encouragement from the environment to act and, at the same time, limitations placed on their independent endeavours in the form of help being provided, prohibitions, and obstacles. This situation leads to another crisis that must be dealt with together by the child

and their loved ones. The crisis experienced by a young organism manifests itself in changes in behaviour, e.g. stubbornness, defiance of prohibitions, recalcitrance, and negativism. From the perspective of the guardian, this crisis is associated with the fact that previous methods of relating to the child and supporting their aspirations become ineffective, and the child's behaviour is incomprehensible to many guardians. Thus, both adult and child are faced with the need to develop a new way of coping, which leads to the child (and guardians) learning to assess their own ability to act independently, to reject or accept help, to reach the limit, but do not exceed it. Resolving this crisis is once again the basis for pre-schoolers to undertake other developmental tasks typical of middle childhood. During this period of life, the child faces the prospect of achieving independence, learns to obey social norms, but also masters the ability of emotional self-control, undertakes tasks for others and together with others, and learns to carry out them independently and in cooperation. Adults (parents, guardians, and pre-school teachers) are once again involved in achieving these tasks. During this period, a coherent system of tasks and related requirements set for the child at home and in institutions facilitates better orientation in what adults expect from the individual. Similar activities that support the child's aspirations for independence contribute to his or her sense of security and help develop the belief in one's agency. The key moment here is the crisis, which in psychology is called the crisis of the seventh year of life, when the child loses his former childhood spontaneity. Around the age of seven, a child fights an internal battle between conflicting feelings, is characterized by emotional instability and mood swings, and the manifestations of emotions are exaggerated. The individual is prone to such behaviours as clowning around, sulking, and becoming angry, which had not previously been observed in their behaviour. At this point, adults once again play a crucial role: they help the child cope with the emotions they are experiencing, for example, by verbalizing the child's behaviour, encouraging them to name their feelings and experiences. As a result of solving this crisis, the child's behaviour becomes visible in what Vygotsky terms the "intellectual factor," related to a progressively improved understanding of one's emotional states, experiences and the ability to generalize them (Vygotsky, 2002: 165–177). Children achieve basic independence in verbalizing their emotions and moods, also making better use of previous experiences, which they may refer to them on their own and use in similar situations. They also plan their actions better and accept their consequences. It is therefore worth emphasizing once again that at each stage of the development of independence, an important role is played by the adult accompanying the child, who understands the child's needs and capabilities, formulates tasks and

helps the child undertake them independently or in cooperation with others. This adult acts as a mirror that allows the child to independently observe his or her actions, reflect on these observations, and then take further action. The adult plays a crucial role in the process of the child achieving independence in moments of crisis, when the child, on the one hand, seeks to demonstrate their will, despite not always having the level of skills to cope alone. The adult's task is therefore to create opportunities for independence, activate self-control in the child, indicate information needed for action (solving a task), recall what the child already knows and can do, guide actions, provide feedback, encourage reflections, etc. On the other hand, the guardian defines the framework for the child's independent action. The adult's role is also to enable the child to deal with negative emotions. We can therefore state that the keys to a child's independence always rest in the hands of adults. There are several such keys, and each is undoubtedly equally important:

1. Key one – examples from adults. The child is influenced by the attitudes that parents, guardians and teachers have towards the world and the emotions accompanying him. If an adult expects a child to keep his or her room tidy and does not keep the surroundings tidy, he or she will not instil a love of cleanliness in the child.
2. The second key – entrusting tasks: tasks adapted to the age and abilities of the child, tasks that require and teach systematicity, during the performance of which the child will feel important (the task will be associated with a certain prestige), tasks which the child enjoys performing and which are interesting (a child forced to perform will become discouraged), tasks whose effects the child will be able to see, and where the efforts made by the child will be noticed and appreciated by those closest to them.
3. Key three – supporting the child's aspirations to act independently. Those closest to the child help them develop independence when they notice and appreciate how this is manifested. A young person's pursuit of independence and demonstrating this may prove to be a difficult experience for those closest to them. Consistent support for children's aspirations makes it easier to accomplish later tasks.
4. The fourth key – cooperating with the child: children learn most effectively when they can "watch" and imitate an adult acting together with them. By cooperating with mature people (for example, cleaning, cooking, taking care of plants, taking care of pets), the child has the opportunity to observe how adults deal with lack of motivation, how they correct their actions, improve what did not work out, and, if necessary, start

over. By cooperating with the caregiver, the child experiences in practice that action does not always lead to the intended result.

5. Key five – accompanying the child. The younger the child, the more they need the presence of a partner during individual activities. The presence of an adult not only provides a sense of security: more importantly, the child can receive direct feedback during the activity. The caregiver also satisfies the need for closeness, attention, and the need for meaning. In the presence of an adult, the child can verbalize their independence (the adult becomes a mirror for the child) – “I can do it,” “I will do it this way,” “and now I will do it this way.” The absence of an adult, however, means that the child is deprived of the opportunity to “express his or her independence,” does not receive feedback, and does not receive support when he or she needs it. A child deprived of an accompanying caregiver often stops acting when an obstacle or difficulty appears, gives up further attempts, and becomes discouraged.

To sum up the issues presented here, we would like to emphasize that achieving independence is a developmental task facing both the young person and their environment. Moreover, it is a lifelong process, although in this article only to the early stages of development is referred to. The intention, however, was to draw attention to the fact that the process of developing an individual's independence begins long before the child starts their school education, because the resources with which he or she is provided in the early stages of development may be significant factors shaping his or her school independence.

Child education in a nursery

2.1. Early childhood education – introduction

Early childhood education is a topic increasingly discussed in the field of social sciences in Poland, which is probably due to the need to specify educational assumptions for young children in line with European Commission recommendations and with social dilemmas related to how child up to the age of three function in an institutional environment outside the family. The provisions of the Lisbon Strategy, established at the beginning of the 21st century, assume that the governments of EU countries should be involved in creating conditions conducive to early education (Okoń-Horodyńska, 2004). These provisions at the European level led to such legislative changes as the Act on the Care of Children up to 3 years of Age adopted in Poland in 2011, which specifies the principles for organizing and running institutional care for children of this age. This encompasses the conditions of the services provided, the qualifications of caregivers, principles of financing care and supervision, the conditions and quality of care provided (Journal of Laws of 2011, No. 45, item 235), and the functions of nurseries (the principal facilities to which parents returning to the labour market entrust their infants and post-infant-aged children), including care and the educational function.

Polish pedagogy literature offers several publications focusing on educational strategies implemented in kindergartens and schools, but it should be noted that nurseries are of least interest to Polish researchers (Telka, 2007).

Concern for the quality of interactions with the youngest children was already visible during the Polish Enlightenment. During this period, Dymitr Michał Tadeusz Krajewski wrote about the need for “early education of the mind without books” (Leżańska, 2009: 31). The postulates put forward by Krajewski, as Wiesława Leżańska points out, are all the more valuable because, despite lacking any role models of his own, he demonstrated excellent knowledge of the psyche of a small child and the issues related to upbringing, even before

the works of Jan Henryk Pestalozzi and Fryderyk Wilhelm Frobel were written. The theoretical and practical foundations of early childhood education in the nursery in Polish pedagogy still remain largely undefined, due to rather timid attempts having been made over the centuries.

Caring for a child's development in a nursery was also of interest to Polish psychologists. In the 1960s, psychologists including Maria Przetacznikowa conducted comparative research into the mental development of children aged nine months to three years who were raised either in nurseries or exclusively in families. This revealed developmental differences to the benefit of children brought up in a family environment, although the conclusions indicate that the child's place of residence is secondary to the atmosphere and conditions created for the child (Birch, 2007; Steinberg, Belsky, Meyer, 1991).

All researchers of children's development in institutional conditions believe that non-family institutions where children stay until the age of three should provide children with high-quality care, a stimulating environment, committed and caring staff, and a high staff-to-children ratio in order to ensure the child develops harmoniously (Birch, 2007: 59). In the 1970s, researchers in Poland argued that nursery institutions can create favourable conditions for development "if they are properly organized, have the necessary rooms, equipment and toys, and provide proper hygiene and health care" (Skorny, 1976: 114). Taking into account the fact that from the beginning of their life humans have a need to establish interpersonal relationships, a key role in the process of early childhood education in nurseries is played by the friendly attitude of the staff towards children and establishing contacts with them. However, regardless of the type of educational environment (institutional, family) and its structure, a child brought up in an atmosphere of understanding, with respect for his or her needs and abilities, and adequately supported in development has a chance for harmonious development.

2.2. The first nurseries in Poland

In the Polish care and upbringing tradition, a nursery was generally perceived as an institution providing care to children in infancy and post-infant age. This institution was intended to support or supplement the care for a child whose parents, due to the need to work, continue education or for other reasons, were unable to provide personal care (Kurcz, 2008: 994). At present, pursuant to the so-called Nursery Act of 2011, the nursery also has an educational function, although this function is often perceived in Poland as marginal or incorrect

(often a child's education is instrumentalized and associated with formal and intentional learning).

According to Mirosława Furmanowska (2008), "the creator of modern nurseries was the French philanthropist Firmin Marbeau, who founded the first nursery on November 14, 1844 in Saint-Pierre de Chaillot. He formulated the tasks of these institutions as follows: "To take care of a child whose mother works, to nurture him during her absence, to facilitate his upbringing, this is the most human, most intelligent and most fruitful help" (Furmanowska, 2008: 23). In Furmanowska's view, subsequent Western European countries followed the French example and began to establish similar institutions, although until the beginning of the 20th century these were founded on private initiatives of a philanthropic nature. As Lucyna Telka notes (2007), the first nurseries "served primarily to take care of the physical sphere of the child's development – to provide him with food and relative cleanliness" (Telka, 2007: 30) Citing Françoise Dolto, the French paediatrician, psychoanalyst and creator of "Green House" care institutions, Telka describes how "at the beginning of the 20th century, in one of the nurseries, children were dressed in long linen shirts so that their physiological needs could be met without any problems" (Telka, 2007: 30) The name "nursery" itself originally meant food for animals, and then a barn. Later, it became a metaphorical term for a place of care for a small child, "where activities for the care of the child focused on milk and nappies" (Telka, 2007: 30).

It can be assumed that the sources of the tradition of establishing and operating nurseries in Poland date back over 150 years. Prior to that, as Dorota Żołądź-Strzelczyk and Katarzyna Kabacińska (2011) point out, children tended to stay at home, as indicated by sources such as diaries, letters, statistical and demographic studies and iconographic messages (Żołądź-Strzelczyk, Kabacińska, 2011: 56–57). Issues related to upbringing and the role of the family in a child's life in Poland have been chronicled by such writers as Mikołaj Rej in *The Life of an Honest Man*, Andrzej Frycz Modrzewski in *On Customs*, Erazm Gliczner in *Books on Raising Children...*, Sebastian Petrycy of Pilzno in *Appendices to the Works of Aristotle* (Żołądź-Strzelczyk, Kabacińska, 2011: 54). Although children were raised at home, it was the case that in "mighty" families (in the 18th and 19th centuries until the interwar period), the youngest children were entrusted to wet nurses, who were often made nannies as the child grew, while older children were cared for by nurses or guardians (Bołdyrew, 2008: 248–249).

The history of nurseries comes from the idea of providing care for children coming from environments at risk of poverty, combatting the high infant mortality rate and providing direct care – primarily nursing – for the young chil-

dren of working women. For centuries, Poland was a country that understood childcare as the mother's exclusive responsibility, even her vocation. However, as Krzysztof Jakubiak (2015) puts it, "after centuries of home care and upbringing of small children, mainly by mothers, along with changes in social relations, the establishment of factories and later the factory industry, the prototypes of modern kindergartens appeared in Europe" (Jakubiak, 2015: 109). These prototypes initially took the form of shelters and nurseries, to which not only children in middle childhood but also early childhood were brought (due to the lack of age restrictions).

Referring to Bobrowska-Nowak's 1978 work 'The History of Preschool Education', whose source materials in this case include a reprint of a fragment of an article by M. Karczewska titled *Working Conditions of Rural Female Caregivers* (from the magazine "Polski Łan" dating from 1907, No. 25, pp. 2–4), we see clear information that children as young as 5 months old (therefore, children today called nursery-age children) stayed in orphanages (Bobrowska-Nowak, 1978).

The basis for organizing the first nurseries, as well as the first Polish kindergartens, was initially philanthropic (Stolińska-Pobralaska, 2012: 116). In 1814, in Poland, out of concern for the fate of children, the Warsaw Charitable Society was established, which "took under its wing" the poor, orphans and children from working-class (proletariat) families deprived of reliable parental care. "The idea of establishing orphanages for children was put forward at a meeting of the Society's board by Teofil Janikowski, a Warsaw merchant and well-known philanthropist. This project was accepted and in 1838 a new department of the Society for Nurseries was created" (Bobrowska-Nowak, 1978: 139).

On the one hand, orphanages were intended to "protect children from difficult living conditions and lack of home care" (Szewczuk, 2012: 173), yet they also performed educational functions: "thanks to these institutions, it will be possible to raise the lower social classes through education, which will serve society, nation and state" (Szewczuk, 2012: 173). As Stefania Walasek (2015) notes, "the number of orphanages in Warsaw grew rapidly and in 1846 there were 7 of them, caring for 436 children. Unfortunately, in subsequent years, the issue of nurseries was neglected" (Walasek, 2015: 44).

A change took place in 1858 in the lands under Russian control in the Russian Partition, when Jan Tadeusz Lubomirski, a priest, became the president of the Society. Despite the previous reports of neglecting the issue of nurseries, on December 24, 1857, the Warsaw Charitable Society opened the first nursery for children aged 6 weeks to 3 years (located on Bednarska Street), with a second nursery established a year later on Aleje Jerozolimskie (Walasek, 2015: 44).

The first stage in the development of typical nurseries, understood as institutions providing primarily care for infants and post-infant children, can be considered as covering the period from 1857 to the end of World War I. In 1857, in addition to the aforementioned first nursery in Poland, the Warsaw Charitable Society's "House for Babies" was established, after which similar facilities were opened, where children aged from 6 weeks to 2–3 years were placed. Children were provided with free care, appropriate food and care, and the primary goal of these facilities was to counteract the high mortality rate and to help working or destitute mothers. At that time, for the reasons mentioned above, as well as ideas related to children's rights to appropriate care also noticed in Polish lands, social activities were also undertaken to secure the basic needs of the youngest and shape the basic care skills of mothers. Such actions included the "Kropla mleka" childcare initiative (Bobrowska-Nowak, 1978: 153).

A significant role in the development of social care for children in the second half of the 19th century was played by the Society of Friends of Children, founded in 1880 on the initiative of doctors, hygienists, educators and social activists. Those responsible for shaping care for small children included Adam Goltz, Eryk Jachtowicza, Jan Jeleński, Walentyn Kosmowski, Aleksander Moldenhawer, Stanisław Makarewicz and Roman Wierzechlewski – co-founders of the Society for the Care of Poor Mothers and Their Children (established in 1884), as well as the Child Welfare Society (operating since 1906).

In Polish lands under Prussian control at that time, the first organization to establish orphanages and nurseries (operating since 1833) was the Society of the Ladies of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul. Another Warsaw institution the facility operating at Jachowicz's Nursery (Orphanage and Protection of Small Children) in Nowy Świat. Until 1900, the Society took care of five nurseries (Walasek, 2015: 123).

Among the initiatives for the care of infants and post-infant-age children in the Russian partition, one can also note the private nursery for ten children established by the Kronenberg family, an initiative of Maria Grabowska (which was then read about in the "Bluszcz" magazine from 1894) (Walasek, 2015: 124). Irena Moszczeńska, in "Bluszcz" (no. 14 from 1900), justified the need to create nurseries with the work of mothers whose desire to provide their children with a "bearable existence" "pushes women to activities that are inconsistent with... household duties" (Walasek, 2015: 124). Dr. Stanisław Kopczyński wrote about the beneficial role of a nursery for children's health in 1904 (in "Hygienic and Educational Sketches" published in Warsaw in 1910), describing a nursery located in Warsaw at 85 Sienna Street where he worked as a doctor (Walasek, 2015: 124).

Similar initiatives were also recorded in the areas of the Austrian partition. The problem of care for the youngest children was addressed in a circular issued on the 60th anniversary of Emperor Franz Jozef's rule, in which it was proclaimed that the state could not deal with the matter directly, but would create numerous opportunities for social actions, also in the field of schools for mothers and infant institutions. Also of note were the orphanages of the Folk School Society founded in 1891 in Cracow and organized in the Galicia, Moravia, Silesia and Bukovina regions, which admitted children from two to twelve years of age (children who were still toddlers). "An appropriate provision enabling the organization of nurseries, Froebel nurseries and primary nurseries appeared in the Society's statute adopted in 1903" (Bednarz-Libera, 2012: 157). The establishment of orphanages, as well as other institutions for children and young people, fulfilled the caring, educational and "national" function: these institutions "protected" children against denationalization (Bednarz-Libera, 2012: 164). TSL shelters were an institutional form of prevention through:

- creating an atmosphere for child-friendly development by providing appropriate housing conditions, a playground and often food;
- providing care in facilities run by 'protectors' and nuns professionally trained to stimulate the child's intellectual development;
- religious education;
- education in performing basic activities needed in everyday life;
- supporting the development of Polish children from families whose parents could not provide proper care and upbringing due to working outside the home;
- national education through contact with Polish literature and poetry, songs, and history;
- weakening the influence of the foreign environment in which the Polish child functioned, preventing its denationalization;
- defending children against Germanization or Czechization;
- preventing the denationalizing influence of orphanages run by other nationalities to which Polish children were sent due to the lack of Polish institutions;
- "impact on the development of the 'Polish element' because they were organized in areas where Poles were a national minority" (Bednarz-Libera, 2012: 168);
- concern for attendance in Polish schools, where they often operate (Bednarz-Libera, 2012).

In Poland at that time, the achievements of famous European educators and doctors were known, including Robert Owen, Jan Svoboda and Friedrich

Froebel, thus attempts were made to adapt certain elements of these authors' methods to Polish conditions.

It is worth noting that in 1852, childcare facilities (in the Austrian and Prussian Partitions) were overseen by the Ministry of Clerical Affairs, Science and Medical Affairs (under the ordinance of February 11, 1852) (Bobrowska-Nowak, 1978: 148). However, each Partition developed separate systems of care for mothers and children, although in fact "Polish society could not count on the help of the partitioning authorities" and for this reason "care and educational activities during almost 125 years of captivity became the field of work of social organizations" and constituted an important part of the overall struggle for national progress and liberation" (Balcerek, 1978: 51).

Researchers such as Bronisław Ferdynand Trentowski (author of *Chowan-na, i.e. the System of National Pedagogy as the Skill of Upbringing, Learning and Education, in Other Words, the Education of Our Youth*) containing numerous tips on stimulating the growth and upbringing of a child from birth until school readiness), and Ewaryst Estkowski (founder of the Polish Pedagogical Society established on December 6, 1848) showed interest in small children, and as part of their pedagogical activities, also formulating the basic principles for nurseries at that time (Bobrowska-Nowak, 1978: 148).

As Stefania Walasek (2015a) notes in reference to the concept of institutional care and upbringing work with children at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, "the idea of broad support – care and upbringing of the youngest in specialized institutions – had a large group of supporters in Polish society. No smaller group were opponents of institutional solutions to issues. It was believed that the appropriate educational environment for a child was the family, and above all, the mother" (Walasek, 2015a: 17).

In 1913, the Polish Association of Catholic Women also joined in working for the youngest citizens, organizing orphanages, daycare and a nursery for 40 children in Lviv (Walasek, 2015b: 116).

During World War I, in the face of devastation and in the name of "saving the young generation of Poles from extermination," Polish society expanded its welfare activities following a 1916 appeal by Władysław Szenajch (*On Saving Children*) (Balcerek, 1978: 61). At that time, associations, institutions, civic and welfare committees were established to organize various forms of childcare. At the beginning of the war, the Central Citizens' Committee was established in Warsaw, and on January 1, 1916, this transformed into the Main Welfare Council, a welfare and philanthropic institution operating throughout what was the short-lived Kingdom of Poland at that time (Balcerek, 1978: 61–62).

At the beginning of the 20th century, interest in childcare in Poland increased in many social circles (Jamrożek, 2001: 121). This was also associated with the development of biological and medical science known as pedology, or the dissemination of the idea of “new upbringing,” and the resulting interest in health care and the specific development needs of children. A need to introduce legal regulations regarding the care of small children and to go beyond the current nature of charitable and philanthropic activities was discerned. The focus was on such aspects as the problem of “motherhood protection and care for the mother and child” (Jamrożek, 2001: 124). These issues were included in the programmes of various social and political groups and also discussed during congresses and pedagogy meetings convened during the early twentieth century at the time of the Second Polish Republic.

The next stage in the evolution of nurseries was related to the further development of social care as a direction of state policy, as well as the burgeoning concept of institutional forms of childcare in the interwar period. Issues of care for mothers and young children were still dealt with by non-governmental social organizations.

“Of all welfare institutions and associations in the country, the Main Welfare Council still played the greatest role in the years 1918–1920, and at that time was the coordinator of social activities, covering two-thirds of the country’s territory” (Balcerek, 1978: 76). On December 12, 1920, the MWC was dissolved, and its tasks taken over by state authorities, local governments and other social organizations (Balcerek, 1978: 78). A new institution of care and upbringing was created in a socialist spirit as an alternative to the philanthropic activities, which part of Polish society associated with the social system, and whose patron was the bourgeois state authorities at the time (Balcerek, 1978: 83–84). Due to the division of society into antagonistically positioned social classes, the Workers’ Society of Children’s Friends was established at the Central Executive Committee in 1919 as the Workers’ Department of Child Education and Care. Initially, the WDCEC operated in what had been the Russian Partition, and later the entire country; its activities targeted working-class children (with care provided for the youngest children in closed and open care facilities, children’s homes, kindergartens, children’s clubs and other forms of care and upbringing) (Balcerek, 1978: 84).

In 1917, before the authorities of newly liberated Poland were fully formed, the Department of Child and Mother Care was established at the Ministry of Public Health, Social Welfare and Labour Protection, headed by the previously mentioned paediatrician and philosopher Władysław Szenajch (Balcerek, 1978: 98–99). As the tasks of specific ministries were

taking shape, on March 18, 1921 it was decided that childcare would fall within the scope of activities of the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare (Balcerek, 1978: 100–106).

In 1923, the Sejm also passed the Social Welfare Act, the aim of which was to assist poor and needy people or those whose difficult life situation had pushed them to the social margins (Samsel, 2013: 247).

Article 1 of this Act specified that: “Social care within the meaning of this Act is the satisfaction from public funds of the necessary life needs of people who cannot do so permanently or temporarily with their material resources or their work, as well as preventing the occurrence of the condition specified above” (Journal of Laws of 1923, No. 92, item 726).

Article 2 of the Act set out the scope of social care: care for infants, children and young people, especially orphans, half-orphans, neglected children, abandoned children and children at risk of pathology, protection of maternity, care for the elderly, invalids, cripples, terminally ill, mentally disabled and incapable of work, care for the homeless, care for prisoners after serving their sentences, combating begging, vagrancy, alcoholism and fornication, and assistance to private care institutions (Journal of Laws of 1923, No. 92, item 726).

However, this act did not introduce specific solutions related to child upbringing (Balcerek, 1978: 124–125). In 1925, due to public dissatisfaction, an attempt was made to create two bills:

- on social care for maternity, children and youth;
- about social welfare bodies (Balcerek, 1978: 124–125).

Guidelines for social care, including care for the mother and child, were outlined in the 1921 Constitution of the Republic of Poland (of March 17, 1921). In Article 103, “we read: ‘Children without sufficient parental care, neglected in terms of upbringing – have the right to care and assistance from the State’” (Samsel, 2013: 247).

“Both projects were of an implementing nature in relation to the Social Welfare Act of 1923, and the basis for their development was the English Children Act of 1908 and the Danish *Loi de 14 avril 1905 sur le traitement d’enfants et de jeunes gens criminels et moralement abandonnés*” (Balcerek, 1978: 125). The projects were prepared by the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, but differed from the projects formulated by the circles of doctors and educators gathered around Szenajch. Another draft – this time not as a bill but a presidential regulation on social care for maternity and minors – appeared after the May Coup of 1926. This project was more complete and clearly defined “who is responsible for organizing childcare and what are the tasks of municipalities and district and provincial municipal associations” (Balcerek, 1978: 129).

According to Balcerek, the projects were successively approved by the Commission for Social Welfare for Children and Youth, representing almost all ministries and institutions interested in the problem of childcare. However, they were not adopted and until 1928 “circulated” between the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare and the Ministry of Treasury. In the following years, additions to the 1923 Act appeared, but these did not directly concern issues related to maternity protection and the care of a small child. These were:

- Act of February 18, 1925, on the Social Welfare Council;
- Regulation of the President of the Republic of Poland of June 29, 1924, on the provision of social care for Polish citizens deprived of the right to permanent care and on bearing the costs related to it;
- Regulation of the President of the Republic of Poland of April 22, 1927, on supervision and control over the activities of other care institutions, which resulted in three subsequent regulations of the Minister of Labour and Social Welfare:
 - Regulation of October 10, 1927, on the qualifications of managers of care facilities,
 - Regulation of October 12, 1927, on the regulations of care facilities,
 - Regulation of November 23, 1927, on reports on the activities and accounting of care institutions.

It was also adopted:

- Regulation of the President of the Republic of Poland of October 14, 1927, on combating begging and vagrancy;
- Regulation of the President of the Republic of Poland of January 16, 1927, on the construction and maintenance of provincial care and educational institutions (Samsel, 2013: 247–248).

In light of the content of the legal acts listed above, it can be concluded that nurseries were to be established by municipalities, both in the form of closed care facilities and day nurseries as open care and security facilities. Open care facilities aimed to provide parents with assistance in taking care of their children, while the task of closed care facilities was to equip the child with resources enabling proper physical, mental, moral and religious development and preparation for future professional work (Samsel, 2013: 249).

Due to the unfavourable economic situation of many Polish families in the interwar period, women were forced to take up paid work. Therefore, the legislator found it necessary to introduce regulations regarding the participation of enterprises in benefits for employed women and their children. Thus, the institution of a “nursery” for women working in enterprises (mother-workers) was introduced under the Act of July 2, 1924 on the work of minors and women

(Balcerek, 1978: 140–141). Article 15 of the Act reads: “In plants where more than 100 women work, the entrepreneur must maintain a bathing facility and a crib for babies” (Journal of Laws of 1924, No. 65, item 636). Supervision of the organization and activities of nurseries was entrusted to the Labour Inspectorate (Balcerek, 1978: 141). Article 16 of the Act regulated the legal situation of pregnant women (Balcerek, 1978:141).

At the time of the Act’s adoption: “Of the total number of 16,182 workplaces registered by the Labor Inspectorate, 244 workplaces were subject to the statutory obligation to establish a nursery. They employed a total of 103,869 women” (Furmanowska, 2008: 24). According to M. Balcerek, although “the Act on the work of minors and women was developed reliably and was a success of progressive social thought” (Balcerek, 1978: 141), it had “many shortcomings, such as not including some provisions in the protection of maternity of female workers in medium- and small-sized enterprises” (Balcerek, 1978: 141) However, from the moment it came into force, enterprises that employed 99 women began to appear more and more often. In 1925, due to pressure from the business community, the implementation of Article 15 was postponed; it came into force again only in 1928 (Balcerek, 1978: 141–142). At that time, the activist Halina Krahelska played an important role in shaping institutions for children. Thanks to her efforts, some of the first enterprises in interwar Poland began to establish workplace nurseries as early as 1925 (by the end of 1927, such nurseries also operated in 13 tobacco factories, spirit alcohol factories and other state-owned enterprises) (Furmanowska, 2008: 24).

Based on the Act, as well as the Regulation of the Minister of Labour and Social Welfare of October 14, 1924 on the rights and obligations of women breastfeeding foreign infants (Journal of Laws of 1924, No. 94, item 876), the Minister of Labour and Social Welfare issued a regulation on March 11, 1927, related to the arrangement and maintenance of nurseries for babies in workplaces, regulating the issue of supervision over these facilities (Journal of Laws of 1927, No. 32, item 293). This regulation specifies:

- that the entrepreneur is obliged to equip and maintain a nursery if the total number of women employed in the workplace in the last calendar month – even for a few days – exceeded one hundred;
- that the nursery was opened after official confirmation by the labour inspector in consultation with the administrative authority of the first instance (district doctor);
- that the premises, equipment and staff meet specific hygiene and medical conditions;

- that the facility is to remain under constant medical supervision and care of managers – educated nurses (one for every 30 infants) (Furmanowska, 2008: 24–25).

The document also includes:

- information specifying that the nursery could be maintained by one or a team of entrepreneurs or jointly with associations established for this purpose;
- the location of the facility about the workplace (close enough for mothers to be able to breastfeed their children during breaks);
- standards for children's rooms, along with the need to provide each child with a separate bed with bedding, and the age of children who were entitled to a place in the nursery was also specified (up to 15 months of age and provided they were fed with natural food);
- appropriate procedures that were adopted related to the possible illness of children staying in the nursery while their mother is working.

Under this regulation, general supervision over nurseries was the responsibility of district doctors, labour inspectors and other officials acting on behalf of the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare (Furmanowska, 2008: 25). To ensure the organization and operation of nurseries for working mothers, it was also stated that enterprises could establish nurseries in consultation not only with other enterprises but also together with other care institutions.

The above-mentioned regulations only regulated the activities of nurseries intended for children of mother employed in larger factories, and factory nurseries were not available to children in general. However, at that time, this problem was regulated in the then autonomous Silesia region by the Silesian Act of April 20, 1926 on the creation and maintenance of nurseries for infants (Journal of Silesian Laws of 1920, No. 11).

In 1927, under the Act of 1923, Poland had 113 nurseries operated by private enterprises – fifty-nine 24-hour facilities (in the western voivodeships – 17, central – 17, southern – 16, and eastern – 9) and 54 day nurseries (in the western voivodeships – 11, central ones – 8, southern ones – 34, and eastern ones – 1) (Furmanowska, 2008: 30). In winter 1924, several dozen nurseries were established in state-owned enterprises. “The number of nurseries in the 1930s remained stable at 30–35” (Furmanowska, 2008: 30). These facilities housed from 456 children (in 1938) to 610 (in 1935) (Furmanowska, 2008: 30).

In the interwar period, alternative forms of childcare to nurseries were also sought. During the 4th International Childcare Congress in July 1922, the issue of replacing workplace nurseries with a half-yearly allowance for breastfeeding

mothers paid by the employer was discussed, and attention was also drawn to mother and childcare stations established on private initiatives called “Drop of Milk” and “Milk Kitchens,” or “Mothers’ Counselling Centres,” etc.

Poland’s first “Drop of Milk” (“Kropla mleka”) was established in Łódź in 1904, the next in Warsaw at the Lenval Institute, and a year later stations were opened in Kalisz, Lublin (Chodźko), Vilnius, and Cracow. In 1917, similar initiatives were also noted in Lviv (Furmanowska, 2008). The operations and organization of these institutions were not legally regulated, but factories were not exempt from organizing nurseries.

It was assumed that the Mother and Childcare Centre was:

- a transitional form preparing the area for establishing a nursery,
- a means of propaganda for motherhood protection,
- action in the field of hygienic and cultural prevention in the employees’ home environment” (Furmanowska, 2008: 33).

The stations were concerned with promoting the principles of feeding hygiene and sensible upbringing, as well as creating conditions conducive to development for children left at home while their mothers worked at the plant. Therefore, the stations were created as part of preventive care. The task of the station was to provide medical care to pregnant women and to constantly supervise the health and development of the child from birth to the age of two (Samsel, 2013: 250). In interwar Poland, stations functioned both as childcare for mothers employed in enterprises and as part of local government initiatives. In the case of the latter, “Organizational responsibility and financing were transferred to local governments. The station manager was doctor-assisted by a qualified nurse (health care attendant), whose task was to register patients and keep records, assist the doctor in daily activities, perform treatments and make home visits. The nurse was also a link between the doctor and the family. Support staff were welcome at the centre, as long as the commune could afford to employ them. Milk kitchens were often organized at the facility” (Samsel, 2013: 250).

Another form of factory care were flexible, mobile care stations for mothers and children, which were based on merging nurseries and nursery institutions, namely, kindergartens. A doctor and a nurse worked in such stations, and childcare focused on caring for babies in the family homes of working women, periodic examinations of children carried out on the station premises, dispensing nutritional preparations by the nurse, and providing free clothing for children up to 15 months of age (Furmanowska, 2015: 34).

The period between 1918 and 1939 was a time of keen interest in the issue of care not only for the child but also for the mother and child. Mortality was

a common phenomenon not only in newborns or infants but also in mothers. Some authors expressed the belief that care should be provided not only to the child but also to the mother because these beings are so closely connected that providing care for one is unthinkable without taking care of the other. There were even calls for maternity care, effective vocational training and enhancement of the skills of midwives, nurses and nannies so that they could relieve the burden of professionally working mothers. Wnęk points out the following: “The literature on the subject also contains statements about the need to establish nurseries, homes for mothers and children, and infant care centres” (Wnęk, 2012: 252)

In the interwar period, several activities were undertaken to prepare qualified care staff for nurseries and childcare centres, specialized vocational courses were organized, manuals for nurses working with small children were published, standards for organizing and running nurseries were developed by the needs of children, and scientific institutions were established that addressed mother- and childcare-related issues. “Courses for nurses were conducted under the auspices of the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare” (Balcerk, 1978: 142). Among the people involved in training staff for nurseries, Halina Kraheńska (also M. Leśniewska and J. Młodzińska) deserve repeated mention (Balcerk, 1978: 142). The courses for nurses were organized by institutions such as the Workers’ Society of Friends of Children.

2.3. Congresses and pedagogical conventions in the interwar period and concern for the care of mother and child

The issue of educating appropriate staff to work in nurseries was also the subject of pedagogical meetings and congresses convened until 1939. Educating qualified care staff was proposed during the 1938 Children’s Congress, although this issue had been discussed earlier, for example, during the so-called Teachers’ Sejm (National Educational Congress in Warsaw organized on April 14–17, 1919) (Jamrozek, 2015: 70).

The problem of preparing caregivers for work with young children was discussed in the second section, “in which the basis for the discussion was a paper by Maria Weryho-Radziwiłłowiczowa (then a well-known proponent of preschool education in Poland, creator of the first training centre for educators of small children)” (Jamrozek, 2015: 140–141). The creation of a two-year ‘caregiver seminar’ was proposed by M.B. Jaworska, who spoke at the 1919

Congress. It is worth noting that “the congress adopted the motions passed by the section, which demanded state care for children of preschool age, the creation of protective services separate from schools as educational institutions, state supervision over all protective services, the publishing of a magazine by the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Public Education (MWRiOP) devoted to the issues of preschool education, the creation of courses for ‘guardians’ and courses for nursery nurses” (Jamrożek, 2015: 141–142). In February 1923, the General Council of the International Union for Children’s Welfare, in response to E. Jebb’s initiative, adopted a resolution establishing the rights of children to care (the Declaration of the Rights of the Child, also known as the Geneva Declaration). During this period, the participation of Polish representatives in the process of organizing international cooperation between European countries in the field of organizing the childcare system and protecting child rights was notable.

In August 1925, under the patronage of the League of Nations, the First World Children’s Congress was held, organized by the International Union for Children (Jamrożek, 2015: 47). This congress discussed issues related to providing childcare, the main directions of activities, and the tasks of state authorities and care associations and institutions in the development of care activities and international cooperation in this field were set out (Jamrożek, 2015: 47). An important event for developing a coherent European tradition in this area was the “Child Care” Congress held in Paris in 1928, where the issues related to care for mother and child were discussed by such participants as the Polish doctor Marcei Gromski, co-editor of *Care and Child* (a magazine devoted to the protection of maternity, care for children and adolescents), who dealt with organizing Mother and Child Care Stations and nurseries (Gromski, Bartel, 1962; Gromski, 1927).

The issue of caring for a small child and its mother was the subject of the National Children’s Congress, held in Warsaw from October 2–4, 1938. “The discussion drew attention to the situation of working mothers, their overload with responsibilities and the need to create auxiliary institutions (nurseries). Appropriate, universal hygienic and medical care for motherhood and small children was postulated.” Moreover, “the creation of a special mother fund to take care of the mother and the child in the first years of its life” was also considered (Jamrożek, 2015: 125).

The development of childcare between 1929 and 1935 was hampered by Poland’s economic crisis. According to M. Balcerek (1978), “First of all, all legislative work in the field of childcare was suspended. The draft act on the development of care for maternity, children and youth was not even discussed pub-

licly” Balcerek, 1978: 213) In a circular letter from 1933, the government obliged local authorities to make “reasonable savings” in the field of childcare (Balcerek, 1978: 214–215). Consequently, by 1935, there were only 44 nurseries in Poland (Balcerek, 1978: 215).

In the years from 1936 to 1939, attempts were made to formulate an act on the care of motherhood, children and youth, which was to include care for motherhood and young children, and in which the elements of material assistance and protection of the mother’s and child’s health were to predominate, while educational matters were to concern only the upbringing of future mothers. This act was also to cover the care of minors. However, the project did not meet with the approval of local government activists (seemingly because of the country’s economic situation) (Balcerek, 1978: 277).

2.4. Polish nurseries in the era of communism

It is difficult to talk about typical care for children under three years of age during World War II. There are no sources that indicate any organizational forms addressed to mothers and children. “The Main Welfare Council, the Polish Red Cross, the Church and other organizations worked generously to save children” (Stelmaszuk, Kolankiewicz, 2004: 843) People were saved, regardless of age, by care centres being organized for lost and orphaned children, as well as by maintaining as far as possible the orphanages and institutions that had existed prior to the war, and by children being sent to foster families. Therefore, numerous self-help initiatives developed.

“After the war, in the face of enormous needs, rescue initiatives were undertaken, foster families, care, medical and educational facilities for huge ‘numbers of children and youth’ were established” (Stelmaszuk, Kolankiewicz, 2004: 844) Initially, attempts were made to create structures based on the principles of pre-war structures, but local governments were soon abolished, and care tasks were taken over by the state. In the 1950s, organizations involved in organizing care were dissolved (including the Society of Friends of Street Children and the Polish Institute of Social Services founded by Helena Radlińska). The care system was centralized, and the main tasks included “improving the lives of orphaned children, but above all, educating them to become future builders of socialism” (Stelmaszuk, Kolankiewicz, 2004: 844) In the system created in this way, care for children up to three years of age, along with care for the sick and disabled, was the remit of the Ministry of Health. Care of older children was the responsibility of the Ministry of Education.

As a result of changes that took place after 1945, the nurseries were gradually handed over to the Ministry of Health. On March 17, 1950, under the Order of the Minister of Health regarding the inclusion of certain mother and baby homes, young children's homes and nurseries as social healthcare institutions, some nurseries began to function as healthcare facilities (Polish Monitor, No. A 33, item 376, 377, p. 228); these were nurseries financed by foundations, congregations, unions and religious associations (specific facilities are listed in Annex 377).

"The Minister of Health also planned to create a network of nurseries, but did so in consultation with the Minister of Labour and Social Welfare (Act of February 4, 1950, on transferring to the Minister of Health the scope of activities of the Minister of Labour and Social Welfare in the field of social care for children up to three years of age and for women pregnant and breastfeeding women)" (Stolińska-Pobralaska, 2012: 117–118)

In the Official Journal of the Minister of Health No. 23 of December 30, 1957, an instruction was issued which constituted the basic normative document specifying the structure of the nursery, its organization and fundamental tasks (Stolińska-Pobralaska, 2012: 117–118). The concept of running schools that would educate staff qualified to care for the youngest also emerged, and the first one-year schools educating caregivers were established. The instructions from 1957 defined nurseries as healthcare facilities which were to provide "medical, nursing and educational care" to children (Kurcz, 2008: 1001).

In the post-war period of the Polish People's Republic, "The role of a woman, primarily as a mother, was often emphasized, but in a different patriarchal form than before the war. The years immediately following the war saw the idea of neomatriarchy often used. The "new woman" had a reproductive duty, especially in view of wartime losses and in the name of "population security"; and mothers with many children were honoured by Poland's communist leader Bolesław Bierut himself, who presented them with special orders" (Polakowski, 2015: 14–15). Thus, in the 1940s and 1950s, "two pillars of social policy aimed at increasing women's professional activity were strengthened: leave and maternity benefits, and care services. The length of maternity leave was initially set at 12 weeks, with the amount of benefit due for the leave period set at 100% of the woman's salary" (Polakowski, 2015: 14–15). Working mothers could benefit from the system of family benefits from 1948, and from 1954 also from care leave (e.g. in the case of a child's illness). Workplaces employing women who had a combined number of ten children were obliged to establish factory nurseries.

Danuta Graniewska points out that "the process of industrialization of the country during the 6-year plan had a strong impact on the further de-

velopment of nurseries and kindergartens. This development was also influenced by economic factors, expressed in the increased demand for the female labour force. It was assumed that the development of nurseries and kindergartens stimulates the professional activation of women. Ideological and political factors also played an important role. These institutions were also supposed to constitute means ensuring the implementation of constitutional demands for equal rights for women in the socio-economic life of the country” (Graniewska, 2009: 57).

In the 1950s, the number of nurseries grew dynamically – from 543 in 1950 to 947 in 1956, although in the entire country, only 11% of children of working mothers had access to this type of institution (i.e. no more than 5% of all children of nursery age) (Graniewska, 2009: 57).

Before 1989, the task of organizing and running nurseries and kindergartens was carried out by public administration, and financing these institutions came under the state budget. A significant proportion of these institutions belonged to state workplaces, although nurseries could also be established within social and religious organizations (Lange, 2011: 63).

Until the early 1970s, two types of nurseries could be distinguished: “city, district and company nurseries with one, two and three shifts open on average 10 to 14 hours a day” and weekly nurseries, where children of mothers working in multi-shift systems, living far from the workplace, studying in the evenings or studying, and women in a difficult social and financial situation (mainly single mothers) stayed throughout the week (except Sundays and public holidays)” (Kurcz, 2008: 1001). Due to their poor mother-child contact, these weekly nurseries had a bad reputation, which also affects the perception of Polish nurseries nowadays.

Additionally, in the 1950s and 1960s, seasonal nurseries were organized (e.g. in the countryside during fieldwork) and specialized nurseries (for sick children or those growing up in families affected by the disease) (Kurcz, 2008: 1001).

Nursery rooms from that period resembled hospital rooms more than modern living rooms. The children were fed, changed and had enough sleep, but whether they were properly stimulated, rocked and emotionally safe is difficult to establish, since these facilities were mostly staffed by medical professionals, not educators. It was only in the late 1970s and 1980s that nurseries began to be equipped with toys, furniture for children, and aids supporting children’s development.

In 1980, there were approximately 1,500 nurseries in Poland offering 103,500 places. By 1989, the number of institutions had increased by another

100, and although the number of places was expanded, there was no increase in the number of children were observed attending nurseries during this period (Lange, 2011: 63).

2.5. Dilemmas of Polish nurseries in the period of political transformation

Until 1991, nurseries and kindergartens developed and operated on principles derived from earlier periods. However, “under the influence of changing social and economic conditions since 1989 in terms of the potential of services, there were significant changes, and in some years – especially in the case of nurseries – a significant regression. Generally speaking, it was associated with socio-economic and political changes, often referred to as “building the market economy” (Graniewska, 2009: 57). According to the Central Statistical Office data provided by Graniewska, in 1989, for every 1,000 children up to 3 years old, there were only 44 in nurseries. The reduction in nurseries became significant in the subsequent years, “and the opinions expressed in decision-making circles regarding its temporary nature and the connection with women’s unemployment were not confirmed” (Graniewska, 2009: 57).

During the transformation period, nursery facilities (which were to be financed by local and self-government authorities under the Act of March 8, 1990 on local government) (Journal of Laws of 1990, No. 16, item 95, chapter 2, article 7, points 5, 6, 8) were criticized and perceived as “costly and a remnant of the period of building socialism” (Kurcz, 2008: 1001) However, the increased costs of maintaining these facilities stemmed not from rising employee salaries or higher care standards, but economic changes in Poland – the liberalization of rents, adjustment of operating prices to global conditions (Balcerzak-Paradowska, 1994: 10–13). Municipalities, whose task was to finance the facilities, marginalized the role and importance of nurseries. There were also no uniform standards in the care of children under three years of age. Care for such children could be organized in the form of nurseries operating as public and non-public health care facilities based on the Act of August 30, 1991 on health care facilities (Journal of Laws of 2007, No. 14, item 89, as amended), or conducted in the form of a business activity under the provisions of the Act of July 4, 2004 on freedom of economic activity (Journal of Laws of 2013, item 672, as amended). Care for small children was also provided by nannies acting as a registered business or, far more commonly, practising their profession without formal registration.

The situation described above led to a discrepancy between nurseries that had the status of healthcare facilities and were thus subject to high requirements and facilities of private entrepreneurs. As a result of economic changes, the availability of places in institutions for children up to three years of age decreased significantly, therefore there is no accurate data on the number of non-public nurseries established in the period 1989–1995. Company nurseries also gradually closed due to restructuring, financial difficulties and changing ownership of workplaces, resulting in the company's social and living activities being limited (Balcerzak-Paradowska, 1994: 10–11).

The regulations governing the status of nurseries, requirements regarding principles, competences and tasks of staff, as well as the method of appointing a nursery manager were specified in the Act of August 30, 1991 on health care facilities, together with its implementing regulations – the Regulation of the Minister of Health and Social Welfare of March 29, 1999 on the qualifications required of employees in particular types of positions in public health care facilities (Journal of Laws of 1999, No. 30, item 300), Regulation of the Minister of Health and Social Welfare of June 8, 1999 on the principles of remuneration of employees public health care facilities (Journal of Laws of 1999, No. 52, item 543), Regulation of the Minister of Health of May 17, 2000 on the requirements to be met by persons holding managerial positions in specific types of health care facilities (Journal of Laws of 2000, No. 44, item 520), the Regulation of the Minister of Health of July 16, 2004 on the system of departmental identification codes for health care facilities and detailed rules for assigning them (Journal of Laws of 2004, No. 170, item 1797), and the Regulation of the Minister of Health of November 10, 2006 on the requirements to be met in terms of professional and sanitary conditions by the rooms and equipment of a health care facility (Journal of Laws of 2006, No. 213, item 1568).

In connection with the Act of 1991, the Minister responsible for health matters, after consulting the Supreme Medical Council, the Supreme Council of Nurses and Midwives, the National Council of Laboratory Diagnostics and the Supreme Pharmacy Council, by way of a regulation (annex to Act No. 5 – Journal of Laws No. 170, item 1797) specified that the nursery should have children's rooms, playrooms and separate bedrooms, and that the minimum area for each child was to be 3m² (Stolińska-Pobralaska, 2012: 117–118). The nursery should be equipped with separate rooms for particular age groups (this recommendation particularly concerned infant age children), and next to the room for the youngest, there should be a place to relax on the veranda or terrace (Regulation of the Minister of Health of November 10, 2006, on

the professional and sanitary requirements to be met by the premises and equipment of a health care facility, as registered in the Journal of Laws of 2006, No. 213, item 1568). Nurseries were also to be equipped with a place for prams, sanitary facilities (toilets, washbasins, at least one shower, a place for cleaning out potties), and, if possible, an area adjacent to the facility which was “closed” to outsiders but located outdoors and equipped with a playground (Regulation of the Minister of Health of November 10, 2006 on the professional and sanitary requirements to be met by the rooms and equipment of a health care facility (Journal of Laws of 2006, No. 213, item 1568)). “According to the Central Statistical Office data, in 2006, 23 (2.3%) children out of 1,000 children under 3 years of age were in nurseries. This low rate also occurred in 1995” (Graniewska, 2009: 57).

Despite the actions taken by the ministry, the downward trend in organizing nurseries continued until 2011 (Piętka-Kosińska, Ruzik-Sierdzińska, 2010). In 2009, Poland had a mere 380 nurseries, of which 361 were public ones established by local government (Lange, 2011: 69). Due to the above and also the tendency of the European Union to emphasize the importance of early education in child development and women’s right to professional activity, in 2010 (on March 30), the Council of Ministers adopted a project whose principles focused particularly on children’s access to early education. The aim of the Polish authorities was primarily to activate women on the labour market, improve the quality of services provided by facilities for children up to three years of age, and reduce administrative barriers in the process of establishing new nurseries (Stolińska-Pobralaska, 2012: 118).

When writing about nurseries in the transformation period, it is impossible not to refer to the analysis made by Bożena Balcerzak-Paradowska in the journal “Polityka Społeczna” (21st year, no. 10, October 1994) (Balcerzak-Paradowska, 1994: 10–13). In it she emphasizes that “the development of needs in the field of various forms of care and upbringing of children was determined by the high professional activity of women with children” (Balcerzak-Paradowska, 1994: 10), so it was one of the problems of social policy undertaken during the transformation period. However, there seems to have been a greater focus on the forms of care and education for children over three years of age, despite a downward trend in this area as well. During the transformation period, Poland received expert assessments from the Brussels Commission of the European Community or the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe working to improve activities conducive to the full development of the family (Article 16 of the European Social Charter) (Balce-

rzak-Paradowska, 1994). It was postulated that in view of the fact that developing facilities is important in the process of equalizing opportunities in the broad sense of this concept, increasing women's opportunities on the labour market, determining the financial conditions of the family and affecting the child's development, access to various forms of childcare should be universal. Despite these demands, however, establishing care facilities for children up to three years of age (as well as kindergartens) was not a priority in the changing Polish reality. The trend was quite the opposite: more and more facilities closed down. The downward trend was also explained by the unemployment of women who, allegedly due to their inability to return to the labour market, stayed at home with their children. This opinion, as Graniewska (2009: 55–57) points out, was not entirely true.

In the period from 1989 until 1994, facilities for children over three years of age tended to develop in Europe. However, public institutions for children up to three years of age in Poland provided care to only 4% of children (Graniewska, 2009: 55–57). Balcerzak-Paradowska reports that the situation in Denmark, Belgium and France was in marked contrast to Poland: in Denmark, almost 50% of children under the age of three, and in Belgium and France 20% attended public institutions. In the former Eastern bloc countries, 8%–35% were provided with nursery care (in each country a much larger percentage of children attended kindergartens). During the transformation period, nursery services were mostly used by families who, for financial or professional reasons, were unable to provide care for their children at home (Balcerzak-Paradowska, 1994).

From 1989 to 1993, a clear downward trend was seen in the maintenance of care and education facilities for the youngest children: in 1989, there were 1,553 nurseries in Poland (including 315 company-based ones), and a year later 1,412 (including 236 company-based ones). In 1991, there were 1,033 nurseries (including a mere 53 company-based ones), in 1992 the number of facilities did not exceed 818 (including only 14 company-based ones), while 1993 was the year of 694 nurseries, none of which was a workplace-based (Balcerzak-Paradowska, 1994: 11). The fact that care facilities for children up to three years old were closed was also influenced by the demographic situation: a clear decline was observed in the number of births and problems related to the commercialization of the facilities (the parent as a client had to participate to a significant degree in financing the tasks carried out by the facility), which was one of the ways in which municipalities obtain funds to finance childcare-related tasks.

2.6. Nurseries after Poland's accession to the European Union

It was only in 2004, with Poland's accession to the European Union, that the process of adapting the standards of care and education to European standards began. An example of such activities may be the document titled the National Action Plan for Social Integration for 2004–2006 for Poland, adopted by the Council of Ministers on September 21, 2004 (Balcerzak-Paradowska, 2007: 27–28). This document assumed an increase in children's participation in preschool education, but also the development of "care systems, in particular, day care institutions for children ... which should contribute to supporting the economic activity of women" (Balcerzak-Paradowska, 2007: 28). In the field of establishing nurseries, a large role was assigned to non-governmental organizations in accordance with the Act on public benefit activities and volunteering adopted on April 24, 2003 (Journal of Laws of 2003, No. 96, item 873), under which public benefit activities by non-governmental organizations enabled public administration bodies to use this activity to perform public tasks.

In the "Głos Nauczycielski" journal dated December 6, 2006 there is an article by Ewa Miłoszewska, who starts by noting that "nurseries are a poorly explored area in Poland. If they are talked about, it is either bad or not at all" (Miłoszewska, 2006: 8). The author asks about what nurseries are really like, and notes that "many parents retain a negative image of a nursery from their childhood. They associate it mainly with a mixture of the smell of chlorine and milk because in the past the "furniture" in institutions was a bactericidal lamp that emitted an unpleasant odour" (Miłoszewska, 2006: 8). Miłoszewska's article includes a paragraph about the image of a lady in a white apron waiting on the threshold with a thermometer in her hand, dating back to the times of the communist Polish People's Republic, an image featuring sad, grey colours and weeping children. The author also notes that even among psychologists, opinions regarding nursery care are divided. An important aspect that Miłoszewska highlights is the change in the image of nurseries in the 1990s (from the moment when these facilities "were transferred from the care of health care institutions to City Hall" (Miłoszewska, 2006: 8). Miłoszewska is convinced that for nurseries to be perceived as a place for educating young children, they should function in the education system (Miłoszewska, 2006). Postulates regarding the development of care facilities can also be seen in the National Action Plan for Children for 2004–2012, the National Development Plan for 2007–2013, and the National Programme Social Security and Social Integration for 2006–2008, in which one of the goals were "to make it easier for employees to reconcile

work with parental responsibilities” (Balcerzak-Paradowska, 2007: 28) According to Balcerzak-Paradowska (2007), while these programmes do contain postulates and goals, it is difficult to see proposals for specific solutions. Such solutions were included in the Family Policy Programme of Jarosław Kaczyński’s government of 2007, but these were largely concerned with forms of preschool education (Balcerzak-Paradowska, 2007: 28–29).

In the issue of “Głos Nauczycielski” journal dated December 12, 2007, we read that care institutions for children up to the age of three are to “go beyond” health care facilities, and even that “the new government team goes even further – it seeks to change the status of nurseries to educational institutions” (Miłoszewska, 2006: 6). Although nurseries evolved beyond health care facilities, they were placed under the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, despite many educators believing that the optimal model of early education would include nurseries within the competences of the Ministry of National Education. This would make it possible to develop solutions typical of the system of integrated education for young children (i.e. a unitary model that is optimal for children’s development). Miłoszewska (2006) also provides alarming data: there are 371 nurseries in Poland (four times fewer than in 1989), including several private ones (GUS data for 2005). This lack of places in nurseries is primarily a problem in large cities.

One of the initiatives to restore the institution of the nursery and adapt it to the standards already in force in Europe was the implementation of a project aimed at making access to care services in Białystok more flexible. In 2006, all Białystok’s municipal kindergartens and local government nurseries took part in the “Flexible Worker – Family in Partnership” project financed by the ESF under the EQUAL Community Initiative (Truskolaski, 2008: 100–101). The aim of the project, however, was not to raise the standards of early childhood education but to “develop a comprehensive model of activities conducive to reconciling work and family life and reintegrating women and men who had previously left the labour market” (Truskolaski, 2008: 100–101).

Another project in which Białystok nurseries were involved was the “Family Friendly Child Care Facility” project (also under the EQUAL Community Initiative) (Wieczorek-Łada, 2008: 100–101). This project, although also related to the concept of “Flexible Worker – Family in Partnership,” focused much more on raising the standards of early childhood education. “Educational activities were carried out in nurseries, addressed to both children, parents and staff” (Wieczorek-Łada, 2008: 119). The facilities implemented the “Programme for Supporting the Development of Children Aged Six Months to Three Years” formulated by Teresa Walaszek (2006).

This programme sought to draw attention to the fact that early education “takes place through play (spontaneous and guided), engaging the physical, emotional and mental spheres of children and enabling them to establish contact with the environment” (Wieczorek-Łada, 2008: 119). It was rightly assumed that conducting programme-based educational work with a small child is difficult due to the predominance of individual, internal determinants over external ones, hence it was concluded that activities should be implemented to allow children to learn about the world through activity. The analysis of research results shows that Białystok city nurseries prefer the work of educators, and they also make efforts to ensure high standards of early education adapted to the actual developmental needs of children and the requirements set by parents (Wieczorek-Łada, 2008: 119–121). We also read about the projects of Białystok care facilities for children up to the age of three in the “Wychowanie w Przedszkolu” article on the Flexible Employee – Partner Family project. Białystok kindergartens and nurseries adapted to the needs of parents (Łącka-Bakun, 2007: 52–53). Innovative projects, although assuming slightly different goals, were also implemented in Warsaw (where nurseries were changed as a result of the activities of Bożena Przybyszewska, director of the Nursery Complex of the Capital City of Warsaw) and other large cities (including Łódź, where the concept “development associations” was implemented).

The inclusion of institutions for children up to three years of age in the education system and a more effective form of early childhood education were also proposed by Irena Dzierzgowska in the publication *The Future Begins in 2008*, published in the “Dyrektor Szkoły (School Principal)” journal from 2008 (Dzierzgowska, 2008: 3–6).

Despite these efforts and the implementation of new solutions, in 2008 care services in Poland's institutions for children up to three years of age were still provided to a limited extent, with only 2% of children of this age receiving institutional care and education (Przybyszewska, 2008: 118–119). A vicious circle also seems to have existed that in terms of demand for care services for the under-threes. Initially, after 1989, the fertility rate decreased significantly, but publications on care services published in later years (after 2005) reveal that the low availability of services led to a further decline in births (Szelewa, 2011; Szymańczak, 2008). “Since the mid-1990s, despite the growing number of women at the age of peak fertility ... the number of children of nursery and preschool age has been systematically decreasing – from nearly 1.7 million children aged 0–2 and 2.6 million aged 3–6 years in 1990 to the level of 1.2 and 1.4 million, respectively, i.e. by 30% in the youngest group and as much as 45%

in the older group” (Lange, 2011: 61–62). In Milena Lange’s 2009 publication on changes in reproductive behaviour in Poland in relation to demand for care services, we read that Poland is among those countries with the lowest fertility rate (Lange, 2011: 59–60). The effect of the push for changes in supporting the development of children in an institutional environment was the Act on the Care of Children under 3 years of Age of February 4, 2011 (Act on the Care of Children under 3 years of February 4, 2011, Journal of Laws of 2011, No. 45, item 235). Nurseries ceased to be part of health care facilities, and they once again came under the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy (today the Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy). The second article of the Act states that “the following functions are performed within the scope of care: caring, upbringing and education,” therefore, when considering how a child functions in a nursery, one should focus on the importance of early education, and on understanding the nursery not in terms of a “storage room” for the youngest, but as the first educational stage.

Article Ten of the Act specifies the tasks of the nursery, such as providing care for the child in living conditions similar to those at home, guaranteeing the child proper nursing and educational care by conducting play activities with elements of education, taking into account the individual needs of the child, conducting care, upbringing and educational activities, and account for the child’s psychomotor development, appropriate to the child’s age.

Modern nurseries are not supposed to be “storage rooms” closed to the public, where a child is changed, fed and put in a playpen or bed in a routine, almost ‘conveyor belt’ manner. In a modern nursery, a child should participate in creating conditions for development. Although nurseries are associated mainly with care, it is important to emphasize that each child should be provided with educational functions, as specified in the Act.

Under the Nursery Act, nursery caregiving staff has become more diversified since 2011. In nurseries, in addition to midwives and nurses, educators are increasingly employed – graduates of teaching studies or care and educational pedagogy, as well as other pedagogical specialities. The Ministry also assumes the possibility of employing people not involved in care or nursing but obliges the potential employee to complete 280 hours of training in the care and education of children up to three years of age.

The Act also allows for alternative forms of care for children under three years of age. These are:

- children’s clubs (for children from one to four years old), where their parents can come with their children, and volunteers can take part in the care activities;

- day caregivers, who take care of children from six months to four years of age in their own home and, if the parents so wish, with their participation or that of volunteers;
- nannies taking care of children in their places of residence (Rościszewska-Woźniak, 2011).

The public debate on the 2011 Act became a gateway to the creation of commercial places in care facilities for children under three years of age, on the one hand, and “removed” the burden of establishing nurseries from public authorities, on the other. Published comments on the Act include those in “Głos Nauczycielski” in the text *Nurseries Have Been Signed and Can Be Opened* (Kaszulanis, 2011: 1–3), or in the article *First Step in the Clouds* (Rzekanowski, 2011: 4), in which the author points out that the main merit of the act is that “we started discussing nurseries again, that they are needed, and probably thanks to this and the provisions of the Act, some new nurseries will be created in Poland” (Rzekanowski, 2011: 4). Rzekanowski (2011) also expresses the belief that the early education system (to which nurseries can easily be included) should be public, widely available and financed from the state budget.

Beata Krajewska, in discussing the assumptions of the 2011 Act in her publication entitled *New System of Care for Children up to Three Years of Age*, also mentions the government programme “Maluch,” the implementation of which was intended to help local governments create childcare institutions (Krajewska 2011: 19–24).

Magdalena Chrzan-Dętkoś, in the article *Maluch nie za maty* published in the journal “Charaktery” (2011), raises the issues of risks and benefits related to entrusting a child to out-of-home care. She notes the difficulty in formulating uniform conclusions on whether nurseries have a beneficial or harmful effect on development. She believes that this is difficult because the group of children under institutional care is not homogeneous. Children spend a different number of hours in nurseries, care centres differ from each other, and also the children examined so far came from diverse socio-economic backgrounds. However, Chrzan-Dętkoś (2011) also points out that although all children attending high-standard nurseries develop faster cognitive skills, the nursery is particularly useful for children from poorer families. Thanks to nurseries, these children have a chance to make up for certain deficits resulting from poverty: “They develop their intelligence better and gain greater linguistic competencies” (Chrzan-Dętkoś, 2011) The author also points out that the children examined up to that point differed in temperament and, as previous research findings indicate, those children whom the author calls ‘children with difficult characters’ usually experience greater adaptation problems. However, what is

most important in this approach is the author's assertion that the high standards of a nursery are determined primarily by education and the number of caregivers per child. According to psychologists, it would be optimal for one person to take care of four children. However, the author rightly notes that the 2011 Act does not meet this standard (Chrzan-Dętkoś, 2011).

2.7. Education of a child in a nursery – theoretical premises

The model of early childhood education in the Scandinavian countries and Italy, which can be assumed to be a model derived from humanistic pedagogy, combines education based on the concept of developing the whole person with solutions that encourage learning while initiating classes independently, spontaneous exploration and play. The basis for organizing educational work is to direct children towards interaction and cooperation, and symbolic or pretend play is considered as important as cultural learning. The role of adults is to prepare the room space and select toys, and to engage in children's activities in a way that encourages them to learn cognitively and culturally. The essence is care combined with an informal system based on play. Such systems are characterized by "a balance of child-initiated and educator-initiated activities" (Monti, Farne, Crudeli, Agostini, Minelli, Cecilian, 2017: 2). The American paediatrician Bettye Caldwell also fits into the trend of child education understood in this way, as she noticed that most day care centres look at their function from the point of view of the mother's benefits – freeing her from caring for the child while at work (Gordon-Klein, 1992: 218). Caldwell's goal was to draw attention to education integrated with care and building relationships between adults and children while stimulating the child's development.

In the second model operating in Europe, inspiration is drawn from educational theories based on the transfer of knowledge and skills by the teacher. "The emphasis is on language and academic skills, which are included in the primary school curriculum. Teaching methods are based on direct teaching, teacher-directed activities and reinforcement; the basis of the process is a systematic and planned curriculum" (Eurydice. Early childhood education and care in Europe: reducing social and cultural inequalities, Educational, Cultural and Audiovisual Executive Agency (EACEA), Warsaw 2009: 138). In the second system, the predominant form is education perceived more formally, initiated by the teacher and existing separately from care. This model seems to currently function in many Polish nurseries.

An approach focused on “educational” care (*educare*) is a more effective way of educating a young child than directive and formal teaching because neurobiological research confirms that when we are dealing with early childhood education, the essence of which academic competence, it may result in negative effects on the child’s further development.

The play-and-care approach seeks to balance child-initiated and teacher-initiated activities and combines social-emotional development goals with intellectual goals. This gives priority to experiential learning rather than goal-oriented learning (Hayes, 2007: 10–14). We are dealing here with a belief in the caring nature of education and the educational essence of care. “*Educare*” understood in this way offers a developmentally very beneficial integration of education and care; stimulation and education; work and play combined with care for harmonious development.

A nursery in Poland currently appears chiefly as a place where a child is sent so that the parent can start working. The very fact that this institution comes under the Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy allows us to conclude that nurseries are intended to help adults in their professional activity: the child remains in the background. However, the child should be the most important entity in the process of organizing early education, care and upbringing in a nursery. Waldemar Segiet (2011: 66) comments on the problem reported thus: “The offer of non-family care for children under three years of age meets the needs of working mothers ... It is worth it for parents to use the institution, primarily with the developing child in mind” (Segiet, 2011: 66). In the process of educating a young child and getting to know both themselves and the world, the educational environment plays a key role: parents and guardians constantly observe the child’s development, enable the child to experience, create new cognitive situations, cooperate with the child, and stimulate him to action. As Joanna Wieczorek-Łada points out when writing about the premises of education in a nursery, sociology and social psychology distinguish two basic environments that influence a person, namely, the family, which is a natural educational environment, and educational environments outside the family, e.g. institutions such as educational institutions and care facilities (Wieczorek-Łada, 2007). In the case of a child under the age of three, this also includes a nursery, and although until 2011 this fulfilled mainly care functions, the author emphasizes that it also fulfilled educational functions, but these were neither articulated nor given the primary role.

Before 2011, the nursery was subordinated to the Ministry of Health and fulfilled three functions understood as family support. The first was social compensation, the second was educational prevention, which also enriched parents’

knowledge about the conditions of child development or creating appropriate conditions for the child's optimal development, the third function was rescue, allowing for the immediate elimination of the effects of a sudden misfortune (Izdebska, 2000: 106–108). Education in the nursery took place during the implementation of the second of the above-mentioned functions, both for children and parents. As J. Wieczorek-Łada (2007: 175) writes, children in a nursery until the sixth month acquire knowledge by achieving goals resulting from their activity in a group of peers under the supervision of supportive caregivers. Activity is reinforced and learning occurs through gaining experiences during activity. A child is not taught: he or she learns about the world.

Therefore, early childhood education cannot be defined in terms of teaching, as people responsible for implementing education in nurseries often believe. When we talk about educating a child under three years of age, we are talking about stimulating the child's development through the gradual transformation of the physical and mental spheres, with the aim being to achieve maturity appropriate for a given developmental period. In the course of nursery education, there is no assumption of specific learning outcomes, but we do assume a variety of individual reactions to those in the institution's care (Walaszek, 2006: 10).

A caregiver in a nursery or children's club, regardless of the profile of qualifications obtained, becomes a very important person for the child and parents: this caregiver's attitude towards professional duties will shape the child's development. A nursery caregiver, as the first teacher outside the family environment, has the opportunity to guide another person "here and now" towards the future. However, this future should be approached slowly, step by step, and all anticipatory actions must be within the child's zone of proximal development. This should take place on the way from the zone of the current to the zone of proximal development.

The zone of proximal development is "the space between what a child can do on his own" (Mikler-Chwastek, 2013: 20–21) and what he could do with the help of an adult. As Mikler-Chwastek (2013: 21) points out, unfortunately, there are no tools that can easily diagnose the zone of proximal development. Its upper limit can only be determined by careful observation of the child's actions. The key issue is adapting the learning process to the zone of proximal development. If we provide experience to build patterns that the child has already mastered, we will not be able to intensify his or her development. However, when experiences are above the upper part of the zone of proximal development, we will trigger an avalanche of defence mechanisms and avoidance reactions.

Such assumptions fit into the active learning trend in Jerome Bruner's cognitive and developmental concepts. Discovery "consists of rearranging or transforming data in a way that allows you to go beyond the rearranged data and gain further new insight into the problem: Ah, so that's it; Now I understand what I'm doing; I see. An important feature of discovery learning is that the child, in an active learning process, organizes the material to be learned into its final form" (Filipiak, 2011: 85). The child is therefore an active participant in the educational process and has the opportunity to take responsibility for acting and learning. As a result of such organization of early childhood education, the child will have the opportunity to gradually develop more complex thinking and focus on internal, rather than external, motivation.

The successful development of a child, according to Polish psychologists and educators (Brzezińska, 2015), depends not only on the child's resources but also on the resources of the environment in which the child lives. This applies to both the physical environment, which determines the material conditions of action, and the social environment, which influences who and what interactions the child will interact with:

- acquiring perfection (proficiency) in the skills already possessed – Erik H. Erikson defines this process as a "tendency to master" (leeway of mastery);
- expanding and modifying your knowledge and skills;
- using the acquired knowledge and skills in solving new tasks (the problem of transfer of knowledge and skills);
- acquiring new knowledge and master new skills by currently implemented development tasks, biologically and culturally assigned to a given stage of life and education, i.e. by the biological clock and the cultural and social clock;
- acquiring such knowledge and master the basics or beginnings of such skills to smoothly move to the next stage of development/education, i.e. be ready to take on new development and educational tasks and the related challenges (Brzezińska, 2015: 135–136).

Accordingly, the guardian/ carer should have tools enabling them to recognize the child's resources in terms of current competencies and capabilities, and to identify the resources of the physical environment in which the child, family, and group in the nursery function. The caregiver should also be able to recognize the resources of the child's social environment. However, the crucial aspect, according to Brzezińska, is to recognize "who in the child's immediate environment plays or can play the role of a significant person" (Brzezińska, 2015: 136). The person "accompanying" the child in development is therefore perceived as a me-

diator in the relationships between the child, social environment and physical environment. “The quality of the child’s interaction with this person or persons largely determines the extent to which his or her resources will be developed thanks to the resources of the environment; as a result, how ready the child will be to successfully cross subsequent educational thresholds and make further transitions in the development process” (Brzezińska, 2015: 136).

When constructing the assumptions of early childhood education, one should also take into account the different pace at which subsequent developmental competencies are achieved by different children. The disproportions may be related to the number of experiences the child has accumulated, the parenting model preferred by parents, but also to the child’s age (children born in January are older than their peers born in December). “There will also be children whose development is accelerated and will achieve much better results than their peers” (Mikler-Chwastek, 2012: 58).

The achievements of Emmi Pikler, who involved parents in working with children up to three years of age, may also act as inspiration for the Polish system of care for children of this age in the search for an optimal model. Unfortunately, her achievements are still only an inspiration for nurseries in Łódź. This author of the “non-interfering” upbringing model, spontaneous, allowing children for unlimited psychomotor activity, notes that:

- each child is a developmental individual, and has their rhythm of the day, which determines a different way of meeting their needs – the child does not need direct development guidance, but the creation of conditions and appropriate safe space to make each independent step in development; it is not important when a child masters a specific skill, but how they master it;
- mutual relationships between a child and an adult are forged during joint care and play activities; close contact with a permanent team of people caring for children is a basic condition for meeting children’s needs (Sadowska, 2020).

In this concept, “observation of the child is an important element of the caregiver’s daily contact with them. Observation is careful, continuous, focused on the child, especially when care is performed (care is the moment when there is an intimate relationship between the child and the caregiver, in which the child’s non-verbal messages are more accessible to them than speech, which they have not yet mastered)” (Telka, 2007: 56). Moreover, “the adult, through meticulous observation, listening and careful touch, receives the signals sent by the child and thus learns to understand and respond appropriately to the child’s needs, always in a non-directive way, but also in a way that does not show the

child emotional states that the caregiver cannot reveal it without harming their ward's strength" (Telka, 2007: 56).

An observation in Emmi Pikler's concept "also concerns the caregiver herself and her emotional states towards the child, as there may be situations when the child wants to be with an adult, but also when they rejects the adult" (Telka, 2007: 57). An important aspect is also conducting a "dialogue" with the person under care, i.e. words. "This serves to explain to the child the actions that are being taken towards him because they concern him. These words are used to formulate prohibitions and rules in the case of a child's aggressive behaviour towards peers, to talk to them, e.g. while washing" (Telka, 2007: 57).

Therefore, the essence is to accompany the child in their development and create a social and physical space in which the child will function effectively. The caregiver should gradually modify elements of the environment to respond appropriately to the child's growing competencies and needs. According to Polish experts, a child is considered competent in building relationships with an adult. An adult can support a child in the process of feeling the pleasure of being active. This is important because, as scholars such as Rebeca Wild (2000) see it, the child implements its development programme, which is fulfilled through cooperation with the environment. Therefore, when talking about supporting a child's development, they should be perceived as a fully social being, co-creating the process of their development.

Early childhood education, or early childhood education in psychology, is referred to as development support. A comprehensive approach to the methods, scope and most important principles of early education can be found in the approaches developed by a team of experts with the participation of Anna Brzezińska (Brzezińska, Czub, 2012; Kram, Mielcarek, 2014).

Following Brzezińska, to create a definition of early childhood education (for a child up to three years of age), it is assumed that "early education involves supporting a child's development by creating circumstances conducive to accumulating knowledge and acquiring skills naturally and spontaneously in various situations, in which the child finds themselves" (Kram, Mielcarek 2014: 8).

From the moment of birth, a child participates in many educational situations, i.e. those in which he or she learns something about the world and himself and masters various skills. Agnieszka Kram and Monika Mielcarek, whose observations are consistent with Brzezińska's assumptions, divide these situations into:

- "play-related – natural situations: related to minimal interference of an adult, the child initiates it themselves, and the adult eventually joins in and follows first the child's gaze and then the child's course of action (e.g.

the child looks at something – the adult also directs their gaze there; the child starts banging the spoon on the table, and after a while the adult gives the child various other objects to hit”;

- learning-related – “inspired situations: they are initiated by a child or an adult, but there is clear interference from an adult to encourage the child to take a specific action to learn something new for themselves (e.g. not only shaking but also opening the box); not only throwing something out but also throwing something into a container; not only scattering it but also placing blocks on top of each other and next to each other”;
- work-related – “directed situations: the adult initiates these and interferes in their course, by means of an action plan, to make the child do something ‘to the end’ (e.g. getting the child to clean up after themselves and helping them to do so)” (Kram, Mielcarek, 2014).

The authors emphasize that the condition for success in early education is to match the methods of supporting the child’s development to the development phase in which the child currently is: “e.g. A one-year-old child is usually unable to follow even a short command – another person’s instructions – it would be better for him to demonstrate a given activity and then perform it together with the child, but a three-year-old can sit quietly for a long time and ‘read a book’ together with an adult” (Kram, Mielcarek, 2014: 8).

Since the most characteristic form of activity for a child under three years of age in European culture is play, children learn through what is a natural situation for them. When engaging in play activities, the child exceeds the limits of his or her skills and abilities. “Many activities that a child cannot perform in a real situation become possible in a play situation. Through play, the child consolidates and expands his or her previous experiences, but also has the opportunity to move into the world of imagination and fantasy” (Kram, Mielcarek, 2014: 8). Thanks to play, the child develops comprehensively in terms of motor, emotional, cognitive, communication, etc.

To define the framework of early education, it is also important to assume that each of the basic forms of human activity – play, learning and work – “can be implemented not only in a situation arranged by an adult but also spontaneously, in the course of ordinary, everyday, even mundane activities (e.g. while taking a walk, preparing a meal, getting dressed). Any situation that a young child encounters, with the support and appropriate guidance of a caregiver, has the potential to become a learning situation. The basis here is the child’s innate curiosity to learn about the world around him and the innate reaction to new things, called the orientation and exploration reflex” (Kram, Mielcarek, 2014: 8).

Educational goals in the process of supporting child development are inextricably linked to the child's development tasks and concern three groups of competencies that the child acquires in the first years of his life. "They can be considered basic and key competencies, even universal because they provide the child with minimal independence from the environment in meeting his or her basic needs" (Kram, Mielcarek, 2014: 14). The goals of early childhood education will therefore be:

- supporting the development of locomotion;
- supporting the development of manipulation;
- supporting the development of communication.

Locomotion and manipulation are key competencies because the child (especially in the first two years of life) gets to know the world and learns through practical action, which was highlighted by Jean Piaget, who called the first stage of intelligence development the sensory-motor stage. Movement and the possibility of sensory cognition condition development in each of the other development spheres. It is very important to provide the child with a safe space for exploration (i.e. free exploration and exploration) that does not limit the child's motor skills.

Communication competencies, in turn, are important because language is the basic tool of socialization (Segiet, 2016: 34). As Waldemar Segiet (2015: 34) points out, adopting the position of sociologist Basil Bernstein, "language is a guide to the world" and linguistic ways of perceiving reality and preferences for certain alternatives stabilize over time, creating the child's cognitive, social and emotional orientation.

The influence of caregivers and teachers on a small child should be based on diagnosing developmental capital in the field of manipulation, locomotion and communication competencies, with which the child enters the institution. The caregiver should observe, diagnose, and therefore constantly modify and adapt their actions to the child's dynamically changing capabilities.

The diagnosis of a child's development should be based on specific, standardized tools, e.g. development tests proposed as part of the series: Munich Functional Developmental Diagnostics, which enables the diagnosis of psychomotor disorders, taking into account pre-verbal development (Hellbruge, Lajosi, Menara, Schamberger, Rautenstrauch, 1994). It is worth including such a diagnosis for children in the first year of life, as well as in the post-infantile period, to eliminate any observed disharmonies by creating appropriate development conditions. Attempts to construct "development tests" in Poland were also made by Edward Franus (1975) and Halina Spionek (1967). Regardless of which of the authors we would refer to with regard to the child's developmental achievements,

when such tests are absent, early education (also understood in terms of prevention) should provide the child with conditions for acquiring a given competence. If a child does not crawl, education should include creating play conditions for the child that will encourage him or her to crawl on all fours. In the process of educating a child, the adult needs to know the developmental stages and milestones in the child's development, to be aware that not only caring but also supporting the child's development from the beginning of his life is an important condition for the gradual increase in competencies. Ongoing diagnosis of developmental achievements at the early childhood stage may also significantly reduce developmental problems in later stages of the child's life.

Nursery education is intended to create the basis for comprehensive development understood in terms of a continuum, i.e. development conditioned by continuous, ordered methods of interaction that move smoothly from one to the next, depending on the current needs and capabilities of the child. For a child to develop, it needs stimuli, which should be provided by adults. It should also be noted that a child in the company of other children will also draw these stimuli from their peer environment. Being among children with a similar level of development in a nursery environment will undoubtedly be a developmental stimulator for children.

For education to meet the needs and capabilities of the child, appropriate conditions must be created to stimulate the child's development by arranging the space and surroundings of the small child. Apart from statutory requirements regarding the standards of rooms in a nursery, each facility should have a playroom for each group of children attending it and a room for children to rest (at least one for each two groups). Each child should have their own space (statutory requirements provide for 4 square meters for each child). The playroom should be divided into spheres of activity adapted to the needs and development possibilities of children (the number of spheres will also depend on the possibilities, but it is worth distinguishing at least 4 spheres, e.g. construction and manipulation sphere, creative and sensory play, thematic play, reading sphere). Among these activity spheres, space should be left for free motor activity, and the spheres themselves should be supplemented and modified so that the child can discover them again (e.g., one of the elements of the sphere equipment might be changed once a week or new aids and materials created). It is also important that all materials and toys are placed in a way that allows children to explore without the need for adult intervention. Marking cabinets and shelves with schematic drawings of their contents, and hanging works made by children and "educational" boards containing drawings or photographs at the children's eye level is also beneficial.

The colours of rooms for children up to three years of age should be subdued, rather light; a carpet or rug does not have to be installed in the entire room, but care should be taken to ensure that the colours of the carpet and floor are “subdued.” In the process of supporting a child’s development, it is not advisable to accumulate an excessive amount of stimuli, and therefore the decor of the rooms should be within the limits of a small child’s perception and not distract their attention (Mikler-Chwastek, 2013: 22). Auditory stimuli should also be adapted to the child’s needs (e.g. used only during classes or at the child’s request, not “in the background,” because the “background” constitutes another stimulus received by the child’s still immature nervous system). The social and physical space of the nursery should be an open offer for the child, in which he or she will be educated through independent experiences in interaction with an adult who maintains an appropriate distance.

Children learn faster and more effectively when they are convinced that they are doing activities of their own free will. Classes are usually organized collectively and have a specific duration, not always adapted to the child’s abilities. The collective form of “activities” may cause many difficulties for children up to two years of age, who prefer to play “alone” or with an adult partner; only after reaching the age of approximately two years do they play “in parallel.” Collective classes are directive in nature and inappropriate for the youngest children, also because they have various needs in particular situations. It therefore seems that the use of “classes” may involve interrupting a child engaged in an activity that is interesting for them in order to “adapt” to what is in fact guardian or teacher’s plan. Activities are also scheduled for a specific duration, which does not correspond to children’s perception of time and attention span. As a rule, classes are “guided” by a leader, and children quickly lose interest in what this leader has to tell them, illustrate or propose.

In early childhood education, if any measure of time must be defined, it should be measured by a time unit determined by the child – one child will concentrate on a specific activity for up to half an hour, while another will lose interest in a situation or subject after just a minute. Implementing so-called “classes” places these children in a sort of “single row” without individualization of interactions. This type of organization of education brings to mind the organization of schoolwork, in accordance with about which such authorities in Polish pedagogy as Józefa Bałachowicz (2008) or Bogusław Śliwerski (Śliwerska, Śliwerski, 2008) put forward several postulates to change the teaching method functioning in early school education classes. A small child in physical and social space – in the playroom, in the dining room, in the

toilet, in the garden or on the playground – explores this environment, gets to know toys, looks at and touches plants, follows the behaviour of insects, looks for interesting specimens (chestnuts, flowers, pebbles, sticks, etc.). Education is also promoted by the appropriate organization of meals – the space and equipment of the eating corner and the course of the meal should provide an opportunity to learn new names and new tastes (supervisors can explain the names and ingredients of dishes, name flavours, ask questions about similarities and differences, indicate the smell of dishes) to consolidate the experience already gain.

Bearing in mind that all children's activities and play may have a developmental character, potential educational situations appear at every moment of the child's activity in the nursery. Therefore, methods of educating young children can be classified (according to Anna Brzezińska's team of experts) into:

- free exploration method;
- spontaneous fun;
- occasional learning;
- education by creating opportunities to imitate an adult.

Early education should also be considered as building readiness for lifelong learning. The time from birth to the end of 3 years of age is a very demanding and difficult period, both for the child and loved ones. It is then that the basis for readiness to learn in all subsequent stages of school education is shaped. Children's cognitive curiosity is strengthened or weakened and disappears, various forms of exploratory behaviour are evident or the child learns to avoid new situations. The child also learns to ask increasingly inquisitive and varied questions, or when adults dismiss or ignore them, he or she stops asking questions. The child also learns to listen to what an adult says or stops paying attention to their verbal comments (Kram, Mielcarek, 2014: 29).

The essence of creating an educational space for a small child in a nursery is for an adult to accompany the child in its development, which is characterized by:

- non-directive actions taken by a guardian, educator or teacher;
- balancing relationships, reading what in these relationships creates asymmetry, power relations and what fosters symmetry;
- a kind of “development service”;
- preventive dimension – anticipating threats;
- continuous improvement of yourself as an educator, guardian and teacher of a small child;
- social imagination;
- professionalism of the assistance provided;

- the assumption of the relationality of accompaniment – cooperation, mutual subjectivity, and recognition of the child’s autonomy by the adult (Marynowicz-Hetka, 2009: 135–138).

When establishing the principles for early childhood education, one should also rely on the recommendations of the Irish National Teachers’ Organization, which suggest constructing the early education process around play groups, emphasizing “the total development of the child and providing him with an environment rich in the possibility of experience leading to learning through exploration – research and discovery.” “There is no formal teaching ... instead there is the rule of the three P’s – play, paint and Play-Doh.” “The child is provided with the tools necessary for all types of play: creative, imaginative, social, imitative, adventure-oriented, constructive and even destructive” (Early Childhood Education. Issues and Concerns, An I.N.T.O. Publication, Irish National Teachers’ Organization, Joe O’ Toolee (Senator), Dublin 1995: 3). In Poland, unfortunately, we face many restrictions on children’s free play, and education is often excessively formalized.

2.8. Dilemmas regarding the reception of the concept of development accompaniment and non-directive work methods using the example of nurseries in the Wielkopolska region (Greater Poland)

In Poland, as Dorota Klus-Stańska notes (Klus-Stańska, 2019: 269), the increasing number of publications emphasizing the importance of early childhood education includes the scientific achievements of Lucyna Telka. In the second decade of the 21st century, Telka, together with Halina Mazur, introduced the concept of non-directive development accompaniment in urban nurseries in Łódź. This concept was developed by Telka based on the achievements of European researchers such as Emmi Pikler, Loris Malaguzzi, Françoise Dolto, Maria Montessori, and Janusz Korczak.

Telka (2009) presented this concept in her publication *Transforming the Social Space of the Facility: A Socio-pedagogical Study Using the Example of Nurseries*. In a later study, entitled *On Accompanying a Child in Development*, the author of the principle of development accompaniment also presents an outline of the concept of upbringing in a nursery (Telka, 2020). She attempts to characterize the concept of accompanying the child’s development in the nursery, situated in the mainstream of non-directive education. The theoretical foundations of this concept are defined by social pedagogy. Telka emphasises that:

This remark is justified because accompaniment is not a concept strictly related to one scientific discipline and one field of practice. The social pedagogue is inspired by the views of Helena Radlińska, stimulating reflections on the “indispensability” of the educator in the life of the student. Theoretical inspirations for the concept of development accompaniment can be found in social pedagogy in the concepts of development assistance contained in Radlińska’s views, accompanying education in the views of Aleksander Kamiński and development accompaniment used by Ewa Marynowicz-Hetka. The element that connects the views of the cited authors is the idea expressed by Radlińska, according to which upbringing is a field of creativity relating to the possibilities inherent in the child, and not to the life pattern designed for the child. This idea is almost a hundred years old and is still valid, it is an encouragement to present the theoretical, methodological and methodological premises of the concept of education implemented in a nursery (Telka, 2000: 71).

As she notes, the concept of accompanying a child’s development is presented as a tool for the educator’s thinking about the field of practice, and the position of social pedagogy presented by Telka (2020) may become the basis on which educators shape their beliefs about upbringing, in particular, their theoretical and methodological beliefs underpinning educational activities. According to Telka:

Understanding the theoretical premises means discovering why theoretical knowledge is needed by educators of young children, how it inspires us to think about upbringing, and what it makes us sensitive to. Understanding the theoretical premises of working with children does not relieve educators of the need to activate their inventiveness, critical thinking, and reflection-based approach; nor does it relieve them of making an intellectual effort to analyse, deconstruct and construct theoretical foundations of action. Adopting the concept of upbringing is a process that may be supported by in-depth analysis of reading material and conversations regarding various theoretical and methodological proposals regarding the conditions of a child’s stay in a nursery (Telka, 2020: 74).

The choice of a concept based on the belief that the child is a powerful agent in their development breaks with the approach oriented towards the curriculum rather than the child, an approach well established in Polish pedagogical practice. It also rejects the directive, or even behavioural, concept of working with children adopted in the period of the communism-era Polish People’s Republic. Adopting the model proposed by Łódź educational institutions for children up to three years of age encourages educators to be: “non-directive, creating conditions for the child to grow in freedom and learn the rules of social life” (Telka, 2020: 74). In addition to Helena Radlińska, Telka also refers to the views of Stanisław Ruciński, who describes upbringing as “being next to you.” This emphasizes the effort of the student and the specificity of the educator’s

actions “without a ready-made path, but in a known direction – for respect, trust, freedom to... the rules of social life” (Telka, 2020: 75). At the core of the concept of development accompaniment can be found a belief in the difficulty of joint “work” between the student and the educator.

The theoretical foundations of accompaniment in development allow the educator to shape the point of view of the child and the conditions of its development, and to recall specific values. The key attributes of accompaniment are respect, independence, symmetrical social relationship, listening, observing, and conducting dialogue. According to Telka, these are consistent with Józef Lipiec’s view that “as a result of educational activities, a relatively free, independent, creative and responsible human subject” (Telka, 2020: 75). Therefore, she states that accompanying development requires creating conditions that shape the educator’s trust in the child and the child’s freedom of activity, thus emphasizing the emancipatory dimension of social relations.

Accompanying development is also related to the concept of an “active and creative” person contained in Radlińska’s views, and the way of understanding a person applies to both the child and the educator. Radlińska argues that the educators are responsible for getting to know the child’s perspective so that they can understand the child and respond appropriately to his or her expectations, thus creating conditions conducive to shaping autonomy and learning in the child’s rhythm (Telka, 2020; Radlińska, 1961).

Despite the long-standing Łódź tradition of non-directive support in a child’s development, it can still be noticed that in other Polish cities, there are many inconsistencies in the education of children up to the age of three.

According to Telka (2020): “In our country, the current ways of understanding education in nurseries can be assessed in at least two ways. Based on the results of research presenting the issues of a child’s stay in a facility, it is possible to indicate educators’ beliefs that the child plays, develops and learns, makes decisions, is a person who actively participates in the world and that the child is entertained, taught, fed, managed and shaped” (Telka, 2020: 72).

Following Telka’s approach, it should be noted that: “An educator whose views are situated in the mainstream of non-directive education sees what the child feels, thinks, wants, supports his potential, the strengths of his development, and the right to shape himself and social life in the institution. An educator who expects the student to obey the rules given from the outside takes directive actions, has difficulty examining, learning about and observing what is happening during the child’s activity and outside of it” (Telka, 2020: 72).

As Telka and Halina Mazur, the director of nurseries in Łódź, recommend, accompanying the development of a child up to the age of three seems

to be a particularly valuable proposition for the pedagogy of early education, because the child, often overlooked in the systemic solutions adopted so far, is to be the subject of this education, and an adult, in the process of extracting and supporting children's resources, should be a friendly helper, not a directive instructor.

In the Act on the care of children up to three years of age, the tasks of a nursery and a children's club include "providing the child with care in living conditions similar to those at home; ensuring the child receives appropriate nursing and educational care by conducting play activities with elements of education, taking into account the child's individual needs; conducting care and educational activities, taking into account the child's psychomotor development, appropriate to the child's age" (Journal of Laws of 2011, No. 45, item 235, Act of February 4, 2011, on the care of children up to 3 years of age: 3). In many Polish nurseries, it was quite rightly assumed that the nursery was not to be a so-called "storage room," as it was during the communism-era Polish People's Republic, but a place of education. The problem, however, is that a child's education in Poland is still rooted in a directive, or even behavioural, approach, and is, therefore, most often carried out by the stereotype of "classes" during which the adult is active and the child's action are most often "dictated by adults." The word "classes" also appears in the Act and for many people this term brings to mind frontal teaching. This perception of education results in the scenarios of children's classes such as "directed conversation," "directed play," "talk," and "education through play," which by their nature do not fit into the concept of education based on the assumptions of constructivism. Thus, as reflections among psychologists indicate, early childhood education should be described in terms of taking the child from the zone of current to the zone of immediate development by using initial competencies "at the start," teaching new skills, improving acquired skills, and putting the child in new situations (Kramm, Mielcarek, 2014).

This assumption corresponds to natural pedagogy (Alvarez, 2017), especially Montessori, based on the concept of "a prepared environment and the indirect role of an adult who is a companion in ... development" (Kolasa-Skiba, 2021: 194) and a close observer of the zone the child's current development. The action of an adult who builds relationships with the person in their care and is responsive to their needs and development opportunities is part of the trend of social accompaniment, which was encouraged in Poland many years ago by Helena Radlińska (Żukiewicz, 2017; Marynowicz-Hetka, 2005), and nowadays many times emphasized by Lucyna Telka, precisely in the context of the education of a child in a nursery understood in the broad sense (2009; 2016a; 2017a; 2020; 2021a).

Early education in a nursery involves supporting the child's development by "creating circumstances conducive to accumulating knowledge and acquiring skills naturally and spontaneously in various situations in which the child finds himself" (Kram, Mielcarek, 2014: 8).

As Joanna Głodkowska (2017) argues, "From the moment of birth, a child seems to spontaneously cross the limits of its development to constantly reach for new experiences, explore, experiment and construct in its mind an image of the world that surrounds it" (Głodkowska, 2017: 17). The child "collects information constantly coming through the senses and systematically processes it – compares, differentiates and selects, associates and classifies, recognizes relationships and gives meaning to relationships. Cognitive processes are constantly taking place in the child's mind, and the environment is an important context for their development" (Głodkowska, 2017: 17–31).

Meanwhile, studying the educational offers of many nurseries in Poland, it is clear that the child has no time for autonomy and no time for play. Examples of nursery working day scenarios posted on the website include thematic classes, sensory classes, didactic classes, health-promoting classes, motor classes, book classes, manipulative and construction classes, music classes, research classes, and cooking classes. Fun most often appears as playing with music, playing with a song. Free play, as a component of the child's activity day in the nursery, is recorded only when the children are brought to the nursery – in the time between crossing the nursery threshold and preparing the children for breakfast.

Some hope for a change in the directive perception of early childhood education in nurseries is provided by the Regulation of the Minister of Family and Social Policy of September 10, 2023, on standards of care for children up to 3 years of age (Journal of Laws of 2023, item 2121). "Standards for working with children include pedagogical, caring, upbringing and educational goals adapted to the form of care provided, taking into account the actions that will be taken towards the child" and by the recommendations of educators and social educators, including those regarding the environment of nurseries in Łódź, together with Lucyna Telka, that caregivers are to provide the child with a comfortable and safe atmosphere during his or her stay in a nursery, children's club or with a daycare provider, "in particular, through social accompaniment and accompanying the child in development, characterized by subjective treatment of the child, showing respect, taking non-directive actions, establishing positive relationships and building the child's trust" (Journal of Laws of 2023, item 2121). This provision seems particularly important because so far social accompaniment, development accompaniment and taking non-directive ac-

tions have remained in the sphere of postulates in pedagogical literature, not ministerial guidelines.

The document also specifies that the standards of a child's education are to be based on: "Development of motor skills through everyday movement games supporting motor and visual coordination, development of language skills by establishing verbal interaction with children, development of self-service skills, development of cognitive and sensory competences, shaping and training concentration and attention, development of children's creativity by creating opportunities for independent research various objects, learning about the movement possibilities of your body, exploring space, creating opportunities to make decisions and choices" (Journal of Laws of 2023, item 2121). The document does not include a directive on organizing activities for children, but attention is paid to play exploration and the caregiver's interaction with the child.

According to the regulation, standards regarding the organization of work, development and safety of staff employed in a nursery or children's club or a daycare provider, if not specified in the regulations or statute of the care institution, include "providing conditions conducive to stimulating the child's development," implementing methods of working with the child taking into account the child's individual needs, interests and respecting "the child's rhythm of life by appropriately organizing the hours of meals, sleep, hygiene activities and play or creating plans for activities during the day."

This provision shows that creating lesson plans is to be an alternative, not an obligatory requirements, although it does seem necessary to individualize work with a child depending on their needs and development possibilities.

The ministry's recommendation in the area of monitoring and evaluation is also important, as it includes "implementation of a procedure for observing and monitoring the child's development, developed individually for each child by the person providing care and the parents." This recommendation is part of the trend of accompaniment in development because the child's educator can only accompany the child based on sensitive observation of his or her needs and capabilities.

Therefore, it should be strongly emphasized that the regulation recommends innovative solutions for Polish conditions and if it is noticed by staff caring for children under three years of age, we may achieve a gradual change in the child and childhood paradigm in the Polish care and education system to the one operating for decades in Western educational systems.

Research involving nursery caregivers from the Greater Poland region was conducted in March 2023 during a workshop titled "Supporting the development of children up to three years of age in leading European concepts."

The workshops were carried out for each group of caregivers (numbering approximately 25 people) four times, each time with the same workshop run for a different group of participants. After completing the second, third and fourth round, caregivers were invited to a focused interview. 8 caregivers participated in the first interview, 8 caregivers in the second interview, and 12 caregivers in the third interview.

A total of 28 caregivers took part in the study. The interviews took place immediately after presentations of the main principles underlying the concept of development accompaniment in the Łódź nurseries, and of the concept of education according to Emmi Pikler, Magda Gerber, Loris Mallaguzi, and Françoise Dolto. An important issue was the emphasis on how a non-directive concept of upbringing called development accompaniment was implemented in urban nurseries in Łódź (described by Telka in 2009) and which remains a valid concept in these nurseries.

Therefore, a total of three focus interviews were conducted based on the same scenario. The scenario assumed the following:

- presenting the leading concepts of non-directive education of children up to three years of age;
- a conversation about the adoption (current and potential) of these concepts in the nurseries where the interlocutors work.

Caregivers were asked to comment on the following areas:

- Are the described pedagogical concepts applied in the institutions where interlocutors are employed?
- Do caregivers see the possibility of applying the concept of accompanying a child's development in the nurseries where they work?

The research method adopted to diagnose the problems indicated above was focus research – a Focus Group Interview (FGI) (Lisek-Michalska, 2002: 311–326; Olejnik, 2010: 236).

Due to the qualitative nature of focus research, the selection of the group was deliberate because “it is a definite mistake to try to select participants randomly or by quota (in the sense of reproducing the structure of the population)” (Maison: 2001: 41). It should be explained that “the sample in most focus studies is too small to create an adequate representation of the population. Therefore, for example, striving to reproduce the demographic structure of participants in quotas (e.g. in terms of gender, age or education) only leads to disruption of the homogeneity of groups, without ensuring representativeness. Therefore, it is better to consciously abandon it and focus on defining the target criteria as best as possible, and then select people according to these criteria” (Maison, 2001: 41). The selection criteria for the written research were partic-

ipation in a workshop, employment in a nursery, willingness to take part in an interview (Drapikowska, Palczewska, 2003: 72).

Since FGI is part of qualitative research in the social sciences, it should be emphasized that these interviews “conducted based on native pedagogy, as a result of gaining scientific maturity, have become an autonomous, specific field of academic activity (though not only), carried out in cooperation by many scientists identifying with the humanistic philosophy of man underlying them, using the diversity and creativity of the methodology of their implementation in research practice and applying adequate criteria for their evaluation” (Kubinowski, 2016: 6).

One-hour interviews were carried out face to face with the interlocutors.

Describing the research results of each group studied, it can be concluded that the interlocutors did not notice the adoption of the pedagogical concepts described during the workshop, because: “they are limited by the daily schedule,” “they have to carry out teaching activities every day and they are the core of education in the nursery,” “They do not have time to individualize the child’s needs because there are too many children in the group,” and “there are different expectations from the management and parents.”

The interlocutors also draw attention to the fact that they are often prevented from “following the child” due to the number of children in the group. They argue that when they create an offer for the child in the physical space, i.e. provide the child with material to explore by his or her interests that he or she can recognize, they receive a message from the management staff that by giving the child toys and “allowing” them to play on their own, caregivers are “doing nothing” themselves. According to the interviewees, children are to be constantly occupied by adults, they are not to concentrate on their activities.

The caregivers interviewed believe that this approach from management is determined by three factors:

- expectations that children will be “managed” and “there will be no problems with noise” and “discipline”;
- expectations that children “can do a lot”;
- expectations for caregivers to work actively, “because most of the time they work, they have peace because the children are sleeping.”

One of the respondents points out that working in a nursery involves constantly generating task situations, not allowing the child to feel bored or be inactive during the day. The only situation in which it is deemed acceptable for the caregiver to be less active is when the child falls asleep for a nap. The interviewees also argue that an important task for a child’s caregiver nowadays is constantly photographing the child in situations that are supposed

to satisfy the management staff and parents: “We are supposed to photograph children who are clean, smiling, sitting focused during classes, which is completely outside the criteria of supporting the child’s development in the nursery.” Another caregiver emphasizes: “these photos must be published on Facebook for the parents, so the child should not be sad or dirty.” In each group of respondents, there is a statement similar to the one quoted above: “the manager looks through the photos and selects those that correspond to the image of the facility.”

The caregivers argue that they cannot support the child’s development because they are required to be verbally and physically active all the time when the child is awake. They also emphasise that because they often find out that the child “sleeps for up to 3 hours,” they are obliged to be creative in how to manage their children’s “wake-up” time:

When we take action to create space and want to somehow stay ‘aside’ during the inspection we notice the dissatisfaction of the management. Our work involves constantly engaging children in so-called ‘guided games or activities’: colouring, paper-tearing, arranging puzzles, collective singing and dancing.

With the children we do scenarios from methodology books about experiments, e.g. we have to make volcanoes, show how a magnet works, etc.

We don’t have time to create space free play, unless there are fewer children, e.g. in the afternoon when their parents arrive.

The interviewees also mention the inability to support development due to:

- large group sizes – “When a colleague gets sick, we are sometimes left with thirty children. The only thing we can do is watch over their safety,” “There is no standby in the nursery, when somebody is sick, another takes her group,” “we are always in a hurry somewhere, carrying out the daily scenario, we have to clothe and feed the children if they can’t, and there are few of us because many women are on sick leave and we have large groups”;
- diversity of children’s needs – “We have Ukrainian, Belarusian and other minority children, but we do not have support from psychologists or educational specialists,” “In fact, there are many children with special needs in the nursery, but there are no supporting caregivers,” “Communication often becomes a barrier, not only because the child in the nursery communicates non-verbally, but an additional difficulty is the issue of multiculturalism, even the parent does not understand what we are asking them for”;
- no possibility of deviating from the class schedule – “we have set plans and lesson scenarios, we cannot change them too much, we always have

to implement what we have been assigned,” “if we have our ideas, they are verified by the management and they evaluate our initiative, often it’s not the case that we can observe the child and their abilities, we should act so that the parents feel that the child is learning, basically like in kindergarten”;

- the need to inhibit children’s emotional development – “They must not cry, they must not scream, they must be quiet and smiling because the nursery is supposed to be a friendly institution.”

The interviewees highlight how they are subject to great limitations in carrying out free play or independent exploration, which are the key methods of education in early childhood (Kram, Mielcarek: 2014), because:

- “When we create a space for a child to play, we hear that we are not doing anything”;
- “Exploration is difficult because the Sanitary and Epidemiological Station does not allow the use of many natural materials”;
- “Children are supposed to be ‘in a row’ and all do the same thing because it is said that they learn by imitation.”

Although one of the methods of early education, as Agnieszka Kramm and Monika Mielcarek (2014) point out, is adult imitation, this is only one of the four methods recommended by the psychologists mentioned above. In addition to play, exploration and imitation, Kramm and Mielcarek also emphasize the importance of occasional teaching, which, according to the interlocutors, “does not happen at all” and often “going outside is made difficult by the need to dress too many children per caregiver.”

The caregivers express the opinion that every manifestation of education must be described in the work plan. They claim they are aware that education takes place during care and while eating a meal, but they also express the opinion that there is often not enough time for sensitive, unhurried care due to the size of groups; sometimes they do not even have time to dress their children to go outside with them.

The interviewees also argue that they regret that they do not have the opportunity to eat a meal with their children or even sit at the table with them in such a situation, because it would enable them to talk about the tastes, smells and shapes of the meals they eat, and it would also enable them to develop the skill of cultured and safe conversation at the table.

The interlocutors state clear that the conditions in which they function professionally hinder them in adopting Pikler’s concept: they cannot give children time for self-development, and a room for free play would be in contradiction with the assumptions of the classes. They also say that they cannot implement

the assumptions of RIE because the size of the groups means they are unable to provide all children with attention and affection.

Caregivers also regret that:

- they cannot manage their time freely during the child's active day;
- they cannot offer the child toys that the child chooses themselves;
- they are unable to adjust their work methods to their observed needs, as these methods are often imposed;
- that dirty children mean trouble, so free artistic activity, such as in Malaguzzi's educational concept, seems to be a completely unattainable goal.

The conclusions regarding the results presented above should be considered unsatisfactory. Early childhood education, recommended by Telka and the significant educational specialists mentioned in this text, should be non-directive and based on continuous observation and diagnosis of the child's development. Therefore, such education cannot refer to the assumptions of school teaching. In the education of a child under three years of age, it is not recommended to carry out classes, prepare ready-made scenarios or work plans and implement them consistently, because it is the child, not a sheet of paper written down by an adult, who determines the caregiver's way of working. Early childhood education is the education of a child in natural situations, primarily in contact with the world, with adults (or more experienced children, e.g. in contact with older siblings), whom the child observes and imitates.

To sum up, it should be emphasized that in early education, it is important to create space and an environment conducive to the child's exploration of the world.

The child's development environment contains offers through which it invites and encourages the child to act and learn about it. These offers take the form of various objects and events in the child's environment containing hidden tips on how to use them and which are an invitation to engage actively. Although these objects exist objectively (e.g. balls, skipping ropes, chairs, doors, stairs in the house, a slide in the street, a puddle of water after rain, a pile of sand, an open cabinet door in the kitchen, a turned on computer), the question is whether they will constitute an offer for the child depends primarily on the level of his or her development (e.g. whether the child is already able to climb stairs or whether their hands are dexterous enough to catch and throw or kick a ball thrown to them). Therefore, children must have specific skills that will allow them to respond to a given offer. In this approach, the environment is not so much a set of stimuli, but a set of opportunities to take various actions (Kramm, Mielcarek, 2014).

The analysis of the research results in this study suggests that many nurseries still rely on directive methods focused solely on instruction, not creat-

ing space that activates the child to explore independently, have fun, and solve problems on their own. This contrasts with Beatrice Vitali's motto (2014: 26) regarding education for under-threes – 'when it is time to play, educators must wait, and above all, they should accompany'.

2.9. The latest draft regulation of the Minister of Family, Labour and Social Policy of May 20, 2024, on standards of care for children up to 3 years of age – discussion of the principles

In Europe, early childhood education currently emphasizes a child-centred perspective, moving away from standardization, instrumentalization and programme frameworks, which, especially in the case of under-threes developing quite individually, do not produce the results expected by those standardizing and do not foster the empowerment of the child understood in the broad sense. In early education, we talk about building culture in the field of educational practice (Telka, 2020), because such a perspective embeds the child in the construct of a competent agent in their own development. Researchers such as Gunnila Dahlberg, Peter Moss, and Alan Pence believe that "young children's institutions can be understood as public forums situated in civic society, in which children and adults participate together in activities of social, cultural, political, and economic significance" (Dahlberg, Moss, Pence, 2013: 134). The authors note that such forums constitute an important space for civic society, in which joint projects are implemented. Joint projects and "sharing" educational practice permeate the concept of work adopted by the Municipal Nursery Complex in Łódź, where Halina Mazur and Lucyna Telka have been trying for years to consolidate and develop the concept of development accompaniment they introduced in 2007 (Telka, 2009; Mazur, 2017).

In Western European countries, this is the tendency of educators, educational researchers, psychologists and sociologists "to analyse the conditions for the effective functioning of education" (Żytko, 2020: 93). What then becomes important is "an orientation towards diversity and multidimensionality of the social world" (Żytko, 2020: 93), which in education means "an individualized approach, personalized, holistic, taking into account different styles of student development and educational needs, revealed in different contexts and conditions that they create a specific space for the functioning of education" (Żytko, 2020: 93).

However, what follows in this section is a critique of the draft regulation. Numerous inadequacies will be highlighted and discrepancies in the way the

draft is at odds with progressive practice in the field of early education. First of all, the draft standards lack subjective treatment not only of the child and their parents but also of the educator. The project, situated in a directive construct of perceiving a child's education and childhood, imposes duties on nursery staff without the value of "acting in the field of practice"; it does not emphasize "sensitive observation" and "pedagogical design." The draft's authors even deem the child guardians (educators) to be people without competencies who should have directive reference points imposed in advance by the "system" and continuous, standardized evaluation. The draft project indicates the need for educators to adhere to the "predetermined" goals and monitor the implementation process described in the draft directive system, rendering the perspective of educating children up to the age of three an instrumentalized and dehumanized perspective.

The project does not refer to the achievements of Lucyna Telka (2012; 2016a; 2016b; 2017a; 2017b; 2017c; 2017d; 2020; 2021b), nor does it take into account the position of Prof. Dorota Klus-Stańska (2019) on early education; it ignores the scientific achievements of Katarzyna Gawlicz (Gawlicz, Röhrborn, 2014), Małgorzata Żytko (2020), Kinga Kuszak (2016), Hanna Krauze Sikorska (2016a; 2016b) and other researchers dealing with early education pedagogy; it entirely omits the achievements of developmental psychologists such as Anna Izabela Brzezińska (2012), rejects European good practices (Sadowska, 2018: 84–124), and also loses human subjectivity.

To focus only on the title of the project, it is worth paying attention to the use of the word 'standard', which seems completely unjustified in the case of educating a child under three years of age. As Małgorzata Żytko notes, drawing on Gunnila Dahlberg:

The dominant language of early childhood generates questions. How do we measure quality? What programmes are the most profitable? What standards do we need? What is the best way to achieve the desired results? What works? All these questions share a technical nature and a management perspective. They are an expression of the search for techniques that will guarantee standardization, predictability and control. They indicate the desire to find methods that will allow us to reduce the world to a set of objective statements of fact, independent of statements of value and the need to make assessments (Żytko, 2020: 92).

As Żytko rightly notes, this type of language used in the context of early education primarily highlights "the certainty of the adopted solutions, the expectation of unconditional effectiveness, and a technical, instrumental approach. There is little room for doubts, alternative solutions or a look at the needs of

a given school or kindergarten community from a local perspective. Even if an alternative action is possible, it must be ‘squeezed’ into a rigid framework...” (2020: 92). She goes on to argue that the effect of such an approach, which one could even describe as paternalistic and “particularly close to politicians and education management bodies” (Żytko, 2020: 92) is “limiting the diversity of educational approaches, fragmentation, depersonalization of education, subordinating it to specific norms and set goals, which is intended to facilitate control over the achieved effects” (Żytko, 2020: 92). According to the researcher, “the point of arrival is determined at the beginning of the education process because achieving these ‘expert goals’ is the basis for assessing the value of the teacher’s pedagogical work and the effectiveness of the educational institution. The educational system operates under the pressure of these target activities and the fear of their insufficiently effective implementation (Żytko, 2020: 92).

Following Żytko’s comments, it is important to recall her belief that with the “dominance of the normative approach to education and the core curriculum, which defines in detail the framework of educational activities, the concept of socialization is replaced by planned inculturation, common to all children. They are, as it were, ‘added’ to existing or created frameworks” (Żytko, 2020: 92), a point on which Dahlberg, Moss and Pence (2013) write extensively. This type of concept can be termed a kind of standardization pedagogy. In this approach, the child is observed only in “preconceived categories built by ‘experts’” (Żytko, 2020: 97).

Dorota Klus-Stańska (2019) notes that the phase model of children’s education adopted in Poland, which is being phased out in Europe, remains the dominant form. This model of education involves assuming that a small child primarily needs to satisfy biological needs and the need for safety, while in Western European countries the child is perceived as a strong co-creator of his or her own educational space (as is the case with the concepts developed by Françoise Dolto and Loris Malaguzzi, and which was also the case with the ideas of Maria Montessori, Emmi Pikler and other educators who contributed to building the construct of the child and childhood based on the belief in the child’s agency) (Sadowska, 2018; 2020). The project emphasises the phased model of early education, devoid of the broadly understood education of a child up to three years of age, and emphasises the distinct nature of nurseries as separate from other institutions supporting child development. This approach is inconsistent with the concept of a holistic approach to education, which dominates in most Western European countries, as well as in Latvia.

For example, while safety is frequently mentioned in the project, there are no reflections on creating space for the educator, whose task is to accompany

the child in their development. This emphasis on safety somehow indicates the insufficient preparation of the staff of institutions caring for children aged up to three, who have or should have competence in this area when starting work in a nursery or children's club, in the light of the guidelines of the Act of February 4, 2011 on the care of children up to 3 years of age (Journal of Laws of 2011, No. 45, item 235) and the guidelines contained in the regulations created under the Act.

However, this act does not emphasize the importance of the relationship between the educator (guardian) and the child, and social space, as a place to support the child's development, is treated marginally. In the project, the child is presented as a person for whom work is undertaken. This work is about "organizing," "planning," and "monitoring" instead of cooperation, sensitive observation and design.

The first guideline of the standard should be that the educator recognises children's needs and developmental possibilities and creates a space conducive to developing key competencies in this period, i.e. in the area of communication, manipulation and locomotion, to gain autonomy and resources enabling children to expand their range of skills and knowledge about themselves and the surrounding world.

It can be postulated that, if further work is undertaken, the project should include the following: "Early education can be defined as taking a child from the zone of current to the zone of immediate development" (Kram, Mielcarek, 2014: 13) by using initial competences, by encouraging the use of competencies in various and increasingly different everyday situations, by "putting" the child in new situations (Kram, Mielcarek, 2014: 13).

It is also worth noting that the project is curriculum-centric, as evidenced by the wording contained in the document: "In the care institution, annual care, upbringing and educational plans are created, which are the basis for everyday work with children, the implementation of which ensures the achievement of quality standards specified in the regulation."

This formulation not only contains an error in defining education ('care and upbringing plans' are educational plans) but also emphasizes the word plan, which by its nature is a directive construct, not taking into account the autonomy of entities operating in the field of practice, and not taking into account the careful and sensitive observation of the child's individual needs and capabilities.

It should be emphasised that before planning, it is necessary to know the children's capital for the "clash." Planning for children up to three years of age, whose competencies vary greatly due to the specific development period, is an

inappropriate solution. As noted by Kram and Mielcarek (2014: 11) (experts collaborating with Anna Izabela Brzezińska): “To set the goals of early education that support a child’s development, it is first of all necessary to look at how this development takes place. It is important to answer three questions:

1. With what experience, knowledge and skills does the child enter each subsequent phase of their development, i.e. what is the child’s “initial capital” in the subsequent phases of childhood?
2. What social expectations does the child face in each new phase of development and what possibilities of action does his or her maturing body have?
3. What challenges await them in the next phase of development and all subsequent ones, i.e. what must they prepare for at this stage of life they are at now?

Therefore, it is not only a matter of recognizing the skills that the child has already mastered and can use them relatively independently in various everyday situations, but a question of determining what the child should currently be capable of at a given moment in his development, as well as identifying these developmental tasks that the child will only face, and which he is now unable to undertake on his own, much less perform them, but which he must prepare for” (Kram, Mielcarek, 2014: 11).

Lucyna Telka (2020), the outstanding expert in the field of creating the developmental physical and social space of a child up to the age of three, whose work is discussed earlier in this chapter, argues constructing pedagogical projects that can act as an alternative to closed and predetermined plans. As she notes: “Locating the concept of working with a small child in a non-directive trend of thinking about upbringing does not guarantee strict methodological guidelines or ready-made paths” (Telka, 2020: 72–73). It should be reiterated that the achievements of Prof. Telka have been implemented and are being successfully developed in the Municipal Nursery Complex in Łódź in collaboration with its director Halina Mazur. This example in the draft regulation is unique on a national scale and, at the same time, fits in with concepts widely acknowledged as valuable in other parts of Europe.

Telka (2020) argues that in the field of practice, educational activities based on asking questions as crucial, such as “Why and why do you intend to act, what is the meaning and importance of action, what are the manifestations of certainty and uncertainty in action?” (Telka, 2020: 73). There are no ready-made answers to these questions because answering them requires sensitive observation and reflection.

Firstly, however, the draft law does not take into account the following recommendation from Telka: “dialogue, exploration, invention ... – conditions

that stimulate the child's curiosity and interests, enabling him to explore the surrounding world" (Telka, 2020: 73).

Secondly, the project also lacks the term "child's participation in the space of the facility" (Telka, 2020: 73), which is associated with the view that is important for supporting child development that "a small child is a person who knows and requires knowledge, co-participating in building relationships through his or her skills. cognitive, physical, emotional and social" (Telka, 2020: 73).

Thirdly, the draft regulation lacks reference to "the child's independence, curiosity, the discovery of difficulties and overcoming them with the support of the educator who accompanies him" (Telka, 2020: 73).

Fourthly, the project also directly refers to cooperation between nursery staff and families. As Telka (2020) emphasizes, parents are "the first educators of the child," and a nursery should be an institution that accepts both the child and his family. Therefore, cooperation with parents cannot be limited to preparing documents specifying norms and patterns of behaviour, creating a council of only selected people, etc., because the nursery is supposed to be an entity "accompanying parenting" (Telka, 2020: 73).

Furthermore, the draft regulation fails to take the following into account:

About educators, the concept of education draws attention to the importance of working in a pedagogical team, discovering what is subjective in the views of each educator on education, developing a common point of view for the team, allocating time for developing, updating and consolidating the project of educational activities in the institution (Telka, 2020: 74).

The first item in the law reads as follows:

A care, upbringing and educational plan is created, containing: 1) care, upbringing and educational goals; 2) methods of working with children; 3) a schedule including fixed and variable elements of the day; 4) "planned activities" is a provision that raises several doubts. A plan is to be created, not a project, which suggests directiveness in the organization of the facility's work. The provision in the document does not indicate who is to create the plan (and it is worth creating such a plan by all participants of the social space of the nursery, i.e. children, parents and educators).

As mentioned previously, in the above-mentioned provision, we are dealing with a tautology, because education means both upbringing and care. Moreover, while there is an invitation to describe methods of working with children, there is no information clarifying that methods of working with children up to three years of age should refer to education in natural situations. Such methods include:

- free exploration;
- spontaneous play;
- occasional learning;
- education by creating opportunities to imitate an adult (after Kram, Mielcarek, Sadowska, 2018: 199).

A second drawback of the project is its wording, for example, the term “activity planning” is misused, as a child under the age of three should act freely and spontaneously because children are driven by innate cognitive curiosity and their attention spans are short. The educator’s task is to create an educational space (physical and social) in which the child will be able to freely explore “in harmony with themselves.”

A third inadequacy of the draft project can be found in its use of directive phrases and stereotypes. These include the following: “The care institution creates conditions for children to rest indoors in at least two different forms (in particular: resting on loungers, quiet activity on the carpet, listening to music on mattresses).”

The draft’s subjective treatment of educators should also be noted as a fourth point. According to the provision, it is not caregivers but the “institution” that creates conditions for children. Moreover, it should be emphasized that “listening to music on mattresses” is a stereotypical perception of rest for a child up to three years of age. It is also worth considering whether children should be offered additional stimuli (music) while resting, whether the music should be played by a player, sung or played by the caregiver, and if so, what its nature should be. Regarding developmental psychology, it is worth postulating limits to the stimuli that a child is exposed to during rest periods, and not the standard practice of turning on music as a means of “soothing the mood” or a way to “calm down.” Instead of resting, many children perceive music as an additional stimulus, possibly burdening the nervous system (Piotrowicz, 2017; Jegier, Mikler-Chwastek, Piotrowicz, 2024).

A fifth unfortunate formulation in the draft regulation is the following: “The care institution has a written list of staff activities to support the child’s autonomy during cleanliness training (washing hands, toileting, changing a nappy and other activities).”

Once again, the institution is presented as an entity, while its people are omitted. Additionally, the concept of ‘cleanliness training’ is completely inaccurate, as it is a colloquial, stereotypical formulation used in the literature of non-peer-reviewed “parental guides.” The concept of training is one that limits human agency and brings to mind animal training. When talking about a child, a human being, it is more accurate to use concepts such as supporting

the child's readiness, and supporting the child in achieving independence or self-reliant activities.

On this point, the project also includes the following stipulations: "At least once a year, the staff perform a self-assessment of activities supporting the child's autonomy during hygiene activities in the manner established by the institution, and the conclusions from the self-assessment are documented." It can therefore be concluded that the task of the nursery is primarily the "diapering or napping" the child.

Another example of questionable wording in Annex 1 is the following: "... ways of communicating to children the activity during the day and changes related to it," which indicates that children receive a message about what activity they are to undertake, and that children do not participate in dialogue and cooperation in the field of practice.

The provision proposed in the standard also seems inappropriate: "Organization of staff work enabling the improvement of qualifications based on cooperation, observation and reflection on everyday practice," which sounds very accurate, but is developed incorrectly, because:

"The care institution has written rules for work organization, enabling staff, apart from direct work with children, to perform activities such as:

- 1) participation in internal meetings;
- 2) participation in training, whether internal or external;
- 3) carrying out self-assessment of your work;
- 4) discussing and planning work within the care, upbringing and educational plan;
- 5) communicating with parents;
- 6) monitoring the child's development by the system established in the institution."

Additionally, the following provision is particularly objectifying of nursery employees: "The care institution has developed a system for organizing and implementing internal/external training including:

- 1) rules for selecting training topics;
- 2) rules for staff participation in training;
- 3) mandatory hours (minimum 10 hours per year)."

In this draft, not only the child but also the caregiver in the nursery appears to be treated as a "semi-product" that should be improved through training, because the term "training" is recommended by the Ministry several times. It is worth referring here primarily to the concept presented by Lucyna Telka (2009) and emphasizing more non-directive forms of professional development of nursery staff. The idea of improving qualifica-

tions can include self-education teams and offer educators a chance to check their competencies, not necessarily by obtaining documents at the end of the training, but rather through reflection (e.g. through mutual tutoring, through peer inspections, meetings of self-education teams, meetings of teams with experts). In short, the very word “training” arguably treats nursery staff as insufficiently prepared to work with children.

A further inadequacy of the draft can be found in the proposed standard: “organization of staff work enabling the improvement of qualifications based on cooperation, observation and reflection on everyday practice.” This contains no provisions on reflection, and can be seen as a strong directive towards the employee; the provisions are dominated by the power relationship and constant assessment, as well as the need to document work (instead of providing it) and training (instead of gaining experience expanding competences).

Also, the next provision of the standard: “Care of staff for the safety and health of children” brings to mind many directive solutions, and the entire annexe is full of words such as: “system,” “principles,” and “tasks.”

As a result of the analysis of the provisions of the standard included in Annex 1, it can be concluded that the project remains rooted in directive practices, and that the educator and parent move inflexibly, not using natural situations but “channels,” as is also articulated directly in the document.

Annex 2 also contains several imperfect wordings, including “Children are involved in the organization of meals through setting the table, putting away the dishes, pouring a drink from a jug into a cup, among other activities,” which raises concerns about the intention of the project’s authors. Appendix 1 mentions a mattress and Appendix 2 an entry about a cup and a jug, which prove to be particularly inflexible concepts for arranging children’s physical space and the impossibility of giving up one item in favour of another.

The phrase: “The care institution provides activities enabling children to have contact with a foreign language” is also of great concern, as it is forgotten that the key competence is not language competence, but communication competence.

The annexe to the draft regulation states that children are to have special “dirty” clothes so as not to destroy the better clothes, and it is also noted that “pastel colours dominate in children’s rooms, diversity in the selection of colours and patterns is avoided on the wall and floors.” However, pastel colours are not always conducive to cognitive development (Piotrowicz, 2017).

In the nomenclature of the project, one can discern several stereotypes, “trends,” the objectification of all entities coexisting in the facility, and many phrases reminiscent of training – not only of children, but also of their parents,

who must become familiar with the “system” and follow it, and also educators, about whom there is a lack of clarity as to whether they co-create the system, because the institution simply has and provides the system.

In the nomenclature in both annexes, key concepts in the education of a child under three years of age, such as autonomy, self-determination and play, appear very rarely. Children’s rights are treated superficially, there are many stereotypical phrases, and above all, the project does not emphasize reflection, observation, and cooperation, but emphasizes the importance of the system and paternalism.

Moreover, the project does not take into account developmental tasks and key competencies specific to a children of this age. A draft document that would support the design of effective education in a nursery should refer to such indicators.

According to experts cooperating with Brzezińska, these competencies will primarily refer to the area of locomotion, manipulation and communication (Kram, Mielcarek, 2014: 13–14). These competencies are developed in three educational situations: play situations, work situations, and study situations (Kram, Mielcarek, 2014: 7).

It is also worth noting that the project emphasizes that: “§ 2. The entity running a nursery or children’s club, the entity employing a daycare provider and a self-employed daycare provider, taking into account the standards referred to in § 1, take into account the needs of children from families belonging to national or ethnic minorities, children from linguistically and culturally diverse families, children from migrant families, children at risk of social exclusion, children requiring special care and children with disabilities.” No mention is made, however, of children developing harmoniously.

It seems that the project does not take into account developmental tasks, such as establishing a relationship with the caregiver (which could be included in the standard of establishing a relationship between the caregiver/educator and the child) and other sentences, i.e. in the case of a child in the first year of life: maturation of sensory functions, maturation of motor functions: development of various forms of locomotion (movement), exploration of one’s own body and immediate surroundings, building relationships with the caregiver, communicating with the environment (Kram, Mielcarek, 2014: 12).

Similarly, for post-infancy children, characteristic developmental tasks include maturation of motor functions: development of various forms of manipulation (fine motor skills), maturation of motor functions: improvement and modification of various forms of locomotion, differentiation of forms of communication (Kram, Mielcarek, 2014: 12).

The Ministry regulation does not refer to the developmental tasks of a child under the age of three, thus it does not meet an important condition for the quality of care (and, generally speaking, the child's education).

As the team of experts led by Anna Izabela Brzezińska stresses, "In early childhood education, what is most important is the flexibility of the child's caregivers, i.e. their ability to adapt to the requirements of the situation, the features of individual tasks and support to the child's abilities. This is done based on the process of indirect learning, which occurs when an adult who understands the child's specific needs, interests and abilities mediates between the child and the world around them, i.e. transforms it so that it is understandable to the child" (Kram, Mielcarek, 2014: 22).

These words – flexibility, ability to adapt to the child, to the situation, understanding, observation, dialogue, and the child's autonomy - should guide those preparing a project, e.g., raising the culture of education in institutions for children up to three years of age.

According to Telka: "The literature emphasizes the need for educators to reflect on work with children, use tools that enable information to be collected on events in practice (e.g. keeping documentation about the child), orient educational activities (e.g. pedagogical project) and even engage in research action ..., learning in the course of practising a profession," and "the nursery educator analyses their view of a capable, active, curious child who meets an accessible and attentive educator ... who recognises their right to make their own choices, decisions, and activity" (Telka, 2020: 74).

However, in the Ministry draft project in question, reflection seems unnecessary, and results only from the top-down assumptions of the system.

Education in Polish kindergarten – contexts, challenges and dilemmas

3.1. Education of pre-school children in Polish lands and in Poland until 1939

Kindergarten education (commonly called pre-school education) in the European Union countries, including Poland, is understood as pre-initial education, initiating teaching and organized upbringing, designed to introduce young children to the school environment, intended to build a bridge between home and the atmosphere of a school institution (Waloszek, 2003: 952). Pre-school education is a component of the education system in Poland.

“Pre-school education, as seen by the social sciences, is a testimony to the recognition of the value of childhood for the life and survival of societies – humanity” (Waloszek, 2003: 925). It is also a stage of preparing children “for life tasks” in a space that is supposed to support “their development and the use of their opportunities to become, to the maximum possible extent, conscious and creative members of the social, national, cultural and global community and to become capable of active self-realization, unique and lasting identity and distinctiveness, to be able to develop their self by taking up ‘supra-personal tasks’” (Waloszek, 2003: 925).

As Marzenna Magda Adamowicz notes, the first Polish pedagogical text can be considered to be the “Letter of Queen Elizabeth on the upbringing of the prince.” This piece was written by an unknown writer in the 16th century and contains recommendations relating to the proper development of the child on a moral, mental and physical basis” (Adamowicz, 2017: 10).

Certain educational ideas regarding the child were formulated in the Renaissance by Andrzej Frycz Modrzewski in a work entitled *About the Repair of the Republic of Poland*. In this dissertation, the author drew attention to mental and moral education and emphasized the priority role of parents in raising

a child. Modrzewski promoted a child's natural lifestyle. "It was important, in his opinion, to combine entertainment with work. He emphasized how children learn from their parents and that they should pass on knowledge to them. The author was a supporter of stable, natural and ordered work and rest time, as well as daily exercises to strengthen the body and mind" (Adamowicz, 2017: 10).

The writers Mikołaj Rej and Erazm Glincozer were also responsible for raising children and their development. Mikołaj Rej focused on the child's clothing, nutrition and morality, but also the need to provide children with activity. In connection with Renaissance philosophy, Rej emphasized the need to educate the nation, "showing the nature of man who should speak and write in his native language" (Adamowicz, 2017: 10). At that time, Erazm Glincozer was also involved in pre-school pedagogy, defining the principles and guidelines for hygienic, educational and teaching procedures for children (Adamowicz, 2017: 10). "Glincozer believed that there were more benefits from educating the mind than from craft activities. In the fourth year of life, a child can acquire a lot of information because his memory is absorbent, and he can freely learn the alphabet, syllabication and composition of letters" (Adamowicz, 2017: 10).

The education of pre-school children was also dealt with in the 18th century by Dymitr Michał Tadeusz Krajewski (1746–1817), Piarist, private tutor to many noble families, and author of treatises with social, patriotic and pedagogical content (Leżańska, 2020: 42–43). "He was the first in Poland to develop a method of pre-school education, which he described in his book *Science Games for Children*, which he used to facilitate their learning of letters, syllabifying, reading in Polish and French, character formation, writing, customary languages, history, geography and the beginnings of arithmetic" (Leżańska 2020: 43). According to Wiesława Leżańska (2020), the richness of its content primarily stems from its novel pedagogical views, which even preceded the great Pestalozzi and Froebel. *Science Games for Children* was published five years before the birth of the founder of the first children's gardens, Frederick Wilhelm Froebel.

All the ways and methods recommended by Krajewski for educating young children resulted from his personal experience and were a kind of reflection rather than teaching tasks. The originality of his games and activities lay in the fact that their structure was similar to lessons, or rather, they were lessons conducted in the form of fun. They were so well thought out that they provided the child with multiple stimuli for thinking. The material in the games was individualized, so the child could relatively easily control his or her activities and even correct mistakes. Krajewski noticed that self-control develops perceptiveness and encourages careful observation. Therefore, he focused his games on teaching customs, reading, writing, history, geography, arithmetic and foreign lan-

guages. By the concept of the game of morals, he understood pedagogical methods by which a teacher can instil virtue in children's hearts among the toys themselves, before moving on to methods facilitating initial learning.) Science games for children ... can therefore be considered a set of practical tips, extremely useful in the education of a small child, based on insight and fun. Recognising the need to meet children's basic needs for action and movement, their striving for independence and emotional connection with the educator made D.M. Krajewski a precursor of pre-school pedagogy (Leżańska, 2020: 43).

We also owe a significant contribution to the upbringing of children during the Enlightenment to Antoni Maksymilian Prokopowicz, the author of the 1790 publication *A New, Easiest Way of Writing and Reading Together for Girls: With Notes for Teachers*. In Polish pedagogy literature, this was one of the first titles to address the problem of pre-school education methodology. Prokopowicz, taking into account the possibilities of girls' natural development, the need for movement and play, emphasized that they can start learning to read and write even before the age of six (Leżańska, 2020: 44). The diarist Jędrzej Kitowicz (1728–1804) also wrote about raising children up to the age of 6, and it is to him that we owe the knowledge about clothing, feeding and caring for children in poor and noble families. Jędrzej Śniadecki (1767–1838) a book entitled *On the Physical Education of Children*, which is considered the first textbook of developmental psychology. Among the determinants of development, Śniadecki mentioned movement, free gymnastics, spending time outdoors, corporal toughening (frequent washing in lukewarm water, casual clothing), appropriate nutrition (protein and sugary foods) and play as the basic form of children's activity (Leżańska, 2000: 44). This author reduced the methodology of pre-school education to the following recommendations: "Children should learn by playing and frolicking, and it is up to us to provide them with such toys, to occupy them with such things, to take them to such places where they can learn what we want. Our innate curiosity will make us ask a thousand questions about everything, and we will be real teachers if we can answer these questions skilfully so that children learn reliably. By educating the body in this way, we slightly educate the mind, and we do not leave the nervous system fallow, we educate it by the rules of nature, but we educate it without damaging health and without poisoning the first and sweetest moments of life" (Leżańska, 2000: 44). According to Śniadecki, the pre-school period is the best time to gather experience through natural observations and social contacts. It lays the foundations for further school education.

The topic of child education was also visible in the 19th century, especially during the period of positivism. Since "the political situation in Poland obliged

society to engage in home education,” “the issue of home education was one of the important pedagogical and social issues” (Leżańska, 2020: 45). Pre-school education was increasingly treated as an element of social and national existence and the fight for civilization and cultural progress, and despite the Partitions of Poland, Polish lands were quite willing to accept Western reflections and pedagogical achievements coming, which resulted in significantly enhanced interest in the child and teacher. As noted by Urszula Wróblewska, the possibilities of developing care for small children in Poland were significantly limited due to the situation of Partitions (Wróblewska, 2021: 18). “When the social and economic structure was changing in Europe and new pedagogical concepts based on freedom trends appeared, Poland had to focus mainly on safeguarding its nation identity against the policies of the partitioning powers. This does not mean, however, that we remained beyond new pedagogical concepts and practices” (Wróblewska, 2021: 18).

‘Children’s shelters’ (Ochronki) were established in Poland at the beginning of the 19th century. The first orphanages in Poland originated from philanthropic activities. In 1814, the Warsaw Charitable Society was established, which supervised orphans and children from working-class families deprived of reliable parental care (Bobrowska-Nowak, 1978: 139). In 1838, a new department of the Society was established for orphanages in Poland (Bobrowska-Nowak, 1978: 139).

Initially, these shelters did not have an educational character but were intended, as their name suggests, to protect children from difficult living conditions and lack of home care. In these institutions, educational tasks were carried out incidentally, and the prototypes of the modern “kindergarten” were established to ensure children’s sense of security and to provide them with conditions of decent existence enabling their development.

In the second half of the 19th century, people who cared about the upbringing of small children included representatives of the Society of Friends of Children founded in 1880 on the initiative of doctors, hygienists, educators and social activists. The Society’s activists included Adam Goltz, Eryk Jachtowicz, Jan Jeleński, Walentyn Kosmowski, Aleksander Moldenhawer, Stanisław Makarewicz and Roman Wierzchlejewski (Bednarz-Libera, 2012). Until 1900, initiatives to protect and raise children were also undertaken by the Kronenberg family, Maria Grabowska and Irena Moszczeńska (Bednarz-Libera, 2012).

In the Prussian partition, orphanages were created by the Society of the Ladies of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul, and similar initiatives were also recorded in the areas of the Austrian partition. It is also worth noting the activities of the orphanages of the Folk School Society (founded at the end of

the 19th century), organized in Galicia, Moravia, Silesia and Bukovina, which admitted children from two to twelve years of age. “TSL orphanages ... created an atmosphere for child-friendly development by providing appropriate housing conditions, a playground and often food; they provided care in facilities run by security guards and nuns professionally trained to stimulate the child’s intellectual development, instilled religious concepts and religious education in children, taught Polish children how to perform basic activities needed in everyday life, saved Polish children from families in which parents, due to working outside the home, could not provide proper care and upbringing from “fall and crime”; from the first years of life, they were brought up in a nation-focused atmosphere, providing contact with Polish literature and poetry, songs, and history; this weakened the influence of the foreign environment in which the Polish child functioned, preventing denationalization, protecting Polish children against Russification, Germanization, or Czechization, prevented the denationalizing influence of orphanages run by other nationalities to which Polish children were sent due to the lack of Polish institutions. This influenced the development of the ‘Polish element’, because they were organized in areas where Poles constituted a national minority; they ensured attendance in Polish schools, alongside which they often operated” (Bednarz-Libera, 2012: 157).

At that time, according to Żółtek and Rozbarska (2004: 288), the activities of the first institutions created with children in mind were not limited by legal regulations: there was organizational freedom and curricular diversity. The authors conclude that most educational curricula “were dominated by religious content, emphasized the need for physical work, and taught discipline and discipline. Singing, exercise and games lessons were conducted. Patriotism and national pride were developed in children, and later they were also prepared for school education” (Żółtek, Rozbarska, 2004: 288). Importantly, however, these institutions “gradually gained support and social acceptance for the activities conducted there in the following years. They were supported charitably by wealthier private individuals, socio-political activists various charitable and church organizations, religious congregations and local government institutions” (Żółtek, Rozbarska, 2004: 288).

These facilities cared for orphaned and abandoned children, urban and rural children, as well as children living in poor conditions and neglected. Children of working parents also attended them for a small fee.

At the beginning of the 20th century, due to the postulates of the Swedish educationalist Ellen Key, concern for the education of young children also grew in Poland. The precursors of child research include Maria Weryho-Radziwiłowiczowa and Józef Syska (Kowolik, 2012; Jamrozek, 2001; Jamrozek 2015).

Weryho-Radziwiłłowiczowa “made a critical analysis of froebelism in Poland, while pointing out the wide possibilities of these methods in the home education of pre-school children. She emphasized the role and importance of a child’s free play, direct observation of the natural and social environment, and the child’s initiative in organizing games and activities. She popularized the need for medical and pedagogical knowledge in the home environment, indicating concern for the proper psychophysical development of the child, giving detailed instructions in this regard” (Kowolik, 2012: 42). Helena Radlińska also made a significant contribution to the history of Polish pre-school education, “whose experiment in compensating for deficiencies can be considered a prototype of earlier school enrolments, made with the children’s success at school in mind” (Waloszek, 2003: 955).

Wiesława Leżańska argues that in the early decades of the 20th century, the reception of Western science certainly contributed to the development of psychological and pedagogical sciences in Poland (Leżańska, 2020: 48). People increasingly developed their own, novel concepts. All these activities were related to the “new upbringing” and “new school” movements, with work carried out in the fields of psychological and sociological research, as well as philosophical and social cogitations. The achievements of such psychologists of stature as Jan Władysław Dawid, Aniela Szycówna, Józefa Joteyko, Kazimierz Twardowski, Władysław Heinrich, Edward Abramowski, Stefan Baley, Stefan Błachowski and Stefan Szuman also contributed significantly to the development of pre-school pedagogy (Leżańska, 2020: 48).

However, regardless of the state of pedagogical knowledge of the scientific community, it was only after Poland regained independence in 1918 that tendencies to treat care, upbringing and educational institutions as an important link in the state’s social policy emerged. The future results of these institutions’ activities began to be perceived in terms of social and economic benefits for the state (Żółtek, Rozbarska, 2004: 286–299). In 1918 Poland, the first attempts were made to standardize the institution of orphanages as “pre-school education institutions.” This task was undertaken in 1919 by the First National Teachers’ Congress, in which the Pre-school Education Section was distinguished. It aimed to present the design of kindergarten facilities (Adamowicz, 2017: 16).

The activities of childcare institutions existing in interwar Poland (1918–1939) were modelled on Froebel’s gardens and Maria Montessori’s children’s homes, popular at that time in Western Europe. Maria Weryho wrote about the anthropological concept of Montessori in Poland, noting that children are different to adults, have their world, and own individual psychological needs, abilities and interests (Leżańska, 2020: 52). Montessori’s pedagogy, like Froebel’s,

was popularized in Poland primarily through magazines – periodicals devoted to pre-school education” (Leżańska, 2020: 52). These included: “Pre-school Education,” “Kindergarten” and “Kindergarten Issues.” “Relatively, the greatest interest in Montessori pedagogy among Polish authors of compact publications was visible after 1930. The following books were published at that time, important for the process of its reception: Maria Weryho – Method of pre-school education, Felicja Pinesowa – Maria Montessori’s education system, Sergiusz Hessen – Fundamentals of Pedagogy and Natalia Cicimirska – Games and play in kindergartens abroad” (Leżańska: 2020: 52).

Representatives of pre-school pedagogy referred to Montessori pedagogy frequently and for the long time, creatively incorporated it into Polish pre-school practice. These include Maria Weryho-Radziwiłłowiczowa, Stefania Marciszewska-Posadzowa, Janina Pawłowska, Zofia Żukiewiczowa, Antonina Winiarzowa, Zofia Bogdanowiczowa, Natalia Cicimirska, Maria Uklejska, sister Barbara Żulińska and Aleksandra Gustowiczówna (Leżańska: 2020: 52).

However, the unfavourable economic situation of the Polish state immediately after regaining independence did not allow for significant development of kindergartens. Importantly, however, in 1918, the Ministry of Religious Denominations and Public Enlightenment undertook work on defining the scope of duties of educators and indicated the principles of operation of care facilities, orphanages and nurseries. The Ministry’s proposals provided not only for the financing of these institutions but also required their universality and accessibility to all children (Żółtek, Rozbarska, 2004: 289). The introduction of pedagogical supervision was also announced. “Some of the important issues for their further development were the subject of numerous considerations and discussions. Decisions taken at the Teachers’ Congresses held in Poland in 1917 and 1918 were important in this respect. The projects presented there included the creation of free, public and even compulsory kindergartens for children aged at least 5 to 7. Their programmes and organizational activity aimed to provide the mass and mandatory preparation of all children for the planned seven-grade primary school” (Żółtek, Rozbarska, 2004: 288).

Due to the financial difficulties of the reborn state, some projects and demands could not be implemented. These included issues presented at the Teachers’ Parliament in 1919 regarding the model of educating kindergarten teachers and opening new care and educational institutions. Despite numerous difficulties, between 1927–1928, there were 1,435 kindergartens in Poland, including 659 in rural areas (Żółtek, Rozbarska, 2004: 289).

Visible and significant changes in pre-school education occurred in 1932. The Act on the Education System (known as the Jędrzejowicz Act), which came

into force on March 11 of that year, confirmed for the first time the legal affiliation of kindergartens to the entire educational system. It also defined slogans for action programmes and specified the tasks of kindergartens in the field of physical and mental education (Wroczyński, 1980: 295).

According to the Jędrzejowicz reform, a new, distinct method of educating pre-school teachers was also envisaged: “The education of kindergarten teachers was to take place in two types of schools – seminaries and high schools. The four-year seminars for kindergarten teachers were to accept candidates who were at least 13 years old and who had completed their education in a state school to the second level of the curriculum, i.e. 6 years of a third-level school or 7 years of a second-level school, just as in the case of general secondary schools. The wording of the provision indicated that only girls were to be educated in this field, although such a reservation was not expressly included. Two-year secondary schools for kindergarten teachers were earmarked for junior high school graduates who were at least 16 years old. It was also agreed that the curriculum of these schools would include general education, social and civic preparation, pedagogical preparation and practice in kindergartens. Under the new act, the transformation of caregiver seminars into 4-year seminars for kindergarten teachers began in the 1938/39 school year. In that year, there were 8 state and 13 private caregiver seminars in Poland 165” (Journal of Laws of the Ministry of Water and Agriculture of 1933, No. 5, item 97, p. 176). The detailed provisions of the Jędrzejowicz Act, the first to define the goals and tasks of all types of schools, opened with an article on kindergartens. This article stated that kindergartens are organized for children from the age of 3 until the commencement of compulsory schooling, whose aim is to provide physical and mental education by creating appropriate conditions (Act of March 11, 1932 on the education system, Journal of Laws of 1932, No. 38, item 389). This provision was of great significance in officially introducing the name ‘kindergarten’ for all pre-school education institutions, defining their place in the education system as institutions preceding school and preparing for it. While the Act referred to kindergartens the first time, thus giving them the highest legal basis, it did not specify who was responsible for establishing and maintaining training courses, thus becoming a purely formal act. Instead of a curriculum for kindergartens, the Ministry of Religious Denominations and Public Enlightenment issued a guide in 1933 entitled ‘Advice and Tips for Teachers in Kindergartens’ (orphanages/ nurseries or preschools).

In the interwar period, the work programme and the functions performed by kindergartens were extended, and the educational system of kindergartens was still based mainly on the systems developed by Froebel, Decroly and

Montessori. The principles of these systems were presented in the magazines published at that time (e.g. “Wychowanie Przedszkolne,” “Przedszkole” and others), which were an important help for educators in the methodology of working with children.

Despite systemic difficulties, Polish educators made great efforts to create the basis for children’s education until compulsory schooling was introduced. Taking a cue from the achievements of Western educators, they delved into the specificity of children’s nature, empirically studying the regularities of child development, sought to adapt the educator to the child’s nature, and organized an environment in which the children could fully develop their predispositions. Such endeavours were undertaken in Poland by Jan Władysław Dawid, Aniela Szycówna, Józef Joteyko and Janusz Korczak. “The latter made the child’s right to be what he is a canon of his theory and pedagogical practice” (Leżańska, 2020: 53). The essence of education, according to Janusz Korczak, consisted primarily in observing the rights of the child ensuring free and individual development of personality. “In the naturalistic trend, Korczak advocated a personalistic orientation, which assumed that personality education is the only and possible way out of the contradictions in which life is entangled, which requires not only independent and creative individuals, but also sufficiently socialized ones” (Leżańska, 2020: 54). By the principle of perceiving the child as a human being and ensuring the free development of his or her personality, he made the child the subject of upbringing and the educator a partner who was to facilitate this development. Korczak’s views were therefore consistent with the image of the educator proposed by Montessori, whose pre-school education system became a permanent fixture in Poland.

Clear influences of Decroly’s pedagogy can be seen in the concepts developed by Maria Weryho, Natalia Cicimirska and Zofia Żukiewiczowa. The latter considered interest centres to be the most purposeful educational system to be the most expedient because the key to kindergartens is to create an atmosphere and environment in which children find the best possible models of morality, cordiality, aesthetics and hygienic conditions, and, finally, skilfully and purposefully selected material for activities, games and activities (Leżańska, 2020: 55).

In an educational environment, the educator’s task is to comprehensively observe the child to learn about his or her health, talents and interests. Interest centres were used in kindergartens in Poznań, Warsaw, and kindergartens in Łódź organized by Janina Pawłowska. Decroly’s concept was also promoted by Natalia Cicimirska at the Seminar for Educators in Lviv. Drawing on Decroly’s methodological concept, she also called for the adoption of the Montessori system.

Cicimirska's main contribution to the formation of the Polish tradition of pre-school education was in popularizing developmental material for shaping the senses. Cicimirska's most famous and repeatedly reissued textbook, *Moja ochronka*, is a skilful compilation of Froebel's, Montessori's and Decroly's systems, which takes into account not only the pedagogical possibilities but also the material and living conditions of kindergarten institutions in Poland at that time (Cicimirska, 1928).

It should be mentioned that in the interwar period, from January 1925 to 1939, a periodical entirely devoted to pre-school education was published in Poland. "Wychowanie Przedszkolne" was edited by Maria Weryho-Radziwiłłowiczowa, an outstanding teacher, organizer and social activist, publicist, author of numerous methodological publications, theoretical works and short stories for children (Dolata, 2020: 205). From the very beginning of its existence, the editorial staff of the magazine discerned a need to interest a wider audience in the problem of pre-school education, which it regarded as underappreciated (Dolata, 2020: 205). This periodical took care of the development and reliable preparation of child educators for their profession. According to its editorial principles, the magazine published scientific and methodological articles in the field of pedagogy, reports on the state of pre-school education in Poland and abroad, practical tips for educators to conduct pre-school classes, including teaching materials and sample lesson plans, reports on innovative projects regarding pre-school education and reviews of new publications (pedagogical books and children's literature). "Pre-school Education," repeatedly drew on the achievements of world pedagogy and psychology, and very actively disseminated the ideas of "new education" on its pages.

The war years brought an enforced break in the officially conducted activities of care and educational institutions. Under the Act on Expropriation (issued by the occupier) of October 1939, Poles were prohibited from conducting activities in this area, primarily in connection with the takeover of kindergarten facilities for the needs of a foreign army (Żółtek, Rozbarska, 2004: 289).

3.2. Kindergartens in post-war and contemporary Poland

After 1945, the entire process of working with children focused on achieving specific educational goals. In Łódź, immediately after the end of the war, a National Educational Congress was held, which proposed compulsory pre-school education that would be implemented in stages and lasting at least two years

in kindergartens for five- and six-year-olds. According to educators, the task of kindergartens was to prepare children for life in society, create conditions for comprehensive development and fulfil the compulsory schooling requirement (Adamowicz, 2017: 17). However, the popularization of pre-school education was perceived by the communists who had taken over in Poland as a key instrument for social indoctrination. The authorities of the Polish People's Republic therefore sought to centralize the system of care for children aged 3 to 18. The guardianship over the institutional upbringing of children and youth was to be entrusted to the Ministry of Education to avoid problems related to education outside the mainstream communist ideology, and at the same time, to facilitate the gradual and consistent secularization of Polish society.

Hanna Kormanowa, responsible for the communication in the Polish education system, explained: "The years between 3 and 6 are more important in a child's life than those after the age of 7. The occupiers Germanized children of this age" (Wiśniewska, 2015b: 22). Therefore, the authorities called for the establishment of educational institutions on a mass scale. On the one hand, kindergartens were perceived as a kind of gift of socialism, which allowed women to emancipate themselves and take up professional work, while on the other, kindergartens gave the authorities of the Polish People's Republic a monopoly on early social indoctrination. As Sister Joanna Wiśniewska notes: "Motifs worthy of attention, however, arose from anti-personalistic anthropology, which, while idolizing the system, in practice eliminated the nature and subjectivity of man" (Wiśniewska, 2015b: 34). Under the resolution of the Council of Ministers of June 12, 1945 on the approval of the Organizational Statute of the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, No. 37, item 88, it was decided to subordinate all forms of care for children aged 3 to 18 years, including nurseries previously run by philanthropic associations or religious institutions, to the Ministry of Education (Resolution of the Council of Ministers of June 12, 1945 on the Approval of the Organizational Statute of the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy, Polish Monitor of 1945, No. 37, item 88).

The instruction issued in 1945 recommended the creation of kindergartens for children aged 4 to 7 (the educational authorities issued a regulation on a 9-hour stay for a child in kindergarten (Adamowicz, 2017: 17). In this instruction, the Ministry of Education also informed that by means of the School Act of 1932, all children's facilities are subject to the supervision of this ministry (Wiśniewska, 2015b: 315).

The time after 1947 witnessed the spontaneous, unplanned development of institutions established on social initiative and various institutions that had material resources at their disposal. This was made possible by criticism from

the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare. Orphanages of religious congregations, supported by contributions from the public, were also reactivated. However, the majority of functioning care facilities did not have the appropriate material base, equipment and teaching resources. There was a lack of qualified staff, and activities focused mainly on care. Moreover, organizational and structural changes initiated in Poland after 1950 led to the management of kindergartens being centralized and to increased direct participation of state authorities in this. The Act of February 4, 1950 transferred to the Minister of Health the scope of activities of the Minister of Labour and Social Welfare in the area of social care for children under three and for pregnant and breastfeeding women (Journal of Laws of 1950, No. 6, item 49). This resulted in the complete takeover of control over upbringing by Poland's communist rulers (Act of February 4, 1950 on transferring to the Minister of Health the scope of activities of the Minister of Labour and Social Welfare in the field of social care for children up to three years of age and for pregnant and breastfeeding women (Journal of Laws of 1950, No. 6, item 49).

The development of education, including pre-school education, therefore acquired the character of a planned and directed activity, framed in a unified system and related to the political transformation of the state. This uniformity was to be ensured by the first curriculum developed that year, entitled 'Kindergarten Activities'. Education departments were established, including methodological centres within their structures, and these took over the organizational and methodological supervision of care facilities. At the same time, they enabled educators to further their education and acquire qualifications, as well as making it far easier for parents to obtain a place for their children in kindergartens. After 1956, the development of pre-school education focused on a systemic approach corresponding to social needs. Teaching activities, similar in their form to school classes, became the basis for working with children. At the same time, the socialist model of kindergarten was emphasized. From 1958, the educational authorities expanded the network of kindergartens, kindergarten centres and kindergartens based at primary schools were established. These facilities worked 2 to 3 hours a week in the afternoon.

After 1961, orphanages and kindergartens were completely nationalized, and religious congregations were banned from providing care and education. The Act on the Development of Education and Upbringing of 1961 indicated that pre-school education is the first link in the education system and would take place in kindergartens and other pre-school institutions; children from the age of 3 until they start school could be admitted to kindergartens (Act of July 15, 1961, on the development of the education and upbringing system (Journal

of Laws of 1961, No. 32, item 160). The Act defined goals that emphasized the comprehensive development of children preparing them to start school and helping working parents provide educational care.

It can be concluded that “the years 1970–1989 marked another stage in the development of pre-school education and were associated with numerous methodological changes” (Żółtek, Rozbarska, 2004: 291). In 1973, another new programme was published, which brought the system of this education closer to the system of learning in the initial school grades, as well as implementing a new section in kindergartens named “School maturity and preparing the child to study at school.” At that time, kindergartens were organized in various forms, e.g. full-size kindergartens, centres that were later transformed into kindergartens or kindergarten units, and kindergartens attached to primary schools (Żółtek, Rozbarska, 2004: 291). “The new programme, in its sections on health, socio-moral, mental and aesthetic education, called for comprehensive education of children, care for their health and safety, and cooperation with the family and the environment. Particular attention was given to learning through movement” (Żółtek, Rozbarska, 2004: 291–292). In 1977, pre-school education began to be popularized, taking in 6-year-olds. This became possible only with it functioning in various forms, i.e. full-day kindergartens, 18-hour educational centres and 30-hour kindergarten classes. For these various forms of pre-school education, a programme of educational and teaching work with 6-year-old children was prepared in 1977. It aimed to equalize the start of school and ensure the continuity in the kindergartens and schools. It also introduced learning to read as a new element of working with a child, thus limiting play in favour of learning that resembled school education. Radosław Domke (2015) points out that in the 1970s, the popularization of kindergartens in Poland was, despite these efforts, insufficient, and “educational methods and curricular content required modernization in line with the state of developmental psychology and pedagogy at the time, as well as the fact that the staff of educators required better education (possibly at the higher), and the adopted norm of children per educator was the highest in socialist countries” (Domke, 2015: 241). The network of kindergartens was concentrated mainly in cities, while rural areas continued to lack facilities for children.

In the period from the fall of communism in 1989 to 2000, Poland transferred responsibility for managing its 35,000 kindergartens, primary and secondary schools to democratically elected local governments. Concurrent with this, the government significantly overhauled the structure and core curriculum, reformed the principles of management and financing methods. Pre-school education was also highly neglected area at that time. The dramatically

low rate of popularization of pre-school education placed Poland at the bottom of educationally civilized Europe (Rura, Klichowski, 2011: 23). The 1999 education reform largely marginalized pre-school education, which “cut Poland off” from the trends in Western Europe (Waloszek, 2001: 955). Local governments systematically introduced financial savings and gradually limited the number of nurseries and kindergartens.

At present, access to pre-school education is available to children aged 2.5 to 7 years, while compulsory kindergarten education takes in six-year-old children.

As Małgorzata Karwowska-Struczyk (2012) postulates, kindergartens in 21st-century Poland should respond “to local needs, community needs ... by involving these communities “in decision-making processes regarding the rules of their functioning” (Karwowska-Struczyk, 2012: 15). The author, following the ideas of the Reggio Emilio or San Miniato communities, has in mind local communities “who care about the well-being of children” (Karwowska-Struczyk, 2012: 15), and considers civic initiatives undertaken from the bottom up by groups of parents, local governments, associations and foundations (Karwowska-Struczyk, 2012: 15). Therefore, pre-school education should now integrate children’s educational environments, and guardians and people responsible for the process of supporting child development at the local government level should cooperate closely. The postulate expressed here is related to the concept of “Communities of practice,” expressing the acceptance of “specific cultural practices (norms, rules, values, goals, tasks) used in specific social groups connected by a common idea” (Karwowska-Struczyk, 2012: 15). The main idea of a modern kindergarten should be concern for “well-being,” which can be understood as “realization of children’s rights and guaranteeing each of them the opportunity to become who they can become in the light of their abilities, potentials and skills” (Karwowska-Struczyk, 2012: 15). In a modern, safe and progress-fostering kindergarten, the aim is for teachers, parents and children to become members of a learning, concrete community in which mutual exchange takes place on topics important to them. Such a community nature also means the need to integrate the activities of various institutions related to the kindergarten and support it.

Taking up the views of Karwowska-Struczyk and other present-day Polish educators dealing with non-directive education of young children (Karwowska-Struczyk, 2012; Telka, 2017), it is worth reaching for a participation strategy which assumes the co-participation of three protagonists who become part of the space of this education. Children experience this participation by actively constructing knowledge and assigning and negotiating meanings on

their own. Adults participate through a willingness to engage in a pedagogical project and dialogue through which educators and parents together, while engaged in everyday educational activities, develop guidelines for early childhood education standards, thus building a culture of childhood. This type of perception of pre-school education fits into the trend of constructivism, based on the assumption that children build their knowledge independently in integration with the social environment. Although the Polish kindergarten is still far from the solutions developed in the Scandinavian countries or northern Italy, certain trends in accompanying development are gradually starting to penetrate Poland's alternative kindergartens, and they also appear primarily in Polish scientific discourse on early education.

In summary, it should be noted that kindergarten education is a way of equalizing educational opportunities in society and an indicator of adults' attitudes towards childhood and its value for individual and community life. Kindergarten is also intended as a place for the child to function safely, where the child's elementary developmental needs should be met, and then fulfil the need to belong to a group, respect, acceptance, recognition, and finally, what is broadly understood as self-fulfilment.

3.3. The current core curriculum for pre-school education

There is no doubt today that pre-school education should focus on supporting the harmonious development of innate predispositions of all spheres of a child's personality: physical, mental, intellectual, moral, and spiritual, and the child "should acquire knowledge about himself and his surroundings in the course of his activity, with the participation of adults and peers" (Lubowiecka, 2012: 350). In the education of young children at present, both at the level of its theoretical assumptions and their practical implementation, the subjectivity of the child as a developing person is visible. As Józefa Bałachowicz (2009: 25) points out, "human subjectivity, subjective 'being in the world', shaping the subjective existence of a human being is the central issue of education. The problem of humanity in its subjective dimension constitutes for pedagogy a fundamental and, at the same time, normative matrix for reflecting on the problem of human development and its educational context. In this context, it is extremely important to "involve the child early in the systematic process of constructing their subjectivity and creating relationships with others in a planned and organized educational environment" (Bałachowicz, 2017: 50). Those driving the changes in the education system

base this assumption on the child's subjectivity. Annex No. 1 to the Regulation of the Minister of National Education of 2017 refers to the new curriculum framework for kindergartens, pre-school classes in primary schools and other forms of pre-school education, indicating the purpose of pre-school education, preventive and educational tasks of the kindergarten, and the effects of implementing the tasks in the form of goals achieved by children at the end of pre-school education. In the reformed education system, it was assumed that the primary goal of education at the kindergarten level is to support the overall development of the child through a properly organized process of care, upbringing and teaching-learning, enabling the child to "discover their capabilities, the meaning of action and gather experience on the path leading to truth, goods and beauty. As a result of such support, the child becomes mature enough to start learning at the first stage of education" (Journal of Laws of 2016, item 356: 2). Therefore, we see the child as a person developing and gaining experience. The key task of a modern kindergarten is to support the overall development of the child, "whose activity is expressed in three forms: learning what is true, doing good and shaping beauty" (Curriculum for pre-school education and general education for primary school with commentary. Pre-school education and early school education). The specific tasks of the kindergarten include:

- Supporting the child's multidirectional activity by organizing conditions conducive to acquiring experiences in the physical, emotional, social and cognitive areas of development;
- Creating conditions enabling children to develop freely, play and relax;
- Supporting activities that increase the child's level of sensory integration and the ability to use developing cognitive processes;
- Ensuring the proper organization of conditions conducive to children's acquisition of experiences, which will allow them to continue the adaptation processes and help children develop in a disharmonious, slower or accelerated way;
- Supporting children's independent exploration of the world, selecting content appropriate to the child's level of development, perceptual abilities, imagination and reasoning, respecting individual needs and interests;
- Strengthening the child's sense of value, individuality, originality and the need to create personal relationships and participate in a group;
- Creating situations conducive to the development of habits and behaviours leading to independence, care for health, mobility and safety, including road safety;

- Preparing to understand emotions and feelings of oneself and other people, and taking care of mental health, for instance, using natural situations occurring in kindergarten and task situations, taking into account content appropriate for the intellectual capabilities and development expectations of children;
- Creating educational situations that reinforce the child's sensitivity, including aesthetic sensitivity, about many spheres of human activity: speech, behaviour, movement, environment, clothing, music, dance, singing, theatre, art;
- Creating conditions enabling safe, independent exploration of nature surrounding the child, stimulating the development of sensitivity and enabling learning of values and norms relating to the natural environment, appropriate to the child's stage of development;
- Creating conditions enabling safe, independent exploration of elements and techniques in the environment, constructing, tinkering, planning and taking intentional action, presenting the products of your work;
- Cooperation with parents, various environments, organizations and institutions recognised by parents as a source of important values, to create conditions enabling the child's identity to develop;
- Creating, together with the above-mentioned entities, situations leading to the child gaining knowledge about values and social norms, the sources of which are the family, the kindergarten group, and other adults, including older people, and the development of behaviours resulting from the values that can be understood at this stage of development;
- Systematic supplementation, with the parents' consent, of the educational content with new issues resulting from changes and phenomena in the child's environment that are important for his or her safety and harmonious development;
- Systematic support for developing the child's learning mechanisms, leading to them reaching a level enabling them to start school;
- Organizing classes according to needs that enable the child to learn the culture and language of a national or ethnic minority or a regional language – Kashubian;
- Creating educational situations conducive to stimulating the child's interest in a modern foreign language and the desire to learn about other cultures (Journal of Laws of 2017, item 356: 2–3).

These principles constitute an attempt to apply the latest theoretical concepts in educational practice at the kindergarten level, e.g. the concept of social learning, developmental tasks, learning through experience, constructing a sys-

tem of individual knowledge, learning through experience, the concept of multiple intelligences, etc. It is clear that the role of free activity and unrestricted play is acknowledged, and there is a belief that the world appears to young children as “a kind of paradise holiday, inaccessible in its mysterious details to adults, which is why they use a specific code of children’s language (Dymara, 2009: 35), “a child should have time to freely develop their interests and have a moment of carefree fun” (Kaczmarek, Lewicka, 2014: 78). Moreover, “if a child is to play for his or her own benefit, he or she must have a rich life, many experiences and experiences” (Brzezińska, Janszewska-Rain, 2005: 37). The core curriculum covers this topic as follows: “play develops the child’s cognitive expectations in this area and is the best methodological solution that favours his or her development” (Journal of Laws of 2017, item 356: 8). At the same time, in everyday educational practice, “play is still downplayed, our general approach to it is not so different from the way it appeared in older traditions. We constantly attribute a higher value to learning, school and work, i.e. the activity of adolescents and adults” (Waloszek, 2009: 68). This can be seen in the underlying principles of the new core curriculum, which emphasize that kindergarten plays an important role in the process of preparing a child to undertake compulsory schooling, and the child is ready to cross the school threshold in all areas of development: physical, motor, emotional, social and cognitive. As the provisions of the Act put it, kindergarten is a time filled with fun, which, under the supervision of specialists, creates a field of developmental experiences that build school maturity. Teachers pay attention to the need to create appropriate motor habits in children, which will be necessary to start learning at school, as well as the role of multi-sensory cognition (Journal of Laws of 2017, item 356: 9). The expectations for a child finishing pre-school education are reduced to mastering several skills and abilities, for example:

- a child finishing pre-school education performs activities such as cleaning, packing, holding objects with one hand and both hands and small objects using appropriately shaped;
- in terms of emotional development, “a child prepared to start school notices that not all emotions and feelings can be the basis for taking immediate action, and thus controls unpleasant emotions, e.g. when waiting for one’s turn in a game or other situation” (Diary Act of February 24, 2017, item 356):
- in the social area “uses polite phrases when greeting, saying goodbye, situations requiring an apology and accepting the consequences of one’s behaviour” (Journal of Laws of 2017, item 356);
- a child at the threshold of school education “distinguishes elements of the world of fiction from real reality...”;

- “recognises letters in which he is interested as a result of play and spontaneous discoveries, reads short words composed of learned letters in the form of printed inscriptions regarding content applicable in everyday activity” (Journal of Laws of 2017, item 356);
- answers questions, talks about events from kindergarten, explains the sequence of events in simple picture stories, composes picture stories, recites poems, arranges and solves puzzles; performs linguistic experiments, gives meaning to actions, names them, creates linguistic and situational jokes, listens carefully and gives meaning to experiences;
- experiments with rhythm, voice, sounds and movement, developing their musical imagination; listens to, plays and creates music, sings songs, moves with and to music, notices changes like music, e.g. dynamics, tempo and pitch, and expresses it with movement, responds to signals, makes music using instruments and other sound sources; sings songs from the children’s repertoire and easy folk songs;
- willingly participates in collective music-making, expresses emotions and non-musical phenomena through various means of musical activity; actively listens to music, performs or recognises melodies, songs and chants;
- “lists the name of his country and its capital, recognises national symbols (emblem, flag, anthem), names selected symbols related to the regions of Poland hidden in tales, proverbs, legends, fairy tales, e.g. about the Wawel Dragon, realizes that Poland is one of the countries of the European Union”;
- “expresses creative expression during construction activities and play, manages the space, giving meaning to the objects placed in it, determines their location, number, shape, size, weight, compares objects in the child’s environment based on selected features; classifies objects according to: size, shape, colour, purpose, arranges objects into groups, rows, rhythms, recreates arrangements of objects and creates their own, giving them meaning, distinguishes basic geometric figures (circle, square, triangle, rectangle); experiments, estimates, predicts, measures the length of objects, e.g. using a hand, foot, shoe; determines directions and determines the position of objects in relation to oneself and in relation to other objects, distinguishes left and right sides; counts elements of sets while playing, cleaning, exercising and performing other activities, uses cardinal and ordinal numbers, recognises digits from 0 to 10, experiments with creating numbers that follow, performs addition and subtraction in practical situations, counts objects, distinguishes incorrect count-

ing from correct; uses concepts related to the sequence of time in play and during other activities, e.g. yesterday, today, tomorrow, morning, evening, including the names of seasons, days of the week and months; recognises models of coins and banknotes of low denominations, organizes them, understands what money is used for in the household” (Journal of Laws of 2017, item 356);

- “uses concepts related to natural phenomena, e.g. rainbow, rain, storm, leaves falling from trees, seasonal migration of birds, flowering trees, freezing of water, nature, e.g. mushrooms, fruits, herbs” (Journal of Laws of 2017, item 356);
- “understands very simple commands in a modern foreign language and responds to them; participates in games, e.g. music, movement, art, construction, theatre; uses words and phrases relevant to a given game or other activities undertaken; repeats rhymes and simple poems, sings songs in a group; understands the general meaning of short stories told or read when they are supported, for example, with pictures, props, movement, facial expressions, gestures; responds to a simple command in the language of a national or ethnic minority, uses words and phrases that are important in play and other activities: repeats rhymes and simple poems, sings songs; understands the general meaning of short stories told or read, supported by e.g. a picture, prop, gesture; knows the emblem (symbol) of his or her national or ethnic community; responds to a simple command in the regional language – Kashubian, uses words and phrases that are important in play and other activities: repeats rhymes and simple poems, sings songs; understands the general meaning of short stories told or read, supported by e.g. a picture, prop, gesture; knows the emblem (symbol) of his regional community – Kashubian” (Journal of Laws of 2017, item 356).

To sum up the aspect of a child’s achievements in the sphere of cognitive development, it should be said that the material that a child has to master in kindergarten is quite wide and diverse, often imprecisely defined and requiring very thorough consideration from the teacher when planning their work with the child.

It also seems that while the Ministry of National Education recommends the child’s freedom and focuses on play, the expectations in terms of cognitive competencies are quite high.

Pre-school education in Poland is in a process of dynamic changes and clashing concepts. Several inconsistencies can be noticed in educational practice. On the one hand, we want to create conditions for the child’s comprehen-

sive, unrestricted development, and on the other, we try to direct this development. We consider play to be the most desirable form of activity, at the same time giving higher priority to educational activity, leading to a predetermined goal being achieved. While assuming that the child has the right to develop at his or her own pace, at the same time we try to accelerate this development. We say that a child has the right to make mistakes because these are the driving force of their development, but at the same time, we criticize these mistakes and expect the child to “fit in” with the only correct model of functioning. We forget that during this period of human development so much can be created, but so much can also be broken. Therefore, regardless of the changing canons of children’s education, the most important thing is and will remain a smart and sensitive teacher: a teacher who listens to children and their needs.

3.4. The pre-school teacher – discussion about the profession

Among the professions with the highest level of social trust are teachers (Research International Pentor) and kindergarten teachers (“Yes” to children). This emphasizes the missionary nature of this profession. However, reports indicate that the rank of this profession has changed over time. In the 1960s and 1970s, teachers had the second-third place in social prestige. Their position decreased in the 1980s and 1990s to fifteenth place in the occupational ranking (Szkoda, 2006: 37). Currently, public opinion believes that people performing this profession have an important task to fulfil, which might even be termed a ‘mission’, an activity aimed at “providing help, meeting the basic needs of other people, ensuring a sense of physical and health security, as well as providing people with basic skills or knowledge enabling them to function properly in society” (Czerw, Borkowska, 2010: 304). The assumptions of this profession being a mission, in the common opinion, include openness to the needs of other people and readiness to serve them. Carrying out the tasks arising from the profession of a pre-school teacher requires a high level of readiness to respond to the needs of other people and high motivation. The missionary nature of this profession can be seen from the very beginning of the profession’s existence: initially, children were cared for by ‘protectors’, then by educators, and finally by kindergarten teachers.

Over the two hundred years since the first kindergartens were founded in Poland, the tasks of people working in kindergartens have changed: from caring for and protecting children, then educational tasks, supporting the children’s

parents and legal guardians, to what are broadly understood as educational, diagnostic, preventive and therapeutic, advisory, animating and other tasks. Currently, the most important task of kindergarten teachers is to prepare children to function in the world that surrounds them, which is constantly changing in a way that is difficult to predict. Modern children must learn to function in a dynamically changing reality, in a world of fluid, unstable relationships, and in virtual reality. The task of a kindergarten teacher is therefore much more difficult and complex than simply preparing the child to cope with school tasks and successfully (painlessly) cross the threshold of school, as is commonly believed. Preparing a person for a responsible life, for the challenges of the modern and future world, begins at the earliest stage of education – in kindergarten. It is therefore hardly surprising that in the pedagogical literature, there is the concept of “teacher’s duties” related to “introducing the child to the world of socio-natural phenomena, helping the child to be subjectively sensitive to it” (Czaja-Chudyba, Muchacka, 2016: 16).

Roberta Fulghum (2008) very aptly comments on the educational tasks of kindergartens and the role of people working there from the perspective of an individual’s lifelong development:

“I learned everything I need to know about how to live, what to do and how to act in kindergarten. Wisdom was not at the pinnacle of knowledge acquired in high school but in the sandbox of Sunday school. There I learned that you have to: share everything, act honestly, not hit others, put away everything you find, clean up after yourself, not take anything that doesn’t belong to you, say “I’m sorry” if you offended someone, wash your hands before eating, drain the water, eat warm rolls and drink cold milk, lead a balanced life, study a little and think a little, paint and draw and sing and dance and play and do a little work every day, take a nap in the afternoon A when you leave the house, watch your movements, keep your hands and stick to your side, and notice how wonderful everything around you is [...]. Also remember this important word, one of the first you learned: LOOK. Everything you need to know exists somewhere. Unquestionable rules and love and care for hygiene. Ecology and politics, equality for all, and healthy life.

A child in kindergarten does not gain these important experiences by being left alone: someone creates the conditions for development the child’s innate potential; someone creates the conditions and opportunities for cooperation and interaction with peers and adults; someone ensures safety during activities undertaken by the child individually and together with other children; someone inspires, intrigues, and motivates children to act and overcome difficulties; someone supports, someone explains and answers questions arising in

the child's mind; someone comforts the child when they experience difficult moments such as missing their loved ones. The list of requirements for kindergarten teachers is constantly growing.

Among the important competencies of teachers working in kindergartens, Krystyna Żuchelkowska (2015; 2007) lists specialist, didactic, psychological, social, axiological, praxeological, communication, cooperation, creative and IT competencies. The newly published standard of education preparing for the profession of a kindergarten and early education teacher (also in the previously applicable standards) emphasizes the need for comprehensive preparation for the profession, which includes the candidate's mastery of the basic knowledge in the field of philosophy, psychology, sociology and work methodology. with the child (in the field of Polish studies, mathematics, social and natural sciences, health, art, music, technology, physical education and foreign language teaching methodology), knowledge of the basics of the law, knowledge of the structure and functions of the education system, issues of inclusive education, issues of intercultural education, principles of occupational health and safety in educational, upbringing and care institutions, pedagogical innovations and social communication processes. A kindergarten teacher is also expected to have the competencies in recognising children's individual needs, capabilities and talents, efficiently diagnosing threatening factors and identifying the risk of future school failures, using information and communication technologies effectively in performing teaching tasks, identifying and arousing children's interests, providing first aid, etc. (Regulation of the Minister of Science and Higher Education of July 25, 2019).

A kindergarten teacher should be a reflective practitioner, show readiness for self-development, work on themselves, self-evaluation, making internal changes, etc. Such teachers should be able to work in teams of teachers and with a group of children, including ones with special educational needs, as well as being able to cooperate with parents and guardians of children's legal rights, specialists, school teachers, and people from the immediate local community. These are just some of the duties and tasks that kindergarten teachers assume and perform daily. For some of them, according to Danuta Waloszek (2015), taking on teaching tasks and responsibilities results from an internally felt calling and satisfaction resulting from contact with children, satisfaction in general, with the felt pleasure of contact with a young person. A vocation is "a conviction about choosing the best path for oneself, which may have a biographical basis (e.g. a teaching family), but can be awakened in a person. For most of the teachers surveyed by the above-mentioned author, such a category as the vocation to be a kindergarten teacher does not exist" (Waloszek,

2015: 162). The most important tasks of this professional role undoubtedly result from the fact that parents and guardians entrust their children – the most important person for parents – to teachers. The term “entrust” comes from the word “trust” – believe someone, place your faith in someone, give them your trust (Długosz-Kurczabowa, 2008: 706). Society places trust in the professional and personal competencies of teachers. The results of the report assessing the professional integrity of Poles indicate that teachers are a profession of high public trust (http://www.tnsglobal.pl/archiwumraportow/files/2019/04/K.016_Zawody-spo%C5%82eczny-zaufania_O004a-19.pdf). Also in the report prepared by KANTAR, we read: “A teacher (as well as a doctor) is one of the professions deserving social respect” (http://www.tnsglobal.pl/archiwumraportow/files/2019/04/K.016_Zawody-spo%C5%82eczny-zaufania_O004a-19.pdf). As the authors of another report add, teaching is one of the professions with a high level of social prestige. In the hierarchy of prestigious professions (it is a matter of social usefulness rather than respect, and esteem, and certainly not taking into account economic prestige and the associated comfort of life of people performing it), the teacher was placed higher than the doctor, after the nurse and engineer in a factory. The first place in this ranking is taken by a firefighter (CBOS. “Prestige of the profession. Research announcement. Public Opinion Research Center”. [cbos.pl](https://www.cbos.pl), 2013, https://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2013/K_164_13.PDF). Interestingly, the high position of this profession has been recorded at a similarly high level since 1991 (Do- mański et al., 2010). It is also worth emphasizing that teachers are perceived as highly qualified people who derive satisfaction from their work, but also as people with an impeccable moral and ethical attitude (CBOS. “Prestige of professions. Research announcement. Public Opinion Research Centre”. [cbos.pl](https://www.cbos.pl), 2013, https://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2013/K_164_13.PDF). In the opinion of Poles, the work of a teacher is difficult and stressful, which is why one-third of them would not want their children to pursue this profession (Walczak, 2010: 99). According to Anna Tyl, based on her research, regardless of the stage of education, teachers rate the prestige of their profession lower than representatives of the medical community (Tyl, 2016: 31). This problem does not apply only to Polish reality. Anna Krasnodębska points out that in the United States, low earnings and the low social status of this profession make it the domain of women (Tyl, 2016: 194). Teachers themselves value the most those among their group who “teach secondary school leaving examinations in general secondary schools located in large cities, work in schools whose students achieve high results in external examinations” (Walczak, 2016: 108; Smak, Walczak, 2015: 24).

The social prestige of a kindergarten teacher is lower than that of a teacher at other stages of education, not only among teachers but also in the perception of people not associated with this profession. Opinions and stereotypical beliefs on this subject are adopted and internalized by the youngest children, which can be illustrated by the following statement by a pre-school-age child:

“I wouldn’t want to be a kindergarten teacher there. It’s a bit like that at school, because there you can give grades, even bad ones, and then the kids get scared and calm down, but in kindergarten, you can’t do that anymore and that’s why sometimes the kids walk all over you. And there’s no conversation at all because they don’t hire guys in kindergarten, do they? I don’t know any who deal with kids. I could be a director” (Waloszek, 2015: 5).

The authors of an article published in “Gazeta Prawna” place kindergarten teachers among professions with a high level of social trust, albeit lower than teachers teaching at school. They write about the social role of this profession as follows:

“It is a treasure for the parents of their children. Putting your children in the care of strangers is stressful and raises numerous concerns. Therefore, before a parent decides to entrust his or her child to the care of one or another kindergarten, he or she carefully checks the reputation of the institution ... The work of a kindergarten teacher is quite stressful and involves a lot of responsibility. That is why this profession is almost exclusively filled with people who like working with small children” (Yes to children. “No” to caregivers. Pre-schoolers are leaving their jobs.” *GazetaPrawna.pl*, August 12, 2019).

This is one of many examples of kindergarten teachers being perceived as people who “like children.”¹ The attention of public opinion and, unfortunately, also of teachers themselves overlooks the responsibility for children and their optimal development, which should be seen as a source of prestige, according to the principle: the greater the responsibility, the greater the prestige. In the case of this profession, it is difficult to talk about prestige; there is only duty and obligations. Entrusting a child to someone else is associated with the belief that this person is responsible for the child placed in their care.² However, it is not only a question of the child’s safety, although in the hierarchy of needs, meeting the need for safety is of fundamental importance. Adopting a small child means accepting responsibility (responsibility taken by the teacher) for a PERSON who has their own unique potential, preferences, experiences, and habits, who

¹ Relatively few studies refer only to kindergarten teachers as a homogeneous, specific professional group. Researchers are more often part of a broader group of teachers, elementary education, and often in this group they are treated marginally.

² When taking a child into care, the teacher becomes legally responsible.

has a specific inner world and the closest one surrounding them. This means accepting responsibility for what the child will experience for most of the day, in conditions different from those at home. As Otto Speck (2005) puts it, drawing on Robert Spearmann: “responsibility for another person is justified by the human right to be perceived by every other rational being not only as an object but as a resource” (Speck, 2005: 215).

The teacher assumes responsibility for a child who cannot recognise their many needs and is not always able to effectively communicate what they needs. Children enter the kindergarten space with individual experiences, habits and coping strategies that often turn out to be ineffective in the new environment. By accompanying and observing children, the teacher becomes responsible for recognising and realizing their needs and potential, and for making new situations emotionally and physically safe. The teacher assumes responsibility for each child, his or her well-being and relationships with other children in the group, for the entire (often large) group entrusted to them, and for the children’s development. The category of a sense of responsibility for a child is indicated by kindergarten teachers as crucial (Waloszek, 2015: 164).

It should be noted that other facts about kindergarten teachers also escape the attention of public opinion. These facts include intellectual and educational capital.

Zbigniew Kwieciński (2000) emphasizes: “education and development of teachers with new, different competencies than before: in the sense of content – more inclusive than highly specialized, more open than closed, more creative than reproductive, and in the sense of the nature of the professional role – moving away from the function of a transmitter and enforcer to the role of a guide and translator” (Kwieciński, 2000: 17).

Kindergarten teachers are comprehensively and interdisciplinarily prepared for their professional role during higher education. As noted by researchers such as Halina Dmochowska (2009: 79), master’s degree holders should have solid theoretical preparation of an interdisciplinary nature, possess the skills to conduct scientific research, notice and solve theoretical and practical problems, and should be focused on pro-social activities and self-education.

Graduates of particular fields of study and specializations providing qualifications for employment and kindergarten are employed under the Regulation of the Minister of National Education on detailed qualifications. The majority of professionally active teachers and kindergarten teachers (as well as teachers of grades I–III) have also completed postgraduate studies, e.g. in the field of speech therapy, pedagogical therapy, education management, care and educational pedagogy, and early support for child development. Leokadia Wiatrow-

ska indicates that these teachers believe in the need for permanent education. She notes that: “the high degree of acceptance and understanding of the idea of continuing education among teachers proves their great awareness of teachers, whose duty is to update their knowledge, be innovative in teaching and educational work and enrich their skills” (Wiatrowska, 2009: 96). The research results of Jolanta Andrzejewska published in 2001 indicate that 66% of kindergarten teaching staff had participated in numerous courses and workshops organized by professional development institutions and methodological advisors in the previous two years, and the choice of courses resulted from social and professional needs (Andrzejewska, 2001: 100). As Piotr Sztompka (2016) writes, “greater knowledge arouses curiosity, raises more new questions and prompts us to seek even more knowledge” (Sztompka, 2016: 283).

Therefore, teachers undertake systematic self-education and professional development, often participating in several forms at the same time (e.g. Wiatrowska, 2009: 96) in line with Peter M. Senge’s concept of a learning organization, whose employees look for new opportunities to achieve the desired results, create new patterns of non-stereotypical thinking, develop in teamwork, and constantly learn.

The discourse on building social capital increasingly emphasizes the importance of “numerous grassroots, voluntary associations, clubs, social movements and non-governmental organizations” (Sztompka, 2016: 293). Kindergarten teachers are individuals with a high level of social involvement regarding both children and their parents (Bulera, Żuchelkowska, 2002: 147–163), actively involved in local communities, involved in many events (with the participation of parents, grandparents, representatives of institutions local), and actively influencing mental and socio-cultural changes in the kindergarten environment. Teachers create networks of interpersonal relationships, which mean mutual obligations oriented around the implementation of a common idea, or a common goal (e.g. enriching the collections of the local library, supporting an animal shelter, cleaning the surrounding meadow, etc.). Research conducted by Anna Schmidt as part of the “Pre-schoolers at the University” project implemented at the Faculty of Educational Studies shows that kindergarten teachers systematically cooperate with institutions located in the vicinity of the facility, creating a “learning” educational space for the child and his family.³

³ The institutions with which teachers most often cooperate include fire brigade, police, psycho-pedagogical clinics, emergency medical services, local shops, libraries, theatres, museums, social welfare centres and family assistance centres, other kindergartens, post office, municipal police, cinema, local pharmacy, community centres, social welfare homes, city and

This network is not only rich but also diverse and takes into account the specific resources of the local environment. This fact is also confirmed by Jolanta Andrzejewska, who writes that kindergarten teachers “working with children in their free time organize poetry meetings, children’s concerts, art exhibitions, musical performances or sports events for local communities” (Andrzejewska, 2001: 101). In this way, kindergarten teachers contribute to the creation of bonding capital – tightening bonds between members of the community, but also to acquiring new resources and creating bridging capital (Mikiewicz, 2016: 287).

The report “Future of skills: Employment 2030” shows that the skills sought in the future will primarily include interpersonal, social and cognitive skills (“Future of skills. Employment 2030”. Pearson.com, <https://futureskills.pearson.com/research/assets/pdfs/technical-report.pdf>). These skills are available to teachers and kindergarten teachers (Uszyńska-Jarmoc, 2015: 134–145; Lubowiecka, 2012: 341–361) who create the everyday educational life of children aged 3 to 6 (Soroka-Fedorczuk, 2012: 370–380).

Prospective industry sectors include professions related to education (“Future of skills. Employment 2030”. Pearson.com, <https://futureskills.pearson.com/research/assets/pdfs/technical-report.pdf>). It will be particularly difficult to replace people involved in early education. Despite the intensive development of modern technologies, it seems unlikely that it will be possible to replace a kindergarten teacher with her or his technological equivalent. While in other industries the use of robots instead of people seems likely even in the foreseeable future, it is difficult to imagine a machine performing tasks currently assigned to a person working with a small child. However, kindergarten teacher is not only a profession of the future: it is a profession that is in short supply today. Jobs are waiting for teachers and kindergarten teachers. Since January 2019, superintendents’ websites have included announcements indicating that there is a shortage of approximately 1,400 pre-school teachers throughout the country (Biszewska, 2019). The cities and voivodeships looking for professionals to work in kindergartens include Cracow (Rzepecka, 2019), Warsaw (Raducha, 2019) and the Masovian Voivodeship, which lacks 400 teachers. In Silesia and the Małopolska (Lesser Poland) Voivodeship, 200 teachers are sought to work in kindergartens. There are 160 vacancies in the Lower Silesian Voivodeship (Biszewska, 2019). Information about the transition of teachers from kindergartens to primary schools is widely

commune offices, nearby schools, foundations and associations, housing estate councils, etc. (A. Schmidt (2019). Unpublished doctoral dissertation: 199).

reaching public opinion. Are they pursuing greater prestige? I believe that in this profession there is no shortage of “dedicated missionaries of knowledge” (Juszczak, 2009: 75), who want to carry out their mission well, but also want to be respected and appreciated. Some of them try to confront new challenges, make decisions focused on individual development, and escape from “the impression of professional stagnation and the overwhelming repetition of activities” (Wawrzyniak-Beszterda, 2019: 154–155). Of course, there are those in this group who will seek greater prestige, respect, social recognition and the resulting sense of fulfilment.

3.5. Education of children's teachers in the light of legal foundations in the 21st century

Teachers in a modern kindergarten faces numerous challenges – they not only perform caring and educational functions, but are also teachers and observers of their pupils' progress, often becoming the first diagnostician of possible developmental disharmonies, thus the shape and direction of work in the child's educational environment largely depends on his or her competence.

Kindergarten teachers educated through higher education and (until 2019) also postgraduate studies acquire competencies in the basics of pedagogy and psychology, implemented several specific methodologies, develop their general professional culture, achieving educational outcomes specified in the education standards preparing for the teaching profession. The standards that operated until 2019 were stipulated in the annexe to the regulation of the Minister of Science and Higher Education of January 17, 2012 (Standards of Education Preparing for the teaching profession, annexe to the Regulation of the Minister of Science and Higher Education of January 17, 2012).

These standards were created as a result of cooperation between the Ministry of Science and Higher Education and the Ministry of National Education (MNiSW and MEN) and were developed by the then-applicable teacher education standards in the European Union countries, and they also precisely defined the qualification framework of the future pedagogue – teacher.

According to the above document from the Ministry of Science and Higher Education and the Ministry of National Education, after completing education and preparing for the teaching profession, the graduate: has psychological and pedagogical knowledge allowing for understanding the processes of development, socialization, upbringing and teaching-learning; has knowledge of didactics and detailed methodology of pedagogical activity,

supported by experience in its practical use; has the skills and competences necessary for the comprehensive implementation of the school's teaching, educational and care tasks, including independent preparation and adaptation of the teaching programme to the needs and capabilities of pupils. In the area of skills, a teacher graduate can learn and improve his or her teaching skills using modern means and methods of acquiring, organizing and processing information and materials; communicating skilfully employing various techniques, both with people who are the subjects of pedagogical activity and with other people cooperating in the teaching and educational process and specialists supporting this process; is characterized by ethical sensitivity, empathy, openness, reflectivity, pro-social attitudes and a sense of responsibility; is practically prepared to carry out professional tasks (teaching, educational and caring) resulting from the role of a teacher.

As part of the preparation for the tasks required in pre-school education, the document specified in detail the following areas of knowledge:

- developmental profile of the child in post-infancy, pre-school and early school age (physical and motor development, development of cognitive processes, i.e. thinking, speech, perception, attention, memory, social-emotional and moral development, lateralization, development of body side, models of lateralization);
- play as the basic form of a child's activity (types of play, role of adults in the child's play activity);
- pre-school and early school pedagogy as subdisciplines of pedagogy – their goals, tasks and functions (new doctrines and paradigms in early school pedagogy, principles, methods and forms of care and educational work with children at pre-school and early school age, respect for the child's dignity);
- adaptation of the child in kindergarten and school (preparing the child to learn at school, compulsory schoolwork, independence and dependency of the child at pre-school and early school age, socialization of the child, child in the peer group, social position of the child in the group, camaraderie and friendship, conflicts between children);
- care and educational work with children in kindergarten and school (curriculum, health education, preventive programmes, education for harmonious cooperation with peers, including those with different physical and intellectual capabilities, and adults, developing children's social skills necessary to establish proper relationships, being with others, integration, developing children's self-service skills, hygienic and cultural habits, developing emotional resilience);

- disharmonies and developmental disorders in children and their functioning in the peer group (behaviour disorders, shy and hyperactive child);
- school maturity (concept, components, diagnosis, controversies);
- children's safety in kindergarten, school and outside their premises (field activities, trips, child health protection, education for safety – caring for one's safety and that of others);
- cooperation between the kindergarten and the school with the community and the teacher with the children's parents.

The teacher training process also took into account a rather important issue related to the differentiation of work methodologies in kindergarten and school. This was because it was assumed that work with a pre-school-age child should be based on play, so that the child, in an atmosphere of feeling safe, acquires not only cognitive school readiness but above all emotional and social readiness, because this is at the threshold of teaching in the first grades will allow for maintaining openness to the challenges posed by the school curriculum.

It should be mentioned that teachers were (and still are) prepared to provide a 'pre-school diagnosis' – a diagnosis of children's development. Nowadays, this diagnosis also covers all children who turn five years old in a given year and six-year-old children. Based on the results of this diagnosis, the kindergarten teacher develops and implements an individual programme to support the child's development. The purpose of analysing the child's development is also to collect information to help parents learn about their child's readiness to start primary school so that they can effectively support them in achieving this readiness.

The new Regulation of the Minister of Science and Higher Education of July 25, 2019, on education preparing for the teaching profession (Journal of Laws of 2019, item 1450) defines the framework for educating early childhood teachers, but only those who are to become employees of kindergartens and schools, and not nurseries – “The standard applies to education preparing for the profession of a teacher of kindergarten and early school education (grades I–III of primary school) conducted during studies in the field of pre-school and early school pedagogy...” (Regulation of the Minister of Science and Higher Education of July 25, 2019, on the standard of education preparing for the teaching profession, Journal of Laws of 2019, item 1450: 27). One of the issues indicated in Appendix 2 concerns the group of classes entitled: “Psychological and pedagogical preparation.” In this group, we find the following items:

- basics of pedagogical activities;
- pre-school and early school pedagogy;

- basics of psychology for teachers;
- psychological and pedagogical basis for teaching children a foreign language (Regulation of the Minister of Science and Higher Education of July 25, 2019, on the standard of education preparing for the teaching profession (Journal of Laws of 2019, item 1450: 28).

At this point in the document, as well as throughout the standard, broad concepts are used, i.e. “pedagogy,” and “education.” However, what is puzzling is the fact that when describing the area related to a foreign language (even though according to the current core curriculum for pre-school education, the teacher does not teach a foreign language but creates conditions for the child to be interested in a foreign language and the culture of other countries), the word used was not “education” but “teaching,” which would suggest a much narrower scope of tasks that the teacher would perform for the child.

Another issue that prompts reflections is the inclusion in the module “Substantive preparation of teachers of kindergartens and grades I–III of primary school, as preparation for the integration of teaching content” of individual areas of knowledge (and art), which can be misinterpreted as the document’s authors departing from the concept of integrated teaching for subject education. In this module, we find Polish language, mathematics, foreign language, social and natural education, IT, art, music, physical education and health education (Regulation of the Minister of Science and Higher Education of July 25, 2019, on the standard of education preparing to perform teaching profession, Journal of Laws of 2019, item 1450: 27).

Another issue of note is the content of the 4,000-hour module entitled “Supporting the development of children of pre-school and younger school age.” This includes detailed learning outcomes are achieved, but the authors do not define the classes themselves during which the outcomes are to be achieved.

When looking at overall learning outcomes, it can sometimes seem difficult to correlate these with the groups of activities detailed in the document. A student who becomes an early education teacher knows and understands, for example, “contemporary interdisciplinary Childhood Studies regarding the issue of child well-being; main educational environments, their specifics and processes taking place in them; the structure and functions of the education system and alternative forms of education” (Regulation of the Minister of Science and Higher Education of July 25, 2019, on the standard of education, preparing for the teaching profession, Journal of Laws of 2019, item 1450: 32). However, it is difficult to determine which forms of education are currently considered alternative and which traditional.

The part of the document describing learning outcomes also mentions “the importance and possibility of purposeful and diverse use of play in the process of raising and educating children.” However, an inexperienced and more directive teacher will not feel the need to introduce games into the education of a child at pre-school or early school age, because “fun” is not specified in the standard (in the subject groups).

Moreover, the standards do not include groups of classes or modules related to the education of a child up to three years of age. This solution does not seem to be a completely appropriate, because under the Act of February 4, 2011 on the care of children up to three years of age, pre-school teachers and early school education teachers qualifications to work with children in nurseries, toddler clubs and other forms are specified in the document (Act of February 4, 2011 on the care of children up to 3 years of age, Journal of Laws of 2011, No. 45, item 235). The lack of classes on the methodology of working children in early childhood may result in inadequate preparation of teacher training graduates to work in nurseries and toddler clubs.

It also seems that the regulation on teacher education is not always in line with the regulation of the Ministry of National Education on the Core Curriculum for pre-school education and primary school education (<https://www.ore.edu.pl/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/wyowanie-przedszkolne-i-edukacja-cz-ensnoszkolna.-pp-z-komentarzem.pdf>).

The commentary included in the document posted on the website of the Education Development Centre, which cooperates closely with the Ministry of National Education, contains a broad commentary presenting the philosophy of the authors of the regulation. This commentary concerns the general purpose of pre-school education and early school education, referring to the essence of organizing the child development process in the context of the phenomenological concept of man. The commentary states that kindergarten and school together support the overall development of the child, whose activity is expressed in three forms: learning what is true, doing good and creating beauty. The main goals also refer to the child as a subject of education – a person discovering their possibilities and the meaning of their actions. Education in kindergarten and grades I–III is therefore focused on the holistic development of the child. Its goal, highlighted in the initial provisions of the core curriculum, emphasizes the child's subjectivity in the education process, assigning kindergartens and schools the obligation to respect this approach.

In the Polish magazine “*Życie Szkoły*,” Dorota Dziamska, one of the authors of the current regulation on pre-school education and education in grades I–III

of primary school, emphasizes that the applicable core curriculum is based on the phenomenological concept of man (Dziamska, 2019). At the beginning, the following words are quoted:

“Man is a part of nature ‘he begins to live beyond the state of his strength and his natural nature, he creates a new world, a new reality around himself and in himself. It creates the world of culture and gives it an aspect of humanity’” (Dziamska, 2019). The author, referring to the assumptions of naturalism, also refers to Roman Ingarden and Ryszard Więckowski, describes their achievements and develops valuable postulates for pedagogical practice in kindergartens and schools. She points out that Ryszard Więckowski, when developing the concept of early school pedagogy, noticed that the phenomenological approach in the education of the youngest students situates the essence of human nature in the need to learn values, create values and be guided by them in action, therefore the learning process rooted in natural mechanisms has become an important principle of this concept as a path leading to creativity. Dziamska also emphasizes “the most important paradigm of early school education indicated by Professor Więckowski, the ‘perceptive-innovative paradigm’, as being one that “was derived from the phenomenological concept of man” (Dziamska, 2019). The author reminds us that Więckowski saw in a child a person whose activity is expressed by learning and discovering what is true, through action, the essence of which is doing good and shaping beauty. The author also argues that Więckowski, following Ingarden’s lead, was convinced that: “Man, including a child, through his activity creates the history of himself, the history of humanity through products, useful works, works of art of which he is the originator and creator. These works, as a consequence of actual own activity, have an incredible developmental significance for the child” (Dziamska, 2019).

In the core curriculum for kindergartens and schools, we are dealing with a naturalistic and holistic concept of early childhood education. However, this is in no way consistent with the teacher education standards issued by the Ministry of Science and Higher Education, because these standards are dominated by formal and subject-related education of children with the relatively narrow concept of “teaching.”

It should be noted here that, as previously mentioned, the profession of a kindergarten teacher also involves continuing education and improving qualifications, not only through professional experience but also through courses and postgraduate studies. It could be said that continuous development as an inherent attribute of the teaching profession is an important element of its activity. Early childhood teachers expand their scope of qualifications during

postgraduate studies, often choosing pedagogical therapy, early intervention or speech therapy as the goal of their professional development path. They are aware of the developmental problems of their children: they attend training courses entitling them to conduct educational kinesiology, developmental movement and other methods useful during preventive work with pre-schoolers and their family environment. Therefore, the competencies of a kindergarten teacher have a wide scope and aim to prepare a pre-schooler to cross the threshold of school effectively.

3.6. A teacher organizing cooperation between pre-school children – from directive management to creating a learning culture

In a Polish textbook for pre-school teachers popular in the 1970s, it was pointed out that the teacher's (and also the teacher's) task, especially about younger children, is "to establish habits of not getting in each other's way, not hurting each other" (Topińska, 1978: 143). Thus, the professional's job was essentially to ensure the safety of children playing. The adult's management of children's cooperation for many years consisted in pointing out their mistakes, embarrassing them, and the children's subordination to the teacher, as illustrated by the following description of pre-school children's play and the intervention undertaken by the teacher:

- *What are you making?* they ask Sławek.
 - *A car*, he replies.
 - *A car? Like that? It's not like that. You've done it wrong* – the other boys start laughing at him.
 - *And that's what I want. It'll be good*, explains Sławek.
- The boys don't give up – *mine good, yours not* – says Paweł.
Janusz, who is watching them, shouts: *kids, what car, what has he made?*
A few more children approach and start "mocking" Sławek's car. Sławek stops tinkering and bursts into tears. I take his car in my hand, look at it, and advise him on what to do to make it better. I make the other children feel ashamed (Dudzińska, 1963: 18).

There is no mention of a conversation that would enable the children to understand the situation their friend is in, no description of how to trigger empathy in children or activate altruistic sensitivity. The teacher only plays the role of an intervener and decides on the final outcome. Even if she plays with the children, she decides "what is correct and what is not," as illustrated by the following fragment: "In a 'medical clinic,' a teacher is waiting in a queue with

other ‘mothers’ with a doll in her hand. *What’s wrong with your daughter?* she begins the conversation. She ceases to be a teacher and is a child, she getting closer to the child’s way of acting and at the same time influencing the child’s correctness” (Sawicka, 1980: 58).

According to Antonina Sawicka (1980), the teacher not only provides children with a place to play, or provides content during classes (trips, stories or conversations) that they can play with, but, above all, she is also present in the games. She helps children in the fair distribution of toys, advises, when necessary, also on the division of roles, and makes sure that there are no children with whom no one wants to play (Sawicka, 1980: 58). She is not a play partner, her relationship with children is directing and dominating their activity. Her intervention “restores” proper relationships between children. An illustration is the description of two boys playing and the teacher’s intervention in its course, which involved transforming the situation of dominance of one child into a situation of parallel action with elements of cooperation:

“Just after tea, a group of boys, led by Marcin, were building a ship. Radek was finishing his afternoon tea. The teacher knew that as soon as she left the table, she would want to join her fellow builders ... That’s how it was. Marcin accepted Radek into his ‘brigade’, but offered him the role of a helper. *You’ll bring me the big ones from the crate*, he said. Radek, of course, did not accept this role, because he also wanted to build. The teacher took advantage of this moment to include Radek in the playing. She suggested that Radek build a river marina ... Each of them therefore had an equal role ... Now the boys no longer argued and even tried to cooperate” (Sawicka, 1980: 60–61). The directive role of kindergarten teachers in limiting children’s activity, independence and freedom of cooperation is proven by relatively recent research by Małgorzata Sławińska (2010). Let us illustrate with an example, one of many provided by the author:

N. *What is the coat of arms of Warsaw?*

Journal. *A mermaid.*

N. *Please describe to me what the mermaid looks like.*

Journal. *She has a sword and a shield.*

N. *What else does she look like?*

Journal. *She has a tail. She is half fish and half woman.*

N. (approvingly). *Great* (Sławińska, 2010: 238–239).

The quoted fragment of the teacher’s “conversation” with the children exposes the directive nature of the teacher-student relationship and proves that the teacher “leads the children along a string,” and asks questions and the chil-

dren “follow” the formulas learned by heart. This example illustrates that in pre-school education, instead of organizing situations conducive to gaining experience and cooperation, several of the teacher’s efforts are focused only on checking and correcting, and on inducing competition between individuals and between groups. Although many contemporary female educators are familiar with constructivist-developmental and constructivist-social concepts, the basis of which is thinking about education as organizing a child’s learning environment in cooperation. The traditional Polish teacher even sees the social advantages of small groups (“students learn to cooperate”), motivational advantages (“even the weaker ones take part in the teamwork”) and emotional advantages (“school becomes more student-friendly”) (Klus-Stańska, 2009: 69), at the same time they admit that they rarely use forms of work based on children cooperating (Szplit, Zbróg, 2011). Moreover, they completely fail to notice the intellectual value of this form of gaining experience and learning (Klus-Stańska, 2009: 68).

In practice, some teachers appreciate the role of cooperation, but they believe that younger children cannot cope with it yet (Bałachowicz, 2009: 285). The basic “sins” of teachers include, on the one hand, encouraging children to cooperate, who, on the other hand, start striving to achieve as quickly as possible what the teacher wants and expects, and beat other children who are placed in positions of opponents (Brzezińska, 1986: 69). Tendencies towards competition are revealed in many statements by teachers, e.g. “we will see which group will complete the task the fastest,” “which group will do it the prettiest.” Such messages divert children’s attention and efforts from cooperating, working towards a common goal, learning from each other and learning in cooperation towards the goal of defeating another group or groups. Meanwhile, solving various types of tasks, both everyday and educational, requires authentic cooperation with other people. As Jerome Brunner (2006) emphasizes, like adults, children construct a model of the world in their minds that helps interpret their experiences. Understanding one’s own experiences and the world in which one functions is achieved through discussion and cooperation (Brunner, 2006: 86–87). The basis of cooperation is the meeting of two different concepts and two different ideas. The role of the teacher is not only to recognise these different perspectives that children have but also to create conditions for the children themselves to recognise perspectives other than their own. This requires establishing egalitarian, cooperative relationships with children (Sławińska, 2010: 84), which manifest themselves, for example, in the fact that we try to recognise and understand the other person’s perspective, noticing that we are not always right, that others also have the right to “be

wrong,” and that together we can reach a solution different to that which each of us originally intended.

A key role is played by creating and organizing the culture of a social learning environment (Siadak, 2016: 82), in which the teacher is (not only the leader) an active and committed participant. Organizational culture is understood as the “personality” of a given institution and is manifested not only in behaviours, judgments, attitudes, and methods of resolving conflicts. It offers participants a common system of meanings, which makes culture play the role of internal integration, offering a common language, and a common conceptual apparatus, defining the boundaries of the group, determining the criteria of power and status, and ensuring the need for security is satisfied (Adrjan, 2011: 56). Creating organizational culture is a dynamic process, and complex group learning (Schein, 2010: 11) implies a certain level of stability in the group (Schein, 2010: 14). The concept of organizational culture itself “helps to explain and normalize various phenomena in the organization, for example, insubordination, lack of cooperation in the group, conflicts between group members, differences between teams and ways of adapting methods to them, transfer of information, community of values and goals” (Schein, 2010: 9). The culture of the organization helps the child “in building an internal model of the world, in acquiring learning tools derived from culture that allow to understand the world in a communicable way” (Filipiak, 2008: 26). According to Schein (2010), organizational culture, and in this case the organizational culture of cooperation and cooperation, is determined by two levels of organization:

- the first level is created by artefacts, “tangible,” visible, conscious elements. They indicate the style of organization. These artefacts include linguistic (stories, nicknames, anecdotes, jokes, metaphors), behavioural (communication patterns, ways of greeting and saying goodbye, rituals, ceremonies, rewards and punishments), (interior design, logo, way of dressing);
- the second level is created by norms and values that are more difficult to observe, and which can be divided into declared and observed. Declared values are usually adopted in the form of standards. Real values are those that actually exist and often constitute a hidden level of the organization’s culture;
- the core level (the basic, deepest level) consists of assumptions usually unconsciously held by the participants; it is composed of such elements as the attitude towards the environment, beliefs about the nature of human activities, beliefs like man, interpersonal relationships, etc. (Schein, 2010; Wojtowicz, 2004).

The cultural tools used by the teacher include elements from all levels, e.g. symbols (kindergarten logo, group logo, badge belonging to the child, etc.); a way of arranging space that may facilitate or hinder cooperation (Bańka, 2002: 344); ways of communicating (e.g. linguistic formulas for greetings, starting activities, forming teams, addressing children, etc.); rituals (greetings, farewells, preparation and ending of individual and team activities, etc.); atmosphere (e.g. manifested by the atmosphere of openness, kindness, acceptance and understanding of their needs felt by children); values adopted by the teacher constituting the basis for judging from the point of view of good or evil, norms (referring to the ways and limits within which it is possible to implement specific values), attitudes resulting from the adopted values and norms expressing the attitude of teachers towards each other and their own role, the pupils, their parents, the wider social environment, objects, events in which children participate, in which teachers participate, which they witness, etc.

According to Schein (2010), organizational culture is created and perpetuated by people acting as managers (in the school context these are principals, managers of pre-school institutions and teachers organizing the activities of pre-school children). An important element of organizational culture is the social and moral atmosphere created by teachers. "After all, students in the classroom can cooperate or not, they can compete or not, and finally, they can perceive their classmate as a stranger or competitor or partner in building knowledge, in discovering the world and defining the rules of behaviour in this world, in writing a book about the personally experienced world" (Dylak, 2013: 164). According to the rather unoptimistic results of research by Beata Adrjan (2015), the area of teachers' autonomy concerns almost exclusively relationships between people, including the creation of relationships between students Adrjan, 2015: 95–102). Teachers therefore mainly influence the relationships in the group they work with. The possibility and conditions of cooperation between children and students and how this develops depends on them. Therefore, teachers' tasks include ensuring the involvement of all participants in collective activities. As Henry A. Giroux (1996) puts it, "This participation must be such that it makes students (in this case pre-school children) capable of taking on important challenges, of asking questions ... Classroom (group) relations must be structured in such a way that they give students (children) the opportunity for both elements to occur" (Giroux, 1996: 148). This involvement of students begins with the assumption that cooperation between the teacher and children is not always and should be symmetrical (Radziewicz, 1979: 106–110), then goes through the following stages: organizing and creating the appropriate physical conditions conducive to cooperation; defining the rules and

conditions of cooperation, conditions and rules of discussion (e.g. creating task situations in which the work of the entire team is important and each member has a different role to play); assigning roles to team members, e.g. President, Scribe, Negotiator, Time Keeper, Presenter. Then, from the very beginning, each child knows what to do and what their function is. It is equally important to define the purpose of group activities and their broader context and to give children the freedom to cooperate. It is therefore crucial how teacher perceive themselves and their role in relationships with pupils. Pawlak (2009) points out that a teacher inspiring cooperation may perform various functions, e.g. a specialist, animator, observer, advisor, provider of emotional support, arbitrator, and evaluator (Pawlak, 2009: 103). The teacher may become involved in the space of children's joint activities when it is necessary, for example, to reduce antagonistic behaviour among them, alleviate tensions, and motivate, and inhibit impulsive team members. The tasks of the teacher-organizer of children's group activities also include systematic evaluation of teamwork (e.g. using a "ladder of cooperation" reflecting the process of involvement of the children in teamwork).

3.7. Changes in the approach to the importance, role and tasks of kindergarten in Poland

At the end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century, there was a debate among educators, sociologists, theoretical psychologists and practitioners about the "educational management of childhood" (Waloszek, 2006: 76), the social role of kindergarten, the quality of pre-school education, access to institutions, and educational exclusion, opportunities for children deprived of access to early education institutions due to the liquidation of kindergartens, and their insufficient number, especially in rural areas, in former state-owned farm areas. From this period, numerous research reports⁴ are available (Zahorska, Żytko, 2004), as well as new theoretical approaches, proposed solutions, and studies disseminating knowledge about early education (Wierchow-ska-Konera, 2001; Grzeszkiewicz, 2006; Jaszczyszyn, 2007; Krauze-Sikorska, Kuszak, 2008; Kuszak, 2011; Krauze-Sikorska, Kuszak, 2014).

The analysis of these documents allows us to notice changes in thinking and the approach to the importance, role and tasks of kindergarten. However,

⁴ E.g. Familijny Poznań Foundation (2008). *Our Kindergarten. Project summary report*. Poznań: Familijny Poznań Foundation.

changes at the level of theoretical thinking about education derived from research do not always translate directly into educational practices, because, as Dorota Klus-Stańska (2018) notes, “it should be remembered that while there are changes in science under the influence of new research results and discoveries, cultural practices are characterized by a certain inertia and resistance of tradition ... On the one hand, science shapes (to some extent) practices ..., on the other hand, as we too rarely realize, teaching practice influences learning. It is a research area where it is possible to observe, collect data, measure, as well as experiment and induce phenomena ... Therefore, practice provides scientists with data about its course” (Klus-Stańska, 2018: 27). Currently, it is possible to distinguish different approaches to pre-school education and kindergarten as an educational space for pre-school children, depending on the theoretical perspective, analysis and description criteria adopted. In this study, we propose three approaches present in the scientific debate on educational practice, educational policy and educational practice.

In the first approach, which can be termed ‘traditional’, kindergarten is the first stage of formal, institutional influence on the child, the site of caring, educational, socialization and educational tasks. Upon crossing the threshold of this institution, the individual is subjected to a process of “civilization” to “include him in the gears of the machinery of society” (Fulghum, 2008: 15). A kindergarten “can exert a multi-faceted influence on children’s development, organizing their entire lifestyle during their stay at the facility” (Klim-Klimaszewska, 2010: 109). The main task of the kindergarten is therefore “to provide children with appropriate conditions for mental, emotional, social and physical development and to compensate for possible deficiencies and delays in development, as well as education and preparation for school studies” (Kupisiewicz, Kupisiewicz, 2009: 147; Kupisiewicz, 1992: 168). Some authors perceive kindergarten as a place for educating children: “the specificity of the upbringing process in kindergarten means that this term also includes education” (Klim-Klimaszewska 2010: 110). The emphasis on school education of pre-school children is present in Polish kindergartens, where children complete worksheets, perform exercises in Polish, and mathematics and learn English during lessons conducted by a teacher. Research shows that parents expect educational practices emphasizing that children gain knowledge from teachers. Education is valuable when a child is taught by a teacher responsible for his or her well-being notes Magdalena Grochowalska (2015) when analysing parents’ statements about pre-school education. She also adds that, according to parents, teaching is the priority task of kindergarten, so it is important how this will be carried out (Grochowalska, 2015: 90). It happens that parents depreciate the educational

value of play and expect teaching instead. Therefore, the formalization of roles, tasks and activities is emphasized. The teacher teaches and the child learns, “unlike the family, kindergarten is a system that formalizes social roles. A child must learn about this world and get used to it ... Pre-school experiences are extremely important for a child in internalizing personal patterns. The child internalizes social values and norms that are shown to him by the family and other social groups (Al-Khamisy, 2006: 26). In this approach, “the child must,” he or she is deprived of the right to express his or her own opinion, freedom of choice and own preferences. This child adapts to the kindergarten, not the other way around. Referring to this practice, Al-Khamisy (2006) emphasizes that “in kindergarten as an institution, social requirements play an important role in communication. They have a great impact on the development of a child’s identity” (Al-Khamisy, 2006: 26). The child meets these requirements with greater or lesser success. Moreover, the institution “provides the child with numerous models of social coexistence” (Skorny, 1976: 64). The influence of these models, as Skorny emphasizes (1976: 64), is significant both due to having many hours of daily contact, as well as the tendency of pre-school children to imitate the behaviour of adults. This approach highlights the responsibility of the institution and its employees for the development of individuals, for educational, socialization and educational success. A child is perceived as a human being with deficits (Klus-Stańska, 2021: 280). In the current scientific and professional discourse, several arguments (derived from research) are given against such an approach, and manifestations of the approach are visible in common theories and educational practices.

In the second approach, pre-school education is an investment and kindergarten is an important stage on the child’s path to future professional and life success. According to the assumptions of the market approach, good initial capital has a greater chance of being multiplied because “children from good homes are sent to good and much better than average kindergartens” (Bialecki, 2007: 252). Strengthening, developing and multiplying this capital is the main goal of education from its earliest stages. The result of education is a set of features, talents and acquired skills, as well as developed aspirations, motivation and attitudes that give the individual success at work and the collective results in business activity (Sztompka, 2016: 282). Kindergarten is the second level of early education (Early Childhood Education and Care – ECEC)⁵ after the care institution for children up to 3 years of age. Its task is to support the child’s

⁵ The first level of early education, called early educational development, intended for children aged 0–3 – early care and education in a nursery.

early development and prepare them for participation in school and later in society. Maximizing the social utility of a child is possible through the optimal and purposeful design of educational institutions (Szlendak, 2004: 17). It is therefore important to develop high-quality facilities whose effects can be easily measured. Therefore, mechanisms of competition between fingers are activated, and their effectiveness is measured and compared. It is assumed that the earlier a child starts attending such an “effective” institution, the better for his or her further development (Karwowska-Struczyk, 2007: 239–242), especially for children from disadvantaged backgrounds. As Małgorzata Karwowska-Struczyk (2015) emphasizes, the institution is perceived not as an institution that serves to support the individual development of a child, but “as an institution acting in the name of a specifically understood general good and social progress by freeing the child from the bonds of conservative tradition, which control the behaviour of older generations – parents and grandparents ... It is also intended to mark a break with intellectual poverty, parochial thinking, poverty and educational incompetence that dominates in these families” (Karwowska-Struczyk, 2015: 122–123). It is assumed that family homes are insufficient, and kindergartens serve to improve the quality of current and future life. It is therefore important that institutions are accessible to all without exception to “interrupt the phenomenon of inheritance of marginalization” ([https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/PL/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32019H0605\(01\)&from=GA](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/PL/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32019H0605(01)&from=GA)). Measurement is an important determinant of the quality of preschool education, because “investing in early childhood education and care is only a good investment if the services are of high quality and availability, are affordable and inclusive,” as we read in the document entitled Recommendation of the Council of Europe of May 22, 2019 on high-quality early childhood education and care systems ([https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/PL/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32019H0605\(01\)&from=GA](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/PL/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32019H0605(01)&from=GA)). The recommendations indicate a change in the way of thinking about education and treating it as a process that begins at birth and continues at subsequent levels of education, a point emphasized by Anna Izabela Brzezińska and Magdalena Czub (2012: 15–19). These authors add that such thinking is supported by the achievements of neuroscience, especially developmental neurocognitive science, which provides evidence of the importance of development in early childhood. Using the achievements of science, the importance of accelerating development is highlighted, as is optimizing and accelerating it. Programmes implemented in early childhood education institutions are designed holistically, incorporating elements of purposeful education aiming to support early cognitive, physical, social and emotional development and introduce young children to structured

learning outside the family context (<https://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/international-standard-classification-of-education-isced-2011-en.pdf>). Therefore, emphasis is placed on the child to master skills as quickly as possible and to form key competencies, including entrepreneurial competencies (Recommendation of the Council of the European Union of May 22, 2018 on key competencies for lifelong learning, [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/PL/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32018H0604\(01\)&from=en](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/PL/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32018H0604(01)&from=en)).

By the provisions of the core curriculum of February 14, 2017, a child completing the pre-school education stage should acquire knowledge and specific competencies that can be assigned to the area of entrepreneurship (Kanik, 2022: 111–112). This is followed by pre-school education programmes extended with content related to entrepreneurship (Kanik, 2022: 112). Investing in a child must pay off, in the future it should be an individual with such features as: This approach appears to be common in educational and parenting practice. This is evidenced by various official and unofficial rankings of kindergartens and the choices of institutions made based on such rankings. According to Karwowska-Struczyk (2015: 127), parents choosing an institution for their children do not always act rationally because they do not have time to verify the available offer, even when they know exactly what they expect from the institution.

The third approach (the most up-to-date in the field of science, research and formulated theories) departs from treating the child as a pre-social being and rejects the child-adult dualism, assuming that the child is an active and full-fledged entity operating in society (Kielar-Turska, 2011: 7), the child's value and position in the social system are promoted (Jarosz, 2019: 294). It is perceived as a citizen, a member of the community, with specific rights and obligations and naturally included and not excluded from social life (Klus-Stańska, 2021: 276). Kindergarten as one of the spaces of early education (along with the family home, neighbourhood, peer groups, virtual space, cultural institutions, and nature) begins to be perceived as a place of joint action and problem-solving with other people: peers and adults. It is not just a place, it is a community in which the "for children" attitude gives way to the "with children" attitude; it is a space for their participation (Jarosz, 2018: 371–389). Ewa Jarosz (2019: 299), however, notes that in practice, the wealth of forms of children's social participation "is flattened and comes down to children deciding on certain matters, or even more narrowly: to consulting certain matters and decisions with children." The younger the children, the more their participation is limited to selected opportunities, to a certain offer. Gradually, preschool education is no longer reserved for a specific place, like a kindergarten building, specially arranged

and equipped rooms. In recent years, there has been growing interest in forest kindergartens as open kindergartens, without walls, open to nature (Ordon, 2019), kindergartens cooperating with various entities in the local environment (Rybińska, Kuszak, 2021). Corridors, bathrooms, canteens and locker rooms are still underestimated places in the kindergarten space (Andrzejewska, 2020: 173). The teacher creates such an environment, a space in which the child can decide how he wants to act, with whom he wants to act, etc. Andrzejewska (2018: 42) emphasizes that in pre-school education, places make pedagogical sense and thanks to before the child is immersed in the culture, nature, economy and the world of social relations. In places organized by teachers or used by them, students construct knowledge, agree on meanings, create a system of values, and construct different narratives of reality.” In such spaces, the teacher plays the role of an animator, and the place itself is a space co-created by various entities. The child gains experience in kindergarten and beyond (Andrzejewska, 2020), during open educational situations during which he or she can actively act, discover, and solve problems individually, in dyads and teams in the process of tutoring (Sajdera 2010) and learning from each other (Rybińska, Kuszak, 2021). They then have the opportunity to learn about diversity: places, diversity of situations, interpersonal diversity, diversity of activities, which is the basis for “building a society in which the principles of tolerance towards differences are implemented” (Kielar-Turska, 2011: 8). This is an approach emphasizing the construction and co-construction of the image of the world of oneself and of others in this world, as well as partnership in the process of individual development. Experiencing childhood here and now is a value in itself (Klus-Stańska, 2021: 280).

It is increasingly recognized that the child’s perspective is different from the adult’s view of their own experiences looking back over many years and numerous experiences. The children’s perspective in the discourse on kindergarten as time, space, construction of experiences, and early education seems to be still marginalized. In this regard, it is worth mentioning Sabina Guz’s (2018) research on the image of a child and childhood in the perception of children finishing pre-school and early school education. These studies show that pre-school children perceive their childhood positively because they can have fun and attractively spend time, they do not have to work, they have no responsibilities and worries, they can go to kindergarten, they have various privileges and freedom, they can have friends (Guz, 2018: 102).

However, we will draw attention to other statements made by children relating to their pre-school experiences. They come from two studies devoted to children’s image of the world developed by Halina Zgólkowa (1990; 2019). In

the first study, published in 1990, the author presented the statements of children who attended kindergartens in the 1980s. Two statements were selected from this volume. The second volume contains children's statements collected at the beginning of the 21st century. The narratives and dialogues below present a different image of kindergarten than in adults' memories. It is not always a space for a joyful childhood.

Example 1. Boy, age: 5 years, 7 months old

The teacher in kindergarten calls us names. I go to the corner. Agnieszka goes to the corner. Then someone fights. We go to the middle. We are all horses. Not everyone eats their dinner, and sometimes I don't eat it either. Agnieszka fights, Gosia doesn't study well, we read books... what else is happening... umm! Sometimes we go outside, when it rains, we don't go. I get dirty in the snow. Agnieszka is fighting, what else is happening... In this kindergarten we play with toys, sometimes we exchange them, and the lady calls us names. Sometimes we have to learn to read (Zgólkowa, 1990: 103–104).

Example 2. Boy, age: 6 years, 11 months old

In the kindergarten there are a lot of toys on the cabinets, for boys, there are cars and blocks and guns and books. And older children learn to read, draw and count, I can write poems and songs too. And Krzysiek doesn't want to go to kindergarten. When she brings him home, he cries and stomps, doesn't want to play and doesn't go to the playground. And I like to go on the swings and the roundabout and draw, and when we paint with paintings, the boys make moustaches and the lady screams (Zgólkowa, 1990: 117).

Example 3. Boy, age: 4 years, 5 months old

This year I started going to 'kiddergarten.' I love kiddergarten. It's nice here, but my mom isn't with me... err... and sometimes I cry (cry)... err... because I'm sad... and then I call Miss and tell her to call my mother, but umm... but you don't call my mother because err... my mother works and she can't come... And I love my mommy. Daddy too... but daddy is far away... there... well... far away... because he works for bread... my... and so that we can live better, that's what mommy says. And my mommy is always right, you know? (Zgólkowa, 2019: 231).

Example 4. Girl, age: 5 years 2 months old

We sit, we play, we have to clean up and we got rid of three toys: one building block, another building block, a conductor, a doctor, an ambulance and an ambulance. We didn't clean. Well, because toys need to be cleaned and hidden. Well, my aunt has a room like that in the kitchen and she can hide toys there. Well, if we don't clean up, we have more and more toys. And if we don't clean up, my aunt will take everything and we won't have anything to play with. We'll just sit, paint and talk. And there's this lady who takes us to

the other room. Her hair colour is orange, red, I don't know. And in kindergarten, I still play with dolls, and once Kuba played with dolls (Zgółkowa, 2019: 244).

Example 5. Girl, age: 6 years, 2 months old

I like going to kindergarten because I learn interesting things there, there are nice ladies here, we make various drawings, paste-ups, posters and play various games. We have a lot of... well... a lot... of nice toys. We also have a playground where we play on slides and swings or in the sandpit. Yeah... Well, sometimes we go for walks, but rarely. No... uh... we don't go on trips. Ooo... and we have a cloakroom in the kindergarten. There are new colourful cupboards for jackets, hats, gloves, scarves, and shoes (Zgółkowa, 2019: 233).

Example 6. Girl, age: 3 years, 2 months, in a conversation with an adult

Adult: *What was for breakfast?*

Child: *I don't remember.*

Adult: *And for dinner?*

Child: *Pasta, cabbage, tomato soup.*

Adult: *Do you have any friends at kindergarten?*

Child: *Nobody likes me (Zgółkowa, 2019: 234).*

Example 7. Girl 4 years, 7 months old; Boy: 4 years, 11 months old

Girl: *My friend didn't go to kindergarten, and now he comes, he doesn't know how to behave. So his mum takes him to a psychiatrist.*

Boy: *What does a psychiatrist do?*

Girl: *She can't do anything, it's about upbringing. It's something like this, when children say stupid things, or, for example, they have some disease, a psychiatrist comforts them.*

Boy: *The teacher can also comfort you, even more.*

Girl: *Yep... Yeah, too (Zgółkowa, 2019: 234–235).*

Children share their experiences openly. They talk about what they experience in a way that is available to them at this stage of development. They use their linguistic potential and lexical resources available to them to talk about their fear of being separated from their loved ones: *Sometimes I cry because I feel sad and then I call my lady and tell her to call my mum.* They talk about their friends and their failures in relationships with peers: *No one likes me.* They talk about requirements they don't understand and the restrictions they are subjected to: *If we don't clean, we have fewer and fewer toys.* They talk about what they miss: *Sometimes we go for walks, but rarely.* They carefully observe their peers and notice situations that are difficult, sad, triggering unwanted emotions and their manifestations: *when she brings him home, he cries and stomps and doesn't want to play, he doesn't go to the playground either,* as well as socially unaccept-

able behaviours: *it's something like children saying stupid things or, for example, having some disease*. They are often left alone with these observations. In the light of these statements, it is worth considering the extent to which the current discourse on children's participation, the importance of cooperation and cooperation with children, the role of mutual learning and joint construction of experiences notices the perspective of a small child and inspires in-depth reflection and, as a result, may lead to real change in educational practices.

3.8. Changes in the language of Polish pre-school pedagogy

Teresa Hejnicka-Bezwińska (2008: 79) points to the fact that pedagogy emerged as a practical science “and this is of decisive importance for the choice of a cognitive perspective that makes it possible to reveal the logic of its development, determined by the unique fact that the process of institutionalization of pedagogy precedes the process of its disciplining.” Śliwerski (2010: 10), recognizing that pedagogy is a science that “develops extremely quickly and dynamically ... thus covers new ranges of problems that the development of humanities and social sciences and everyday life in a changing, a world subjected to globalization processes,” indicates how the foundations of contemporary pedagogy have their source in the development of pre-school care, among other places. He emphasizes that pedagogy's roots lie in educational practice when in the 19th century there was an increased need “to provide children and young people with professional care ... to organize interactions aimed at changes in people's personality” (Śliwerski, 2010: 10). In particular, in the case of pre-school pedagogy as a subdiscipline of pedagogy, it is impossible not to notice the roots in the practice of care and philanthropic activities aimed at the youngest children and their families. Opiela (2013: 183–184) notes that in this initial period “the accumulated, often intuitive knowledge resulting from generations of experience in raising a child was gradually enriched with theoretical knowledge ... Its development involved the need to organize knowledge about childhood upbringing, the complexity of which, combined with diverse and often contradictory expectations in the field of ideology and social practice, became clearer. In turn, the research results and the framework of theories and concepts created based on these allowed for modifying care, upbringing and educational activities, changing their direction in accordance with a specific worldview (binding, individual) and current philosophical, axiological, psychological, sociological trends and also (and perhaps above all) decisions of a political nature and their

consequences.” As Śliwerski (2015: 85) points out, worldview plays an important role in pedagogical activity and creates a bridge between pedagogy and philosophy. He regards “pedagogy as a discipline involved in social life, not only describing it but also expressing specific social needs defined in time and space, cannot ignore them and pass by indifferently.” Śliwerski adds that pedagogy is not so much a science of upbringing as a way of thinking about this process, and consequently examines the upbringing and education of a person as a historical, psychological, social and cultural process. In his opinion, three different trends can be distinguished in research on children and childhood since the 1970s: The first focuses on the child as an individual, a member of social groups and on childhood as a social status. The second views children as the constructors of their own lives, environments and their development. The third centres on the history of childhood, on the historical aspects of childhood as a social construct (Śliwerski, 2015: 10).

The process of deriving theory from educational practice, and from research on this practice, forms the development axis of pre-school pedagogy and also contributes to the development and enrichment of concepts in the language of pre-school pedagogy. We must therefore agree with Opiela (2013), who emphasizes that the process of developing the identity and autonomy of pedagogy as a scientific discipline (and therefore its subdisciplines) was becoming increasingly advanced, providing fertile ground for a new context for theory (conceptual framework) and pedagogical practice implementing the concept of early education in educational institutions. It is also worth noting that the term “pre-school education” appeared in Poland to describe the care practice emerging in the second half of the 18th century, and focused on a group of children aged 3–7. Previously, the concept of “primary education” was used as the first level of a child’s upbringing carried out at home from the day of birth to the moment of starting education at school (Opiela, 2016: 18). In the 19th century, the concept of “nursery” emerged as a place to care for children aged 3–7. The creation of care facilities required the training of staff, and educating guardians and later teachers, was increasingly discussed in the popular press at the time (popular and scientific), allowing the idea of this form of care to be disseminated, thus popularizing the concept of the nursery. The systematic implementation and development of care activities (later educational, teaching, etc.) in institutions inspired educators to undertake research from various ideological and theoretical perspectives. Therefore, it is impossible not to agree with Irena Adamek (2000: 25) that “care activities preceded the implementation of the idea of rational management of the upbringing of young children by many years,” which was based on specific meanings given to this process.

Constructing meaning is, according to Benjamin K. Bergen (2017), one of the most important activities that a person undertakes. He writes: “We immerse ourselves in a sea of words – we hear and read tens of thousands of them every day. And somehow, in most cases, we understand them. We understand what they refer to and what situations they describe. We even conclude about things that have not been said at all and prepare to respond. We constantly, tirelessly, and automatically construct meaning” (Bergen, 2017: 13). We dress these meanings in concepts and narratives. Both concepts and narratives change depending on how the reality they name, describe and interpret changes.

As already noted, the development of pre-school pedagogy from the beginning of its existence is a process in which visible “turning moments” can be distinguished (Waloszek, 2006: 66–69) and, consequently, stages of its formation. These turning points are reflected in changes in the language, including its lexical resources, the way of constructing meanings, and linguistic explanation of facts. In the discussion that follows, we want to capture and record not only the changing facts in the area of pre-school pedagogy but also (against this background) to capture earlier changes in the sphere of the language of pre-school pedagogy. Changes in the practice and theory of pre-school pedagogy constitute a broad perspective for us, in which we attempt to capture selected changes in language. In our opinion, language is, above all, a tool for expressing meanings relating to the theory and practice of pre-school pedagogy. We are aware that the boundary between what is practical (e.g. when working with a child) and what is theoretical (the theoretical perspective defining the framework of relationships with a child), in the case of pre-school pedagogy, is “fluid” and “flexible.” We are aware that in pedagogy (especially in pre-school pedagogy), “practice and theory strive for consistency between reality and its description” (Waloszek, 2006: 68–69), which is particularly visible in its language. Therefore, we would like to retain this connection between theory and practice. Theory serves practice, and practice inspires research describing the current state and changes observed in research findings, and the construction of scientific theories. In turn, scientific theories and the results of empirical verification serve educational practice, contributing to its development.

Teresa Hejnicka-Bezwińska (1993: 93) emphasizes, and it is impossible to disagree with her, that the measure of the social role of pedagogy (including pre-school pedagogy) is always the extent to which it responds to the “challenges” of its times, the extent to which it can describe and explain the phenomena that constitute the “environment” and on which the educational practice at a given moment directly depends. However, the starting point should be the vision of humans, the vision of the world and the vision of humans in this

world. This vision of humans and the world, taking into account current world phenomena, creates a conceptual framework typical for a given stage of development of the subdiscipline. Therefore, concepts change as educational theory and practice evolve. In subsequent stages of the development of pre-school pedagogy, changes took place at several levels:

- formal and legal regulations regarding the operation of facilities for children aged 3 to 6 years;
- educational reality in institutions, which (regardless of the formal regulations covering the kindergartens themselves) was and remains under the influence of various factors: political, economic, social, cultural, etc.;
- research on children aged 3 to 6 years and pre-school education conducted from the perspective of various theoretical concepts;
- philosophy of education, scientific theories regarding the child, childhood;
- changes in the education of kindergarten teachers.⁶

The above changes were reflected in the language. Stanisław Gajda (2007), writing about language changes, distinguished three types: internal (language self-regulation), external (socio-cultural) and internal and external occurring simultaneously. However, the focus here is placed on those changes that are the result of a broader context: political, economic, social, cultural, etc. These changes may be short-term or fluctuating, of little significance or entail significant effects visible immediately (revolutionary changes) or after a long time (evolutionary changes). They also include transformations in the lexical-phrasological and textual subsystems, changes in the system of varieties and their social distribution, and the reconstruction of social linguistic awareness (including the relationship between the Polish language and other languages) (Gajda, 2007: 16).

When describing the subsequent stages of the development of pre-school pedagogy, we will focus on presenting the facts that shaped pre-school pedagogy and determined the emergence of concepts – ways of understanding and interpreting them, which over the years have constructed the framework of this subdiscipline. By showing changes in the practice and theory of pre-school pedagogy, we select facts, because our goal is not to describe historical changes in pre-school pedagogy but to show changes in the language of pre-school pedagogy – in its definitions, approaches, and interpretations, in the context of broader changes.

⁶ We refrain from discussing this element in this study due to the stated primary goal – showing changes in the language.

Therefore, when chronicling the evolution of the language of Polish pre-school pedagogy, individual stages can be distinguished. The first of these, dating back to the 18th century, was associated with assigning meaning to social phenomena, which initiated research on pre-school children.

Maria Wróbel (1967: 9–10) pointed out that “institutions for educating young children appeared much later than pedagogical reflection on this subject.” This point, covering the whole of Europe including Poland, was necessary to inspire enlightened people to think differently about children and childhood. This intellectual change used the ideas of progressive philosophers and educators reaching the elites, including Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Jean Comenius, as well as Jean-Henrique Pestalozzi. Based on these inspirations, the first nurseries began to be created in Europe. In France, the pioneer was Jean-Frédéric Oberlin, who in 1769 founded the first orphanage for rural children. The development of industry and the demand for women’s work in England led to the need to provide care facilities for the children of women working in industry. Orphanages in England owe their origins to Robert Owen (founder of a large spinning mill), who sought to counter the exploitation of children employed in industry. The first care institution was established in 1816. First, philosophical and educational concepts reached Poland, which over time formed the theoretical foundations for childcare institutions. In our country, orphanages began to be established twenty years later. Their founding was preceded by several publications presenting research results pointing to the poor economic and hygienic living conditions of children, especially in rural areas (including working-class areas), the exploitation of children and high mortality among the youngest caused by diseases such as pneumonia, gastroenteritis, diphtheria, and scarlet fever (Walasek, 2015: 37). The educational solutions for pre-school children were preceded by ideas expressed by educators, philosophers and social activists concerning social, economic, cultural facts, etc. and resulted from the need to create specific solutions. Therefore, the words of Wilhelm von Humboldt should be noted: “Man ... is looking for signs through which these wholes, corresponding to the individual sections isolated by him in his thinking, could be recognized as separate units” (Humboldt, 2013: 153). This thought most fully brings out the content of the first stage of pre-school pedagogy – noticing facts and putting them into words.

The second stage of the development of the language of pre-school pedagogy in Poland and on Polish lands appeared in the 1830s and 1840s, when concepts forming the basis of pre-school pedagogy emerged. This was a time of increasing employment of women in factories and the rural economy. This required providing care for their children, who were often left unsupervised.

Orphanages were established for children from economically and culturally disadvantaged backgrounds, deprived of parental care. These constituted an attempt to improve the quality of their lives. Their creation was the result of the activities of philanthropic societies, e.g. the Warsaw Charitable Society and the activity of Teofil Janikowski and Stanisław Jachowicz, who founded an orphanage in Warsaw in 1837. Another orphanage was founded a year later by Teofil Nowosielski in Wrocław (Walasek, 2015: 44).

In the Wielkopolska (Greater Poland) region, the first institution for the care of small children was established in Poznań by the Society of the Ladies of Charity of St. Wincent a'Paulo (1944), and in Lviv (Galicia), an orphanage was established in 1840 on the initiative of the Society of Christian Orphanages for Little Children (Walasek, 2015: 69). In turn, the first children's garden inspired by Froebel's idea was opened in Warsaw by Teresa Mleczkowska. Quickly gaining popularity, nurseries and children's homes became fashionable establishments based on scientific principles. Popularizing, educational and organizational activities contributed to the interest of wider social circles in the potential of young children, including Klementyna Tańska-Hoffmanowa (Bobrowska-Nowak, 1978: 93–94; Nicz, 1986: 64), Stanisław Jachowicz (Bobrowska-Nowak, 1978: 96; Walasek, 2015: 79), Teofil Stanisław Nowosielski, Bronisław Trentowski (Adamek: 1999: 28–35), August Cieszkowski (Bobrowska-Nowak, 1978: 154–158), and Ewaryst Estkowski (Bobrowska-Nowak, 1978: 153–154). This period of development of pre-school pedagogy saw basic concepts created (nursery, guardian, nursery school) and their penetration into the language not only of intellectual elites but of all social groups. The conceptual basis formed in the first years of the existence of pre-school pedagogy expanded and was enriched. Over time, however, certain concepts were replaced by others, some of which no longer function in public consciousness today. An example of the language change in this area can be seen in the names given to such institutions from the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries onwards: nursery, protective home, children's home, protection room, facility for small children, Froebel school or children's garden.

In the interwar period, the same place was referred to as follows: protection, proper protection, kindergarten, real pre-school, institution or kindergarten. In the 1970s and 1980s, the place where children stayed in the care of adults was referred to as kindergarten, kindergarten facility, kindergarten centre, and kindergarten classes. Between 1945 and 1969, there was still talk about a kindergarten or a facility, but new names appeared, such as kindergarten point, kindergarten network, kindergarten and kindergarten centre, and then – from the 1990s until today, kindergartens are also specified depending on their profile, and the nomenclature includes kindergarten (e.g. with integration groups,

integrated kindergarten, special kindergarten), kindergarten branch, kindergarten branch, school-kindergarten complex, nursery-kindergarten complex.

At the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, the person responsible for children was called a guardian, and the nursery manager was also employed in the security service. In the interwar period, the word “guardian” was still used, but also “educator.” From 1945 until 1969, in the literature on the subject, we encounter the following nomenclature: educator, kindergarten teacher, kindergarten pedagogical staff, kindergarten instructor, pre-school education instructor. In the 1970s and 1980s, the person responsible for children in a kindergarten was called a kindergarten teacher, caregiver or teacher. Since the 1990s, we have had the term kindergarten teacher.

In the 20th century, the main functions of the facility also changed. Initially, it performed the following functions were caring, hygienic, health-promoting, and preparing for life (for work). However, in the interwar period, the latter was abandoned and an educational and compensatory function was added. After 1945, a function related to supporting parents was added, and the compensatory function was clarified as being corrective and compensatory. In the subject literature from the 1980s and 1990s, the following functions appear: caring, educational, compensatory, compensatory, and educational (in the field of preparation for school). Since the start of the 21st century, the kindergarten has performed caring and educational functions⁷ or educational and upbringing, educational aimed at a wider social environment, a function related to cooperation with the child’s parents/guardians (psychoeducational), and also preventive, compensatory, equalizing and supportive.

Stage III in the development of the language of pre-school pedagogy came at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries. During this time, concepts representing the state of knowledge about children aged 3–6 and in the area of pre-school care develop.

This time saw increased demand for labour due to the development of industry, which involved women engaged in work outside the home. This employment situation of women required changes in care practices addressed to children of working mothers. The turn of the century was a time of dynamic development of pre-school pedagogy in several aspects:

1. Promoting new theoretical trends and practical solutions in Poland, including concepts developed by Ellen Key, Maria Montessori, and Friedrich Froebel. The latter’s idea gained popularity as a specific method of working

⁷ Education is understood as a complex process involving upbringing, teaching the child and the child’s own learning.

with children aged 3 to 7. This did not happen without some distortions of ideas and abuses. The followers of Froebel's ideas, wanting to maintain the connection between 'Froebeling' and school in their work with children, often led to the predidacticization of activities and games, and often even taught pre-school children how to read, write and count. The existing children's gardens were dubbed Froebel nurseries (Wróbel, 1967: 18).⁸ Maria Montessori's proposal was introduced as an alternative solution to 'Froebel gardens'. In practice, solutions originating from Montessori's concept complemented Froebel's proposals and took into account Polish environmental conditions (Wróbel, 1967: 20; Topińska, 1972: 348).

2. Diversification of childcare facilities. During this period, various forms of protection were created and adapted to the diverse needs of various social groups. These forms included "protection rooms," which originally provided care functions and were related to protecting children's health.⁹ However, they quickly expanded their functions to include teaching and educational activities (Jakubiak, 2015: 109). Orphanages for poor children were established in rural areas, including ones on the initiative of Edmund Bojanowski (Opiela, Kaput, Piekarcz, Kornobis, Zymróz, Chidzik, 2012: 24; Topińska, 1970a: 347). Seasonal nurseries were established, which over time evolved into rural nurseries (Wróbel, 1967: 12).¹⁰ In 1912, on the initiative of Stanisław Karpowicz, the first private security was established under the name "Children's Home" (for children aged 3–9), whose programme and structure of classes were based on world achievements, which were the opposite of the standard Froebel methodology.
3. Concerns about meeting the needs of pre-school children, for example, Stefania Marciszewska-Posadzowa fought to make orphanages institutions that care about the health and upbringing of children. She drew attention to the issue of proper nutrition for children and highlighted creating gardens at orphanages that would provide children with conditions for exercise and play. In the "Children's Homes" initiated by Stanisław Karpowicz, the key educational tasks were developing children's independence, the ability to work creatively, and the ability to coexist in a group, as well as developing of an individual's attitude towards society and fostering the sense of duty towards other people (Bobrowska-Nowak, 1978).

⁸ The only critic of Froebel's institutions was the teacher and psychologist Jan Władysław Dawid, who emphasized that children operate there based on artificially selected "gifts" in the form of cubes, bricks, squares and sticks, and not in natural conditions.

⁹ In 1893, medical care for children was organized in Warsaw nurseries.

¹⁰ The initiator of this form of care for pre-school children was Maria Kretkowska.

4. Conducting the first scientific research on a pre-school child, which was possible thanks to contacts with foreign pre-school education centres and under the influence of psychological research, also conducted by Polish educators, arose a need and a basis for discussion on how to raise a small child. Scientific and popular science activities were conducted by such scholars as Jan Władysław Dawid, Aniela Szcówna, Maria Weryho-Radziwiłłowiczowa, who are today considered pioneers of research in pre-school pedagogy. Works from this period include elements of methodological foundations, including a description of the research procedure, methods and tools, such as observational schedules, questionnaires, and characteristics.

In the language of the 19th and 20th centuries, some concepts construct the framework of the theory and practice of pre-school pedagogy, such as: “Leaving children unattended exposes them to numerous dangers ... there is a need not only to protect children from corruption and bad addictions, which they easily succumb to when left unsupervised” (Górki, 1899: 1–2);

- “When our body is clean, we feel freer and happier. Reluctance even influences morality; revulsion towards what is externally dirty is combined with revulsion towards what is morally dirty. Teachers! Therefore, try to accustom children to the love of order and decency” (from the Handbook for Guardians);
- “The development of religious feeling is the crown of our efforts in the field we are talking about” (Żulińska, 1913: 80);
- “Order is the soul of the orphanage because it not only makes all work easier ... A nursery without order must collapse, and the female security guard there will lose her health” (Manual for female security guards prepared according to German and French sources, Drukarnia Leitgebera, Poznań, 1906: 13).
- “Each child, having been given a piece of land for his exclusive use almost from the cradle, and cultivating the rest of the garden together with his peers, will become strongly attached to this employment, which will later fill his whole life on a larger scale” (Bobrowska-Nowak, 1978: 413).

Analyzing the above-mentioned concepts, one can discern clear changes in pre-school pedagogy, both in theory and educational practice, which are reflected in its language. The external order determined the moral order. This is an important feature that was developed in the youngest children in facilities at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, where the task of guardians was “to scold untidy children, namely those who lie on the ground, stain and tear their things due to carelessness, failure to protect and rudeness” (Manual for guardians...). Educating the youngest children about order, developing habits,

a passion for work, etc. was particularly important in disadvantaged environments, where children who did not always have desirable role models in their immediate surroundings.

Stage IV of the development of the language of pre-school pedagogy in Poland came in the 1920s and 1930s. This is the time during which the linguistic image of the child and his needs emerges.

The interwar period was a time of progressive social movements, which involved the fight for every child's right to education and upbringing, the pursuit of equal rights for women and the perceived need to provide care for the children of women employed in industry and agriculture. This is therefore the time of development of pre-school pedagogy, covering its formal and legal aspects – an attempt was made to unify the legal provisions and educational practice of institutions that had so far operated according to three different “systems.” In her 1931 textbook for kindergarten educators, Weryho-Radziwiłłowiczowa uses the term “pre-school education method,” presenting its principles, referring to the concepts of Froebel, Montessori and Decroly, and emphasizing the role of talking and conversations with children. Legal regulations on kindergartens were typical of this period. Notable among the actions taken were the Temporary Protection Regulations created in 1918, under which there were three types of educational institutions, including “proper protection” intended for pre-school children (Bobrowska-Nowak, 1978: 225). The regulations established the scope of responsibilities of educators, the type of qualifications and the principles of organizing work in the kindergarten. Orders were issued regarding hygiene and medical care, and the staff rooms were equipped with bookcases, graphic aids and materials for classes (Woźnicka, 1972: 13). The following year, during the meeting of the Teachers' Congress, known as the Teachers' Sejm (in 1919), in the draft rules for running institutions for children aged 4–7, the concept of “kindergarten” appeared for the first time, which, under the Education System Act (1932) officially became a term defining the institutions of raising children during middle childhood (Wilgocka-Okoń, 1993). According to Maria Wróbel (1967), until 1939 the name “ochrona”/“protection” appeared next to the name “kindergarten.”

In turn, Wiesława Leżańska points out that “so far, kindergarten was supposed to be the first link in the educational system and was not supposed to be a care facility, but an educational institution” (Leżańska, 2001: 80). Another important change was initiated by the Act of March 11, 1932 on the education system and private institutions (Journal of Laws of 1932, No. 38, item 389), which created the legal basis for kindergartens to function as institutions that provide care for children from the age of three and provide conditions for physical and

mental development appropriate to the children's age. It specified in detail the conditions under which private individuals could establish kindergartens. In practice, the requirements formulated for owners did not encourage them to take this initiative (Woźnicka, 1972: 15). Instead of a programme for kindergartens, the Ministry of Religious Denominations and Public Enlightenment issued a guide in 1933 entitled: "Advice and tips for kindergarten teachers." In practice, as emphasized by Wilgocka-Okoń (1993: 639), the educational system of kindergartens in the interwar period was based mainly on the systems of Froebel, Decroly and Montessori, modified to suit the national needs and psyche of the Polish child.

After World War I, at the stage of creating the foundations of state life, in addition to formal and legal solutions, several activities were undertaken to draw attention to the role of institutions for pre-school children. The most active were Weryho-Radziwiłłowiczowa and Winiarzowa, already mentioned in this study, who emphasized the importance of pre-school education during the Congresses of Delegates of Polish Teachers' Societies. The idea of pre-school education, which has already been emphasized, was developed and promoted through proposals for methodological solutions that were published by such methodologists as Zofia Bogdanowiczowa, Natalia Cićmirska, Helena Czerwińska, Maria Łabęcka, Stefania Marciszewska-Posadzowa, Zofia Żukiewiczowa (Bobrowska-Nowak, 1978: 280–290), and Stefania Sempołowska. Maria Weryho-Radziwiłłowiczowa also continued her publishing and pre-school education activities. In publications from that period, one can find threads regarding the development of a pre-school child, the state of research on the child, the upbringing and education of pre-school children, the development of the child's character, activities and games, the organization of a nursery (Manual for female guardians...), establishing and running kindergartens, conditions of care children (Wawrzyńska, 1936: 245–252), and the methodology for working with pre-school children (e.g. Marciszewska-Posadzowa).

The interwar years were also the time of scientific research on children conducted by recognized psychologists and educators at university centres in Poznań – Antoni Danysz, Stefan Błachowski (Nowak-Kluczyński, 2017: 251), in Warsaw – Stefan Baley, Józefa Joteyko (Sedlaczek, 1929: 7–8), Janusz Korczak (Smolińska-Theiss, 2013) and in Cracow – Stefan Szuman, who pursued their research work with their colleagues after the end of World War II. What was characteristic of this period was that research on pre-school children was treated as one of the elements of broader research on the course of human life.

Scientific research conducted during this period, and publications by doctors, psychologists and educators contributed to the emergence of concepts in

the language of pre-school pedagogy such as creating conditions for development, respect for the child,¹¹ respecting the child's nature, etc.

For example, in the area of creating conditions for a child's development, phrases such as "Post-war economic relations mean that a small child in a family home most often does not have appropriate conditions for normal development ... Often, parents, engaged in the struggle for existence, cannot provide their child with even the necessary care to protect him from disability or disastrous examples, and there is no skilful, planned work on educating his concepts, on developing the hidden beautiful resources of the soul-speech" (Bobrowska-Nowak, 1978: 516).

Respect for the child was expressed through the following descriptions:

- "You must stand up to the child in the truth, look at him with a fair and just eye, and therefore neither admire him uncritically, nor treat him as a toy, nor ignore him as an unreasonable being. The child deserves respect and freedom in developing powers and abilities; respect for feelings, respect for free will, which does not allow violence or coercion that arouses disgust and resistance, and finally, respect for vocations" (Manual for protectors...);
- "The child has a future, but he also has a past: memorable events, memories, many hours of the most important solitary reflections. No different to us, he remembers and forgets, values and disregards, reasons logically, and makes mistakes when he doesn't know. Prudently trusts and doubts ... Respect for ignorance ... Respect for the work of knowledge. Respect for failures and tears ..." (Korczak, 2017: 28–30).

Attention is also drawn to the need to respect the nature of the child:

"Pre-school education is the most important period in a child's life because it paves the way for his thoughts, desires and actions. In later years, the educator receives the material in the child not in its original state of nature, but with certain habits, sometimes very strong, and must often repair, straighten and change directions. At pre-school age, we only have the nature of a child, hence it is easier to influence and create habits. Pre-school education aims to put the child on the right path for the subsequent improvement and education of innate qualities" (Manual for protectors...).

Examples selected from the pedagogical literature of the 1920s and 1930s show the humanistic-personalistic direction in the development of pre-school pedagogy, drawing on research conducted at that time on the child's cognitive activity, the role of hygiene, health, etc. (Śliwerski, 2007: 29) and implementing

¹¹ *A Child's Rights to Respect* by Janusz Korczak was published for the first time in 1928.

the ideas expressed by Ellen Key in *The Century of the Child*,¹² as outlined in an extract from her work: “a children’s garden ... let it be for children a place of freedom as small puppies or kittens enjoy, let them play there with their ideas, let them invent something for themselves, as long as they are provided with objects to leading their games and playing companions. Let some sensible woman watch over them and observe them, only to intervene actively when the child intends to harm itself or another person. Let her help them from time to time, tell them a story or teach them a funny game, but otherwise let her behave passively on the surface, but in reality, let her tirelessly follow their tendencies and character traits that come to light during the fun” (Key, <https://wolnelektury.pl/media/book/pdf/key-stulecie-dziecka.pdf>).

Stage V is the time between 1945 and 1969. During this period, socialist ideology was emphasized in the language of pre-school pedagogy.

The beginning of the second half of the 20th century was a time when the idea of socialist education was developed and implemented. Bogusław Śliwerski (2007: 137), referring to this period of the development of Polish pedagogy, points out that the construction of pedagogical theories was closely related to the existing social order, which had a built-in system of legitimation. He emphasizes that the ideological system displaced all previous theoretical directions and currents and allowed pedagogy to be treated as a tool for shaping Polish society’s worldview.

Socialist pedagogy was supposed to oppose the bad traditions of “cultivating completely private preferences of ‘beautiful spirits’ detached from life in favour of subjecting the child to collective upbringing from an early age” (Śliwerski, 2007: 138). Ideologically charged central regulation determined the directions of development and the main tasks of pre-school pedagogy, both in theory and in educational practice. In June 1945, the National Educational Congress was held in Łódź, during which a demand for compulsory pre-school education for 5–6-year-old children was put forward. The instruction of the Ministry of Education, issued in the same year, recommended that children aged 4–7 be included in pre-school education (Wilgocka-Okoń, 1993: 639). In the immediate aftermath of World War II, kindergartens primarily performed care functions, which were related to the need to take care of thousands of war orphans. There was a process of intensive building of facilities, although “kindergartens were not at the forefront of the hierarchy of educational needs at that time. They were preceded by primary, vocational and higher education” (Pawłowska, 1950: 66). In 1958, kindergartens and pre-school clubs as well as kindergartens operat-

¹² The Polish translation by Izabela Moszczeńska was published in 1928.

ing in primary schools began to be established, as a result of recommendations to create pre-school institutions in industrial centres and on the premises of “state agricultural production workshops” (Woźnicka, 1972: 34). In September 1949, the Ministry of Education developed a draft programme for kindergarten classes, with the interim programme being published in 1951. The main goals of kindergartens were enabling working mothers to build People’s Poland, and raising and developing children in the socialist spirit (Temporary programme. Activities in kindergarten, PZWS, Warsaw, 1951: 3). In 1957, during the National Educational Congress, in addition to programme and organizational proposals for kindergartens, a suggestion was made to research the basic problems of pre-school pedagogy and create an education system based on scientific foundations. However, this postulate was not implemented in the 20th century. The Act of July 15, 1961, which regulated the basic goals of upbringing and teaching in Poland in all types of institutions, built the system and organization of institutions (including kindergartens), basing them on the guidelines of the communist party (Pyter, 2015: 113). The consequence of this was the kindergarten education programme’s emphasis (1962) on the issue of “enabling the mother to work professionally before the comprehensive development and upbringing of children and preparing them for school activities” (Zwiernik, 1999: 350). However, in the pre-school education programme (1967) (in manuscript form), the issue of comprehensive development of a child aged 3–6 was highlighted, and the tasks of the kindergarten were defined to achieve this goal (Kindergarten education programme, PZWN, Warsaw, 1967: 3–4).

It can be assumed that due to the historical experiment carried out in socialist countries, pedagogy experienced a crisis on two occasions. The first of these was related to the introduction of the system later called “real socialism.” Factors external to science – with the application of political and administrative measures – created conditions for the emergence and domination of the paradigm that its creators dubbed “socialist pedagogy.” The period of struggle aimed at rejecting, disavowing and pushing to the margins the Polish and Western pedagogical tradition by calling it “bourgeois” lasted over twenty years. The end of this “crisis-collapse” process came in the early 1970s (Hejnicka-Bezwińska, 1993: 95). What concerned pedagogy as a scientific discipline affected all its subdisciplines to the same extent. According to Wilgocka-Okoń (1989), independent research on pre-school children began in the 1950s and 1960s in psychology departments at universities in Poznań (e.g. Stanisław Kowalski), Warsaw (e.g. Stefan Baley), and Cracow (e.g. Stefan Szuman). In the 1960s (and also in the 1970s), researchers from university centres were joined by employees of the Institute of Pedagogical Research, the Institute of Mother and Child

and the University of Physical Education in Warsaw (Wilgocka-Okoń, 1989: 8). As a result of studies conducted by psychologists and educators, scientific works were created on the specific development of children aged 3–6, methods and forms of work conducive to child development changes. Their results were published in scientific journals, magazines addressed to teachers, and textbooks on pre-school methodology (Kwiatkowska, Topińska, 1968). Concepts that can be found in source materials from that period indicate a strong ideological entanglement of theory and, above all, educational practice.

The idea of educating young citizens to serve their country as the goal of education in kindergarten was manifested in the quotes such as “... to educate in love for the People’s Republic of Poland, for its leaders, builders and defenders: the working class, the working peasantry and the Polish Army” (Temporary programme. Activities in kindergarten, PZWS, 1951: 4).

Developing a child’s character as the goal of education in kindergarten can be seen in the following text fragments:

- “Comprehensive education includes health, physical, mental, socio-moral and aesthetic education” (Topińska, 1970b: 353);
- “Kindergarten develops in children those qualities of mind and character without which success at school cannot be imagined. These include discipline, i.e. the ability to comply with norms and regulations, dutifulness in fulfilling various orders, perseverance and diligence, i.e. patience and precise fulfilment of duties” (Lipkova, 1965: 27).

Upbringing in a team as the goal of pre-school education can be seen in the following quote from 1951:

“The kindergarten should ... accustom children to living in a group, develop discipline, the ability to live in a team and behave appropriately among children and adults, respect the elderly, develop a love for parents” (Temporary programme. Activities in the kindergarten, PZWS, 1951: 4).

During the beginnings of the People’s Republic of Poland, a child was seen as a “semi-finished product” that had to be “made” according to specific standards, as evidenced by the following recommendations for managing child development:

- “In kindergarten, methods and methods of purposeful, intended educational activity are based on the process of directing the activity and actions of children ... This process also includes certain elements of teaching consisting in acquiring children’s elementary knowledge and various practical habits and skills” (Kwiatkowska, 1968: 10);
- “Personal hygiene of a child in kindergarten involves developing habits that are conducive to health and are part of the requirements of cultural

behaviour. Such habits include washing hands, teeth, combing hair, wiping shoes, eating aesthetically, using the washroom and toilet” (Kozina, 1968: 49);

- “The scope of tasks facing pre-school education is expanding. The need to activate the child comes to the fore. Moreover, the assigned tasks are matched – in the programme material – with the content necessary to implement them. These slogans define the desired result of conscious and purposeful educational activity in which the child is an active participant. It assumes the possibility of achieving higher results than has been the case so far” (Wacławski, 1985: 26).

In the second half of the 20th century, the concept of cleanliness and hygiene was emphasized in pre-school pedagogy (especially in the post-war period, due to the need to shape the hygiene habits of children who had spent part of their lives in conditions dictated by different values and priorities). In the 21st century, the concept of hygiene has again been highlighted in pre-school education. The current core curriculum includes a provision regarding “creating situations conducive to developing health care habits.” In this example, it is worth pointing out that the meaning of the concept has changed. Taking care of your neat appearance and the neatness of your clothes and surroundings is one thing, taking hygienic activities is another thing, and taking care of your health (proper nutrition, physical activity, disease prevention) is another still.

The current basis for pre-school education does not include any provisions indicating that children are encouraged to take care of their appearance and the appearance of their surroundings. The emphasis has shifted to independence in performing hygiene and self-service activities, using cutlery and cleaning up after meals.

Stage VI of the development of the language of pre-school pedagogy took place in the 1970s and 1980s. During this period, “upbringing” becomes a basic conceptual category.

In this period, the concept of pre-school pedagogy refers mainly to practice, as Maria Kwiatkowska (1985a) points out, identifying it with the concept of pre-school education. Kwiatkowska indicates that it includes intentional and natural influences, as well as elements of teaching work (Kwiatkowska, 1985b: 7). However, it should be noted that during this period there was also progress in theory and research on pre-school children, and attempts were made to organize the knowledge constituting the basis of education in kindergarten (Kwiatkowska, 1986: 7). The 1970s and 1980s saw growing interest in this stage of education, which stemmed from the research and how its findings permeated public awareness. In practice, this reflects the change in the function of

kindergarten: from caring and educational, the focus shifts to preparing for school. The results of research contributed significantly to this change, including work by Barbara Wilgocka-Okoń. Kindergarten begins to be perceived as an institution that can and should fulfil a teaching function. In the kindergarten education programme (1973 and then also in 1981), it was noted that the kindergarten was intended to equalize the start of the youngest citizens of the People's Republic of Poland and to create "the prospect of gradually eliminating institutional differences between kindergarten and school" (Kindergarten education programme, PZWS, Warsaw, 1973: 4).

Comprehensive development of an individual brought up in a team was postulated, as well as shaping attitudes, beliefs, interests, developing skills and abilities, and gradually expanding knowledge. The teacher was expected to guide the child's activity by organizing the educational environment. It was believed that implementing all areas of education and upbringing served to prepare children for school. In 1977 (in accordance with the schedule adopted for implementing the newly reformed school system), activities were undertaken to popularize pre-school education for six-year-old children. All children of this age were subject to compulsory educational and didactic intervention. A natural consequence of these decisions was the preparation and publication of a supplement to the kindergarten curriculum covering content related to educating six-year-old children. Its aim was to draw teachers' attention to the need to "equalize the start of school and ensure the continuity of the influence of kindergarten and school" (Scope of the content of upbringing and education for six-year-old children (an insert to the kindergarten curriculum in force from September 1, 1973). WSiP, Warsaw, 1977: 3). The curriculum was reviewed by the Pre-school Education and Initial Education Curriculum Team at the Institute of School Curricula under the supervision of Jadwiga Walczyna,¹³ which suggests that attempts were made to combine scientific knowledge and educational practice. In 1983, the Institute of School Curricula prepared a draft list of the necessary equipment for kindergartens and primary schools with teaching resources (MEN, Warsaw, 1983: 24).

Due to the political situation in the country, the concepts that constitute the framework of pre-school pedagogy in this period largely reflected those

¹³ The team included Maria Cackowska, Ryszard Więckowski, Zofia Cydzik, Irena Dudzińska, Maria Dunin-Wąsowicz, Maria Jakowicka, Maria Kwiatkowska, Marian Lelonek, Henryk Moroz, Halina Mystkowska, Hanna Nartowska, Maria Przychodzińska, Hanna Ratyńska, Zbigniew Semadeni, Barbara Wilgocka-Okoń, Kazimiera Właźnik, Lidia Wołoszynowa, and Tadeusz Wróbel.

from the earlier stage. However, changes can be noticed in how the child and role of education were perceived, as evidenced by the following quotes:

- “The main goal of pre-school education in Poland is to influence the development of the child’s personality during his/her activity manifested in contacts with the surrounding world” (Hajnicz, 1985: 193);
- “The task of pre-school education is the implementation of a uniform education system” (Hajnicz, 1985: 193);
- “The most important factor in developing rational discipline is the educational influence of adults and the mutual influence of children who have already been taught the desired habits” (Landy, 1985: 100);
- “Preparing a child for school starts early. It involves giving the child’s activity a cognitive character with stimulation through learning. Naturally, this is about learning in a broad sense – as gaining all kinds of experiences” (Wilgocka-Okon, 1985: 137).

Summarizing the specificity of pedagogy in this period, Teresa Hejnicka-Bezwińska (1993: 93) points out that the dominant paradigm in its practice in this period, promoting the de-philosophical atheoretical nature of pedagogy, justified the need to serve theory in educational practice, which contributed to the crisis of objectively conducted research. This fact is confirmed by Maria Kwiatkowska (1985c), who claims that the position of pre-school pedagogy as a scientific discipline depends on the contribution of outstanding specialists in this field. However, it is also important what concept and curriculum of pre-school education was accepted by the educational authorities, and what model in this respect was guided by pedagogical supervision and methodological inspectors. State educational policy would determine educational practice at the kindergarten level in the subsequent years of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century.

Stage VII of the development of the language of pre-school pedagogy came at the end of the 20th century (1990–2000). During this period, new concepts appeared as a result of the political transformation and changes in the area of education.

The political, economic, social and cultural changes after 1989 required changes in the education system, including the theory and practice of pre-school pedagogy. At this time, there was the beginning of a deep crisis in the developing pre-school pedagogy as a science, which was indicated by the liquidation of teaching specialities at university, the weakening of research power and with it the progressive weakness of the theoretical subdiscipline, leading to the duality of theory and practice, narrowing the possibilities of grounding methodological specificity in the result of the “dilution” of the subject of peda-

gogy research in general by the vagueness of concepts, theoretical eclecticism, randomness, linguistic multiplicity and ambiguity, freedom of interpretation, and staff weakness, which led to difficulties in promoting research and teaching staff, and the lack of scientific authority figures who could prevent the breakdown of pre-school pedagogy.

It should also be added that the transformation stage and the first years after the change of the political system were a time of difficult changes in pre-school education. Despite the declared new kindergarten model and the strengthening of its role, in practice, the legal solutions that were introduced led to the liquidation of institutions in former state farm villages, in Silesia and eastern Poland. The consequence of the Act on Local Government (1990) was the transfer of kindergartens to communes, which led to kindergartens being closed. These activities were the subject of extensive and multi-faceted criticism from the scientific community (Śliwerski, 2001: 49–73), which did not stop the process of liquidation of kindergartens at the end of the 20th century. Many parents also gave up sending their children to kindergartens due to the costs associated with paying for the child's stay at the facility. The reason for children not participating in education at the kindergarten level was rising unemployment among parents or the search for employment opportunities outside the family's area of residence, often outside the country, leading to the mass phenomenon of 'Euro-orphanhood' affecting children of all ages. An attempt to standardize activities came with the Ordinance of the Minister of National Education on the minimum curriculum for pre-school education issued in 1992 and a set of programmes approved for use in kindergartens (Journal of Laws of 1991, No. 95, item 425; Journal of Laws of 1992, No. 26, item 113). The minimum curriculum defined the basic goals, tasks and content of pre-school education for children aged 3–6. Teachers were obliged to use educational programmes developed based on the minimum curriculum. Three curricula were then approved for use, based on which teachers were to develop monthly plans for working with children. We therefore have an example of a directive perception of educational practice under the guise of changes being made. However, the educational reality contradicted the research results and the demands of the scientific community, which drew attention to the need to create educational opportunities for children from various backgrounds, raised the issue of a child's adaptation to kindergarten, and discussed the quality of the kindergarten offer (Guz, 1991).

Among the concepts constructing the framework of the theory and practice of pre-school pedagogy in the years 1989–2000 are those related to the educational opportunities of pre-school children, the child's adaptation to kindergarten, and the child's attitude to kindergarten, e.g.:

- “The first selection of educational opportunities for the youngest generation of Poles takes place at the pre-school education level. Kindergarten is therefore the first institution that provides the opportunity to equalize educational opportunities between children. It is especially needed by children from rural environments that poorly stimulate their development” (Lubowiecka, 2004: 62);
- “Kindergarten is an environment with strictly defined requirements, which are often different from those of the family. A child in kindergarten is no longer the centre of attention of the immediate environment, he is expected to adapt to the customs and socio-moral norms specific to the kindergarten group, as well as to subordinate his aspirations and behaviour to the aspirations and behaviour of others or specific regulations (customs, regulations) adopted in the kindergarten group. The change in living conditions caused by the child’s transition from home to kindergarten disturbs the child’s sense of security, but may also be a source of new beneficial experiences. All these elements influence the child’s adaptation to kindergarten” (Kienig, 2001: 162);
- “When a child crosses the kindergarten threshold for the first time at the beginning of the school year, he or she enters an unfamiliar space, far different from home. This fact is certainly one of the reasons why many children feel lost, lack of support, lack of sense of security, etc. (Lubowiecka, 2000: 38);
- “Most children who start attending the reception class have a certain set of ideas and concepts that enable them to define their ‘initial’ attitude towards it. These ideas and concepts are most often influenced by parents’ views, their contacts with other children, stories of more experienced, older classmates, and later experience resulting from everyday attendance in classes. Children’s attitudes towards “pre-school children is always emotionally coloured and depends largely on the educational work carried out in the ward, and therefore on the activities organizing their experience” (Guz, Trębska, 1991: 363).

Pre-school pedagogy in the two decades of the 21st century in the sphere of language resembles a balancing act between mutually exclusive concepts and contradictory narratives. Contemporary pre-school pedagogy as a subdiscipline of pedagogy and “is more a science about practice and for educational practice than about ideas, directions or models of education” (Śliwerski, 2015: 86). Educational practice therefore sets the framework and possibilities for conducting research. According to Danuta Waloszek (2006: 90), the main reason for the weakness of contemporary pre-school pedagogy is its involvement

in the process of “acquiring knowledge through experience.” According to this author, “an indicator of this location is that research is directed to narrow practical areas, leading to the construction of ‘praxeological directives’ rather than scientific statements” (Waloszek, 2006: 90). In many cases, it is difficult to argue with the fact that the research is narrow in scope. The weakness of pre-school pedagogy as a science certainly lies in the fact that few researchers focus on researching this period of a child’s life, educational stage, the broader context of the development of individuals at this age, etc. More extensive research and in-depth research requires time, commitment, concentration of attention, etc. The results of research work do not lead to changes in educational practice, and theory and practice often function independently of each other. For example, it is worth mentioning the issue of transgressive possibilities of a pre-school child, undertaken by Stanisława Włoch (2018). The author writes that “transgressive pedagogy emphasizes a situational approach as opposed to a prescriptive, task-oriented, passive approach, which involves organizing situations in which something happens, which surprises children, in which many activities need to be performed and effort is needed. Thinking and acting. When a child finds himself in such a situation, he creates specific expectations, interests, and motivation to make efforts that trigger his abilities and exceed them. The child ceases to be only an object of educational activities and becomes the subject of his or her actions, has the opportunity to learn by discovering, asking questions, making assumptions, acting independently and solving manifested in various types of activities” (Włoch, 2018: 18). Meanwhile, educational practice and the language he uses proves that the child is still an object (subject of educational influence) of teachers and guardians/parents (Kaczmarek: Lewicka, 2014: 81).¹⁴ In practice (organized based on formal and legal directives), several inconsistencies and chaotic actions can be noticed, which are undertaken contrary to available research results and current knowledge. These include lowering the age at which children complete pre-school education,¹⁵ then extending it, opening kindergartens for children younger than three years old (Krauze-Sikorska, Kuszak, 2014: 25–43), then closing facilities for children aged 2–2.5 years due to lack of places. With the 2017 reform, most six-year-old

¹⁴ Attention is drawn to the fact that a child is deprived of the opportunity to play freely. This happens when a pre-schooler is naughty and does not follow the rules in the room. Then, as a form of punishment, the child is excluded from play for a specified or indefinite period – this is an example of overt blocking of the child’s natural right to activity.

¹⁵ The process of transferring six-year-old children to schools, initiated in 2011 and extended over several years, sparked several controversies and protests directed at the educational authorities from various circles.

children remained in kindergartens. In practice, kindergarten care was abandoned for children under three years of age, even though research suggests that due to the acceleration of development, younger children are ready to establish relationships outside the circle of their closest relatives.

The 2009 implementation of the core curriculum for pre-school education for kindergartens, pre-school classes in primary schools and other forms of pre-school education raised the important issue of managing a child's time in kindergarten. The pre-school day was divided into the following periods and forms of activity: 1/5 time for play as the child's basic form of activity, 1/5 time for outdoor activities – playing in the kindergarten garden and walks, 1/5 time for teaching activities, 2/5 time for care, self-service, cleaning and other activities. In practice, it led to the day being divided into “chunks,” often without taking into account the real needs of children, which are individually differentiated and conditioned by various internal and external factors. Play was rightly considered the most desirable form of activity for children at this age, while paradoxically valuing higher educational activity leading to achieving a predetermined goal or goals (Journal of Laws of 2017, item 356). It was assumed that the child has the right to develop at their own pace, while there were also attempts to accelerate this development. Nowadays, much is said about the fact that children have the right to act individually, experience, construct their knowledge (Brunner, 2006) and make mistakes, because these mistakes are the driving force of children's development. At the same time, these mistakes are criticised and it is expected that the child will “fit in” with the only correct functioning model (Kuszak, Sadowska, 2018: 45–56). Even a child's free activity is intended to serve other purposes, e.g. developing passions and interests (Kaczmarek, Lewicka, 2014: 78).

The 2009 core curriculum also specifies 17 kindergarten tasks, among which an important place is occupied by those related to preparing the child to learn foreign languages. It was assumed that “preparing children to use a modern foreign language should be included in various activities carried out as part of the pre-school curriculum and should primarily take the form of play. Conditions should be created that enable children to become familiar with a foreign language in various situations of everyday life” (Journal of Laws of 2017, item 356). In this context, it is difficult to understand certain educational practices in kindergartens, e.g. organizing foreign language “lessons” (Korean, Chinese, bilingual English-Spanish kindergartens, etc.), during which, contrary to current knowledge about the regularity of children's development, the children are forced to “learn” words and phrases that are useless to them because they do not correspond to the reality around. Such facts may suggest that research results regarding the development contexts and development environments of

pre-school children, development tasks (Kuszek, 2017), for example, do not penetrate educational practice. What is crucial at this stage of human development is marginalized: children's potential (Smykowski, 2005), their activity (Karwowska-Struczyk, 2015), the meanings they give (Aitchison, 1992), communication with other people, cooperation (Tomasello, 2016), practical action and experience (Włoch, 2008) in natural situations (Caiati, Delac, Muller, 2003), in non-pre-school conditions (Karwowska-Struczyk, 2015), mastering cultural tools (Filipiak, 2012), and thinking (Gnopik, 2010). Additionally, the system of pre-school pedagogy, as Krystyna Duraj-Nowakowa (1992: 48) states, is burdened with considerable subjectivity, and the definitions of the same concepts by some authors are opposed to the counter-definitions of opponents, and both are abstract and are the result of subjective construction. For example, I will refer to the concept of individualization, because, as Józefa Bałachowicz (2011: 13) emphasizes, this concept belongs to the category of complex concepts that are subject to negotiation and reinterpretation in the social sciences. It is a concept used in the theory and practice of pre-school pedagogy, approached from one of several possible perspectives. It is worth mentioning that the concept of individualization is not directly articulated in the core curriculum of pre-school education, although some references can be found, e.g.:

- “Every child should be allowed to develop his or her potential, and a properly shaped mental attitude will trigger meta positive thinking in him or her, determining his or her originality, uniqueness and creativity” (Remiszewska, 2013: 45);
- “However, it is not enough to believe in the possibilities of education, which gives each individual a chance to discover their potential (even in one field of their choice; appropriate conditions must also be created for this). Therefore, not only the family environment but also the pre-school environment will play an important role in the development of potential ... which can both contribute to strengthening the child's creative potential and become a catalyst thanks to which unrevealed potential can emerge and develop” (Krauze-Sikorska, 2011a: 62);
- “Helping and supporting a child therefore involves creating an educational strategy that allows for the individualization of activities in the learning-upbringing-teaching process, but above all, which triggers motivation within the child. Such development-friendly activities, based on relationships between the child and significant people, in which opportunities are created to undertake various tasks and help in their implementation, allow us to take full advantage of the message that the devel-

opment of an individual is the result of an exchange between him and his environment” (Krauze-Sikorska, 2010: 277);

- “Individualization places high demands on the educator, and its basis is teacher-child-group interaction. Creating an atmosphere conducive to learning, in which the tutor is not only the adult but also other children makes positive learning experiences as important as acquiring skills and knowledge because they allow the child to acquire strategies for learning, problem-solving, constructing and consolidating one’s self” (Krauze-Sikorska, 2011b: 522);
- “Child development is an individualized, continuous, not always harmonious process, possible thanks to the processes of interaction with people and objects, occurring by universal stages. Each child is an individual in terms of genetics, neurophysiology, health and environment. It is neurologically configured differently (this affects, among others, functioning, learning style), it has a specific dominance of the cerebral hemisphere, intelligence profile, general abilities, special interests and talents, work pace” (Grzeszkiewicz, 2010: 200);
- “Individualization is understood as a rather complex whole in which we can see both the phenomena that constitute the separation of an individual from the community, as well as his striving to shape himself in such a way as to become a unique entity, incomparable to others, unlike others ... individuality values emerge and gain importance in the process of individualization. They express the changes that individualization entails, i.e. changes in the way an individual understands himself or herself, separating himself from the social background, and at the same time expanding the area of his independence of action in the world” (Bałachowicz, 2012: 206).

As Józefa Bałachowicz (2011) points out, “On the one hand, the issue of individualization covers ideas and educational goals related to the development of each individual, on the other, it only involves taking into account the individual characteristics of the child and the pace of learning, or it concerns the content of teaching and the ways of making it accessible” (Bałachowicz, 2011: 13).

The definition of the concept in pre-school pedagogy will therefore be different, depending on the perspective adopted, e.g. of the child – individual existence in the world, of the teacher – creating conditions, opportunities, supporting, etc. individual development. According to Bałachowicz (2011), the following perspectives can be distinguished: functionalist-behaviourist – individualization is understood here as adaptation and will concern the selection of means to adapt the child to the expected pattern; humanistic-adaptive

perspective – individualization is understood here as individual values related to autonomy and self-fulfilment; critical-emancipatory (still a rarely adopted perspective) – individualization is a process of individual creation of meanings, the child can criticize the existing circumstances, able to defend his projects and strive for change.

It is impossible not to agree that language plays a triple role in the world: “It creates, expresses and stores some patterns, and about others (non-linguistic ones) it is a tool of interpretation” (Kwaśnica, 1991: 41). The concepts that constitute the framework of pre-school pedagogy, in the subsequent stages of its development, are determined by the political, economic, economic and cultural situation of the country, to a much greater extent than the pedagogical thought underlying them. They are certainly the result of the need to name and justify social facts, such as poverty, lack of hygiene, neglect, paid work of parents, and new information technologies, in addition to naming strategies, mechanisms and solutions serving society. As Teresa Bauman notes (1993: 203), some of the concepts created by pre-school pedagogy are easy to read and name, while others are hidden, not so obvious and difficult to name. Bauman points highlights how every change in education is based on “certain assumptions; those openly declared and those carefully hidden. Each change has specific consequences; positive and negative. Research can be organized in such a way that it proves the validity of the changes introduced (they focus on examining what is positive) or proves their uselessness (they focus on what is negative). However, apart from the situation of intentional distortions and manipulation of results or the unreliability of the researcher, the results of both studies tell us something about the reality we are learning, they are complementary to each other, and they indicate some dimension of reality” (Bauman, 1993: 205).

From the analyses, it can be concluded that changes in the language of pre-school pedagogy are heading from naming external and one-dimensional phenomena (order, hygiene, nutrition, etc.) to internal, multi-aspect, complex ones (attitudes, needs, mechanisms). Language is a kind of litmus test – it accepts and reflects ideas and ideologies. In each stage of the development of this sub-discipline, one can see manifestations of the linguistic capture of characteristic (typical) phenomena, processes and solutions.

Conclusion

In the authors' view, the dynamics and specificity of education for children up to seven years of age in Poland outlined in this monograph allow the reader to grasp this phenomenon. The authors have attempted to understand and explain this phenomenon, being aware of the words of Krystyna Ablewicz: "To understand means trying to 'close' this possibility of interpretation ... and at the same time being aware of being doomed to the potential ambiguity of the understandings of others and yet others" (Ablewicz, 1998: 27). Ablewicz adds that the explanation is also based on understanding, or rather 'pre-understanding', as coined by Gadamer, which has the nature of a "superstition" because it stands before a judgment that can be proven scientifically. It constitutes an unreflected cultural horizon in understanding reality, which also marks "objective" scientific cognition, seemingly independent of cultural subjectivity (Ablewicz, 1998: 27). In this process of cognition, she emphasizes, one must use all intellectual and spiritual forces to reach what is given internally and in a non-sensory way, through what is given externally – sensually. In seeking to capture the specificity of educating a young child in Poland, the authors of this volume externalize their way of understanding and explaining it. They do not claim a universal view, although they remain faithful to the sources and facts when describing the phenomenon. However, they have selected and presented topics that are important from their perspective to understand the education of young children. This perspective is the result of the authors' many years' experience accumulated during educational practice, academic practice, and, above all, in researching, recording and describing this area of education and the changes taking place within it. This publication is the result of combining the researchers' scientific experience and individual perspectives (focusing on similar yet slightly different areas and issues reflected in their previous research publications (Sadowska, 2018; Sadowska, 2022; Kuszak, 2006; Kuszak, 2008; Kuszak, 2014; Kuszak, 2021; Krauze-Sikorska, Kuszak, Rura, Sadowska, 2016; Kuszak, Sadowska, Kędzia (eds.), 2024). What results is new quality stemming

from a common view and description of Polish education throughout the 20th century and first two decades of the 21st. This specific retention of a scientific overview is important for the authors in a dynamically changing, uncertain and unpredictable reality in which the essence, goals and tasks of education are constantly being redefined in response to changing needs and challenges. The authors believe that to think about the future, one must first understand education's history and present, both in its local and global dimensions. This monograph constitutes a fragment of current knowledge about modern-day education in Poland, in Europe and the world.

Recommendations for educational practice

The dynamics of political, economic, social, cultural changes, etc. in the 20th and early 21st centuries around the world in Europe and Poland determined and still determine the quality of education for young children. Nowadays, we are increasingly aware that these changes around us will be increasingly dynamic and unpredictable. In the best-selling book published in 2018 entitled *21 Lessons for the 21st Century*, Yuval Noah Harari notes that “A baby born today will be thirtysomething in 2050. If all goes well, that baby will still be around in 2100 and might even be an active citizen of the 22nd century. What should we teach that baby to help them survive and develop in the world of 2050 or the 22nd century? What kind of skills will they need in order to get a job, understand what is going on around them, and navigate the maze of life?” He also adds that “since no one knows what the world will look like in 2050 – not to mention 2100 – we don’t know the answers to these questions.” People have never been able to predict the future, Harari emphasizes, but today it is even more difficult due to the dynamic development of technology, which “enables us to construct bodies, brains, minds, we can no longer be sure of anything – even things that previously seemed permanent and eternal.”

The authors therefore wonder whether, in the context of the above findings, it is possible to formulate recommendations for educational practice based on the topics presented in this monograph. Being aware that today’s perspective may be out of date in a year or two, the authors will attempt to indicate important directions and areas of early education.

What seems to be important in the education of a young child today:

1. Understanding the diverse individual needs of children, expressed in the belief that each child is an individual, enters an educational institution (nursery, kindergarten) equipped with an individual history and unique experience, how they function in the institution is the result of the individual dynamics of development, experiences gained from the immedi-

ate environment, and experiences in the institution together with other children and adults.

2. Understanding early education as a harmonious combination of care, upbringing, education and support addressed to each child individually, taking into account the sphere of the current, immediate development of each child and the area inaccessible to children's experience. This means that in each age group, all participants in the educational process experience diversity. Naturally, each educational task for children falls within:
 - the sphere of current development – it is an easy task and can be performed independently – therefore it is not a developmental task;
 - the sphere of proximal development – the child can accomplish it with the support of a tutor (an adult or a more advanced peer, an older child) – it is a developmental task;
 - a sphere inaccessible to the child's activities – the child will not complete this task even with the support of the tutor, the task is excessively difficult for them – therefore, it is not a developmental task.
3. The education of a small child cannot take the form of implementing an external programme imposed on the child, but the implementation of the internal programme of each child. It must take into account the diversity of individuals in every sphere and promote realizing the individual potential of each and every unique child.
4. The education of a young child should be based on understanding his or her needs and capabilities, including respect and understanding of the child's need to be here and now in the current activity without rushing, interrupting, forcing it to end or change it.
5. Education in institutions caring for children up to three years of age and in kindergartens should support the implementation of developmental tasks of early childhood, i.e.: building trust in caregivers, achieving basic autonomy and self-control, a sense of one's own independence, initiative and activity. This is a development stage in which the child should have a sense of security, receive unconditional acceptance as a unique person, time to develop their own activity, and experience activity in a peer group, time to develop independence and cooperation with others.

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Induced sources

Interviews were conducted with caregivers of children up to three years old from Greater Poland in March 2023.

Summary

The Education of a Child up to Seven Years of Age

The Polish Perspective

Since education in a given country does not exist as an isolated island, but part of a larger whole and does not exist in isolation from the historical, social, geographical, political and economic realities that bring it to life, this study aims to show the historical and social contexts of education for a child up to the age of seven in terms of the key factors shaping the Polish tradition and the specific Polish context in this area. The authors assume that these contexts, understood in the broader sense, and changing over the centuries, decades and years, determine changes in the way we think about education, influence educational ideologies and formulate education goals at the country level.

Due to the limited literature in English on the education of children up to 7 years of age in the Polish context, this monograph attempts to internationalize key aspects of the Polish tradition of educating of children in this age group, and strives to analyse the most important problems. It also examines the factors shaping Poland's education system, as well as indicating the direction of changes currently taking place in Polish educational policy.

In this study, the authors reflect on three main issues:

- the child as a subject of Polish education;
- child education in Polish nurseries;
- child education in Polish kindergartens.

The authors assume that pedagogy is an open discipline, both in terms of theoretical and methodological perspective, one of the features of which is its multi-paradigmatic nature. They also conclude that to examine this research problem, it is necessary to refer to qualitative research. Therefore, the method of the pedagogical monograph was employed, with an analysis of existing and created sources. Using these sources, above all, a focused interview conducted by Katarzyna Sadowska and Kinga Kuszak with nursery caregivers from the Wielkopolska region, the authors learned the perspective of practitioners who discern numerous systemic limitations to the introduction of new solutions in child education.

The authors were guided by the principle that qualitative research includes studies on the use and collection of various empirical materials. These included case studies, personal experience, introspection, biographies, interviews, cultural products, cultural texts and products, materials derived from observations, historical materials, materials derived from interactions, visual texts, and materials that describe everyday life and difficult moments in the lives of individuals. The authors also leaned towards a qualitative orientation, because this made it possible to diagnose and analyse phenomena in their historical, social and subjective context. When formulating the methodological assumptions of the research, the authors were also guided by the belief that the social construction of reality takes place through the qualitative interpretation of research results and that qualitative analysis of phenomena may be of particular importance when characterising educational phenomena.

The data in this study therefore concerns existing sources, both printed and electronic, relating to the issues of education in Poland, the social situation of Poland throughout history, magazine articles, and guides and child education curricula. The sources also include law regulations on child's education that were and are still in force in Poland.

By placing the child at the centre of education, the first chapter offers a synthesis of childhood concepts across the 20th and 21st centuries, thereby attempting to show the sources of Polish ideas regarding child education, referring to selected assumptions of Polish prenatal pedagogy, and drawing attention to the ways children achieve independence, and describing the importance of support from teachers in connection with the challenges of the modern world.

The second issue is discussed in Chapter Two, entitled: "Educating a child in a nursery." In this chapter, the authors focus on introducing the concept of early childhood education, describing the first nurseries in Poland, and indicating the discourse on mother and childcare that was undertaken in Poland in the interwar period. They also characterize Polish nurseries during communism, the functioning of nurseries during the political transformation period and the effects of nursery transformations related to Poland's accession to the European Union. In addition, this chapter reflects on the theoretical assumptions of the education of a child up to the age of three, which in Poland are still deeply embedded in directive educational concepts. To address these dilemmas regarding the "opening" of Polish nurseries to concepts that place the child at the centre of education, the authors present the results of focus research carried out with nursery caregivers from Greater Poland and characterize the draft of a new regulation on the standards of care for children up to the age of three.

The third issue is dealt with in the final chapter, entitled: "Education in Polish kindergartens – contexts, challenges, dilemmas." The analysis refers to the historical conditions of the education of pre-school children in Poland and in Poland until 1939, kindergartens in post-war and contemporary Poland are presented, the current core curriculum for pre-school education in Poland is analysed and dilemmas related to the teaching profession were presented. A valuable aspect of the considerations presented

in this chapter is its presentation of changes that have taken place throughout history in the area of the importance, role and tasks of kindergartens in Poland, as well as changes in the area of the formal language used to describe the education of children up to the age of seven.

Keywords: child education; nursery; kindergarten; historical contexts; Polish contexts; children's teachers



Katarzyna Sadowska – PhD (dr hab.), AMU professor
Kinga Kuszak – PhD (dr hab.), AMU professor

The researchers are employed in the Faculty of Educational Studies at Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań. They have been cooperating for more than 20 years, carrying out scientific and teaching projects both in Poland and at scientific and didactic centres abroad, including work in the Netherlands, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, Norway, Germany and Spain. At the centre of their interests is the child and concern for the child's subjectivity in education. Among the topics taken up by Kinga Kuszak are the child's linguistic and communicative competences, children's independence, the role of adults in mediating valuable linguistic experiences to the child, and children's literature. The issues that Katarzyna Sadowska's research focuses on revolve around early childhood education pedagogy and education through art, with a particular focus on the perspective of pedagogical personalism. What unites the researchers is common academic journeys and their shared interest in the Polish language as the first language of a child living in a multilingual and multicultural space. Years of collaborative work, integrating two distinct perspectives, directly led to the creation of this monograph.

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