

Children's Initiations in Communication with Preschool Teachers

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Abstract:

Introduction: This paper deals with an important aspect of preschool teachers' everyday professional life – interacting with children during educational activities in kindergarten environment. The research of real situations in kindergarten, still rare in Czech pedagogical discourse, indicates the limitedness of preschool teachers' communication following already fixed communication structures and patterns. There is not much evidence that teacher-child communication in kindergarten is initiated by children with any frequency. The aim of our research study is to describe preschool children's initiations in communication with pre-service preschool teachers and identify teachers' strategies in mutual communication.

Methods: The research is based on qualitative analysis of data obtained through participated unstructured observation (37 video recordings of micro educational situations with the duration of 3 to 15 minutes were collected) and written reflection of pre-service preschool teachers (55 participants). Each part of the observation took place in a different class of a standard kindergarten. In one case, it was a homogeneous class of children aged 5-6 years, and in the second, a heterogeneous class with children aged between 3 and 5 years. Our data material in the form of written reflections and transcribed video recordings was then processed through the qualitative content analysis.

Results: Research results show children breaking the communication structure managed by the teacher, and the teacher's strategies in these situations. We identified five main circumstances of preschool children's initiations as communicating their own experiences or associations related to the topic presented by the teacher.

Discussion: Our findings show a certain range of responses of future teachers to children's initiation in interaction during educational activities. Besides evidence of releasing communication in terms of teacher management, less suitable kinds of responses to children's initiation appear. The teacher is not able to give up control over the ongoing communication.

Limitations: Selected research sample consists of pre-service teachers, who represent only a partial sample of potential interactions in the kindergarten environment. Thus, to some teachers, the findings apply only partially in practice; with other teachers, we could possibly expand our research even deeper. This choice to use only a partial sample reflects both practicality and the need to improve the competence of future teachers through recording their unscripted interactions with children.

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Conclusions: Children need teachers who are sensitive to their initiations and offer space for children to initiate communication. If we want to have students at the primary and secondary levels of education with developed life skills and the ability to discuss and argue, we need to offer such manner of communication as early as in kindergartens.

Key words: teacher-child communication in kindergartens, preschool teacher, pre-service teacher, children's initiation; communication structure.

1 Introduction

According to previous research studies about teacher-child interactions, early qualitative interaction affects and predicts the children's overall development (Sakellariou & Rentzou, 2011, p. 414). The teacher should give attention to children's attempts to express and share their ideas with the aim to develop children into people who are prepared to discuss problems and possible solutions, to deepen ideas and thoughts with confidence to try out new words in language development (Bruce, 2004, p. 81). The development of language and speech supports children's development of cognitive prerequisites. Preschool teachers do not often engage children in cognitively challenging conversation (Goh et al., 2012).

The teacher's role in supporting children's learning is based on adult-led tutoring but with less dominance as argued by Bruner in the terms of scaffolding. The teacher's strategies in preschool education should already contain the use of reflective co-construction and sustained shared thinking (Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2002). Knowing how to listen to, hear, and understand a child opens the space for children's stimulating questions about their hypotheses, not only for premature conclusions. Teachers and children explore together instead of rushing to fulfil the demands of the curriculum. Diversity of shared ideas can lead them out of the previously prepared plan without being stressed (Vujić & Miketek, 2014).

The best help teachers (and adults in general) can give to children is to encourage them to ask their own questions. Allowing children to lead conversations is also important. Unfortunately, preschool conversations are often limited to the teacher's directives and one-word responses from children (Goh et al., 2012).

The analysis presented in research reports from the project focused on Effective Provision of Pre-school Education proposed four basic areas to be more thoroughly investigated. Among them are adult-child verbal interactions. A necessary condition is that both parties are involved in the learning process but such effective setting does not appear very frequently (Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2002).

2 Teacher-child communication structure and/or patterns in kindergarten

The aim or outcome of analysis of instructional communication is often to find out a certain sequence, whose repetition in instructional communication can be described as the existing structure of communication between the teacher and pupils in all possible variants of participation. Samuhelová (1988) defines the structure as the way in which communicants are arranged, including the relationships between them. This way, one- or bi-directional structures with varying numbers of participants are produced in a vertical or horizontal position. The structure that has been re-examined, revised and

supplemented since its initial description by the authors Sinclair and Coulthard (1975) is known by the acronym IRF (initiation-response-feedback). The next well-known variant of IRF is the structure with a variation of the last component of communication exchanges—E as evaluation instead of feedback as presented by Mehan and Cazden (as cited in Mareš, 2016).

The term “communication pattern,” which can be found in some foreign studies, is the current equivalent of the term “structure” (Myhill, 2006; Rasku-Puttonen, 2012; Molinari & Mameli, 2015). The result of the study by Myhill is therefore the following definition: “teacher-pupil interactions operated in highly conventional discourse patterns with the domination of teacher talk” (2006, p. 24).

The Finnish research team Rasku-Puttonen et al. (2012) focused on studying the structure of teacher-child interactions in kindergartens. The analysis of their data material was based on educational episodes of verbal exchanges captured through video recordings. The authors focused on whether the teacher gives children space for self-expression and whether teacher-controlled communication contains elements that belong to dialogical learning such as sharing ideas, developing children’s answers, and teacher’s open questions. The examined communication, as in the case of data in our research, was related to teacher prepared educational situations designed to develop selected areas such as Math or literacy. The authors identified three different types of interaction patterns:

- Demonstration of child’s knowledge through a question-answer sequence. This case of interactions did not contain any elements of dialogical learning; exchanges between the teacher and children reflected the traditional structure of the IRF, where the teacher did not give a broader evaluation or explanation for children’s answers. In some cases, the teacher interviewed the children in such a way that the children identified the way of their thinking in their responses, but mostly, the opportunities for children to participate were already limited by the teacher’s questions requiring just one correct answer.
- Support of a child’s engagement in interaction. In this structure, the teacher stayed the dominant participant who initiates communication. However, the teacher listened to children’s answers, providing space for diversity of children’s ideas about the given topic in instructional talk more than in the previous pattern.
- Opportunity for child’s initiation. This structure included the active involvement of a child in discussions with the teacher, and other children in the class. Children were not only interested in communication about what they have learned and found out in previous days, but they also initiated their own ideas within the given theme. The teacher accepted the exchange of roles, listened to the children, and consequently developed their ideas. At the same time, however, the teacher remained the manager of the communication in order to fulfil the set goals of education.

Although current approaches to education emphasize the focus on the child/pupil, which should lead to weakening the teacher’s dominance in the classroom, Myhill (2006) notes that many studies over the past few decades repeatedly have shown a strong tendency of the teachers to dominate the communication in the classroom. Communication generally has a power dimension. Dividing communication into content and relationships levels, as described by Watzlawick (2011), affects also the school environment. Likewise, McCroskey (2005) repeatedly states that a certain degree of the teacher’s power in the

classroom is always present; this applies to all levels of education, including preschool education.

Scott and Mortimer (2006) use the term “communication approach of a teacher” (in terms of interaction with the students and at the same time, to what degree the teacher takes into account the students’ ideas during a lesson). The authors demonstrate teachers’ approaches through the recordings of instructional sequences, while describing both verbal and non-verbal cues of teachers and pupils. As the result of their analysis, they identify four types of communication approaches based on the dimensions expressed by pairs of opposites of interactive/non-interactive and dialogical/authoritative approach:

- Interactive-dialogic: the teacher and pupils are considering a range of ideas on the topic together; they pose appropriate questions. The ideas are then either developed or remain just possible points of view.
- Non-interactive-dialogic: the teacher repeats and summarizes the topic from different points of view.
- Interactive-authoritative: the teacher focuses on a specific point of view and leads students through a question and answer routine.
- Non-interactive-authoritative: the teacher only presents a specific point of view on the topic.

In the most effective settings, the importance of teachers extending child-initiated interactions is also clearly identified. As shown by the results of a project aimed at the conditions in effectively managed preschool institutions, almost one half of all child-initiated episodes which contained an intellectual challenge included interventions from the teacher to broaden the child’s thinking. The evidence also suggests that adult “modelling” is often combined with sustained periods of shared thinking and that open-ended questioning is also associated with better cognitive achievement. However, open-ended questions made up only about 5% of the questioning used in even these “effective” settings (Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2002).

The structures or patterns of interactions between the teacher and children, described above, relate to educational situations. But even within the unprepared dialogues between the teacher and children, we do not have much evidence of initiating the communication by children (Makišová, 2010).

3 Methodology

The early years of children’s learning have traditionally been an under-researched area (Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2002). Focusing on the area of interaction and communication between the participants of preschool education, authors of Czech and foreign professional discourse also repeatedly note the lack of research investigations. Preschool education remains a marginal point of interest to researchers. A large and still unsolved question concerns the features of the unscripted communication between teachers and children in kindergartens (Průcha et al., 2016; Suchodoletz et al., 2014). Discourse and the structure of dialogues are explored neither in preschool environment nor in primary education (Rasku-Puttonen et al., 2012). The conclusion is therefore that in the field of preschool education, the database of real situations of children communication in the kindergarten environment needs to be extended.

3.1 Research aims

The aim of the research presented in this paper is to offer the findings based on the analysis of data capturing just such situations in kindergarten for discussion. Researchers are becoming increasingly interested in looking at the issue through the perspective of a child. Despite the gradual rise in studies involving young children, their voices still appear to be marginalized (Vujičić & Miktek, 2014). The goal is to try to listen to the “voices of children” through their experiences in order to better understand their learning in preschool conditions. Given the focus on the teacher-child communication we are interested in the child as the main participant of this communication. The aim of the present research is to determine how a child enters the communication with a pre-service teacher in a kindergarten during didactically targeted activities, and also to find out how pre-service teachers work with a child’s initiations in mutual communication. The choice of participants is limited to pre-service teacher instead of the already practicing teachers, is determined by two reasons. The first reason is the availability of data acquisition. Pre-service teachers are more willing to participate in recording their activities through video cameras, perceiving the need to reflect on their strategies in interactions with children in kindergarten. Records of these interactions provide them with the ability to track the development of their performance. The second reason is the related need to improve the communication competence of pre-service teachers, whereby the reflection on their practice can be an adequate means to improve their interaction with a child, providing him or her space for initiations and subsequent adequate responses. According to Petrová (2013), the use of video recordings in teaching pre-service teachers has a control function (presence of a university teacher, who can intensely monitor the development of his or her students), and the substitution function (in the absence of certain types of activities during the practice, which would nevertheless be helpful for the student teachers). The application of video records facilitates students’ learning of the terminology associated with a given area.

3.2 Research methods

Data material for this research comes from of two sources. The first source consists of written reflections of pre-service teachers. Student teachers were asked to write their reflections about their experiences and perceptions concerning the interactions with children in kindergarten environment. The aim was to obtain detailed personal statements from respondents, reflecting their position as future kindergarten teachers. A total of 55 students in the degree course Preschool Teachers’ Training participated in the research.

The second source consists of unstructured participated observation of pre-service teachers during their interactions with children in kindergarten. The data obtained is in the form of video recordings. The video recordings offer a range of options for the researcher, from microanalyses of separate situations in the classroom, which may possibly not exceed the duration of a minute, to extensive or longitudinal research projects. The authenticity and complexity of captured reality of education in kindergarten (and any other level of education) belongs to the positive aspects of the use of video. While observing the standard way, paying attention to the whole context of reported events is impossible. Audio recordings, although being an important clue to understanding the examined reality, lack all non-verbal interactions. During our research, data collection through observation was divided in two phases. First, we

recorded the communication between pre-service teachers and children in a kindergarten class during targeted didactic activities; these observations included all that was happening in the classroom. A total of 25 video recordings with the duration of 3 to 15 minutes were collected. Later, we decided to focus on the observation of the learning episodes in learning centers, where the communication took place during learning activities aimed to develop language and reading literacy, mathematical concepts, and science education for pre-schoolers. This phase of data collection provided 12 video recordings with the duration of 5 minutes each. Each part of the observation took place in a different class of a standard kindergarten. In one case, it was a homogeneous class of children aged 5-6 years, and in the second, a heterogeneous class with children aged between 3 and 5 years.

Our data material in the form of written reflections and transcribed video recordings was then processed through qualitative content analysis. The resulting categories indicate moments when the children become the initiators of the interaction with pre-service teachers, as well as the range of the future teachers' strategies following the children's initiations.

4 Results

We did not focus on the overall structure of the teacher-child communication in our research. Therefore, we did not attempt to provide empirical evidence that traditionally presented IRF structure, or any kind of pattern identified by the research team Rasku-Puttonen et al. (2012), would be prevailing structure in our data. The object of our investigation is a child's initiation. We define it as the utterance entering the ongoing talk between the child and the teacher. The child decides to participate in the communication on his or her own initiative during communication previously controlled solely by the teacher. We consider both verbal and non-verbal initiations toward a teacher. Therefore, we do not deal with the more common passive role of the child being only a recipient in the communication determined by the teacher – in those cases, the child only responds to the teacher's questions. In some cases, we consider to be child initiations also such discourses which are in the communication structure in the position of the expected answer to the teacher's questions, but where the child suddenly changes the topic of the communication to a matter more important to him or her at the moment.

Our data analysis has resulted in findings in two areas corresponding to the examination of the interaction of two participants who should be partners – the teacher and the child. First, we identified the circumstances of situations when the child decides to take the initiative beyond the communication structures set up by the teacher. Next, we observed the pre-service teacher's strategies as he or she responds to the child's initiation.

4.1 Child as an initiator in communication

Although we were primarily interested in teacher-child (or group of children) interactions, we cannot omit that the child's initiation in the communication supervised by the pre-service teacher may not apply to only the teacher. Children naturally address their utterances to each other in the group. Especially for pre-service teachers, these situations are the moments to realize that it is not necessary to stay the main control participant in interactions. At the same time, there is a space to develop their ability to observe and comprehend the children's interaction and their varying peer relationships.

However, in their written reflections, student teachers expressed the feeling of insecurity about the situations where communication did not exactly follow their planned scenario.

Children sitting on the carpet in the classroom in a circle with the pre-service teacher sitting between them. She asks questions about some riddles relating to the presented topic. The chosen riddles are too easy for the kids, so the pre-service teacher is trying not to entirely lose the children's attention, and she verifies their comprehension of the riddles' contents.

Pre-service teacher: Hm. (nodding her head) And who did she mean...who fluffs a feather?

Child 1: Hen! ...fluffs a feather. (She shows fluff on her chest.)

Child 2 (Meanwhile, he jostles with a boy sitting next to him): No. She fluffs the eggs. Ha ha! (All the kids are laughing for a while).

PT¹: (with embarrassment) I'll give you one more. (She means one more riddle.)

Recorded children's initiations have also a different form than just verbal speech, of course. Children's speech is often replaced by non-verbal expressions, or these expressions are embedded as a part of verbal speech. This could mean gestures, gaze, stance, facial expression, or voice quality (Goh et al., 2012). So far, it is difficult for pre-service teachers to capture all these signals expressed by children because the teachers still focus excessively on the content of their own speech. We have not examined the field of non-verbal cues comprehensively in our research. In the recordings capturing interactions in whole class teaching, the data material including children's non-verbal responses to teachers would become extensive. The non-verbal cues of children, however, were more intensive if the pre-service teacher decided to work in the organization form of learning centers. The teacher's directive communication management was often taken over by a child who realized his or her communication non-verbally by actions. However, the pre-service teachers seemed as if they did not perceive such non-verbal initiations, or they deliberately waited until the child expressed the meaning verbally. The research team Goh et al. (2012) studied teachers' perception and understanding of non-verbal expressions as an important part of preschool children's language. The researchers observed teachers who applied a specific pedagogical strategy called Instructional Conversation (IC) with a modification especially for children aged from 2 to 5 years. Modifications included the support of non-verbal cues, so the child had a chance to express their ideas comprehensively through the combination of gestures and speech. The child would not be able to express the same content only by oral speech. The application has proved to be effective for the development of the dialogue between the teacher and the child, especially for children from bilingual families and children who attend kindergarten between 2 and 3 years of age. Both cases are relevant to the Czech preschool education. In the coming years, teachers will be facing the need to adjust the well-established strategies in interactions with children in kindergarten with respect to the communication abilities of children under 3 years of age.

We consider alarming the finding that dealing with the communication of children and pupils across the levels of education is not rare in research studies – only a few cases of kindergarten children's initiations are in the form of a question. The occurring questions had primarily the nature of organizational questions (e.g., “We will call our names?”).

¹ We will use the acronym PT to mark the utterances of pre-service teachers in all presented examples from our data material.

One possible interpretation for the absence of children's questions as early as in preschool education is visible in the situations where a child asks a question that steers off the expected framework of possible answers given to a teacher. As we can see in the following example, a pre-service teacher copes with the child's question so that the communication returns to the name of a tree that she initially wanted to hear from children. Children adapt to the established communication scenario with the structures controlled by the teacher during interactions as early as in the preschool environment.

Learning center for literacy development. The pre-service teacher shows children a story about Little Prince in different genres. Their dialogue concerns the images in comics they are viewing.

PT: What is the name of the trees on the planet, do you know?

Child: And what will Little Prince do?

PT: Well... (thinking for a while) It is just that there are those baobabs.

The child's question indicates that he is interested in the topic, he wants to discuss the solution to the situation that is presented in the analyzed literary text, or that he, most likely, wants to hear the solution from the teacher. However, there was the opportunity for building understanding through discussion, which unfortunately was not utilized by the pre-service teacher. What other moments belong to the identified reasons why a child enters the ongoing classroom communication between the teacher and children?

4.1.1 The child wants to communicate the association or his/her own experience of the topic

In the previous example of our data, a child posed a question in the dialogue about the Little Prince. Despite the pre-service teacher's efforts to keep the dialogue continuing according to her prepared scenario, another child decided to move towards the topic of her own association: And there are other princes too. In this case, the prepared scenario finally evolved into discussion between the pre-service teacher and children based on the girl's initiation during learning activities.

Sharing of experiences as a pattern of educational dialogue was identified by Muhonen et al. (2017). The pattern consists of dialogical episodes started by a student willing to share his or her experience, or by the teacher requesting to hear such experience with the presented topic. Even in our collected data there were children who initiated a new sub-theme in dialogical episode (often after the pre-service teacher's pause in speech):

I saw once a wild boar. Tracks!

My sister found eggs on our tree that were not cracked, and she found a nest there.

I saw a real stork.

These initiations are typically related to the children's experiences in science education topics that awakened their interest without the need for external motivation. Every teacher should appreciate initiations of children telling their own experiences and develop them in further discussion. The opportunity to watch the communication repeatedly recorded on video was valuable for the pre-service teachers in these cases. Only then they noted, for example, the significance of the word "real" in the statement of the child, which meant for them information about the perception of the uniqueness of this experience when a child living in a city could observe real animal in nature.

The proof of sharing experiences and associations for the child in interactions with a teacher can be found in the recorded exchanges where the child repeats his or her perception until the pre-service teacher finally pays attention.

Learning center for the development of mathematical operations. Children create simple origami animals and so get to know the basic geometric shapes.

Child: (waving her origami) It looks a bit like a dragon.

PT (observes another child, who is taking longer time) Yes, yes, you're doing it right.

Child: (vehemently) It looks a bit like a dragon!!

4.1.2 The child wants to introduce a new topic

In their written reflections, pre-service teachers often positively evaluated themselves for being able to spontaneously respond and accept the child's new topic in communication when the child wanted to introduce a new initiative. *"I enjoy adjusting the topic of communication to the one preferred by my children; I'm able to react promptly."* The teacher should perceive linking of discussed educational content to children's experiences as desirable also in those cases where the communication takes place, at least for a while, under the baton of the child.

Even when the pre-service teacher tries to start a discussion with the theme of nature in spring, the child comes with his own theme – an important experience from that day: *"Today, my daddy spilled water on me when he woke me up"*. If the pre-service teacher applied an approach corresponding to the third identified interaction pattern by Rasku-Puttonen et al. (2012), she could have developed communication about the child's experience for a while and then effortlessly move back to the intended educational content. In most cases, however, pre-service teachers feel tied to the prepared topic even in a morning community circle that serves as an introduction to the topic of the day.

4.1.3 The child wants to express disagreement or doubt

We can identify situations perceived as difficult by pre-service teachers in their reflections when the communication goes in a different direction than expected. It happens when a child makes a protest about the prepared activities: *"This is...these riddles are too easy"*. The child thus enters communication by naming a weak part in the pre-service teacher's preparation, which is a sensitive issue for the teacher, of course, one which usually paralyses the subsequent discussion development. None of the pre-service teachers in our research thought to take advantage of the active participation of the child.

Teachers repeatedly face a lack of time as they try to cover most of the educational areas in the curriculum, and this causes another barrier for children's initiations in mutual communication.

Based on discovered clues, children solve a "detective story"- they search for a place where the plush class mascot is hidden. The final discussion is strongly controlled by a group of pre-service teachers because the previous activities lasted much longer than expected. Although children have different views on possible solutions, pre-service teachers lead them quickly to the correct version of the solution.

PT: So, if everyone agrees with the bathroom, line up at the end of the carpet (pointing at the place).

(Children start running there.)

Child: Hey, I didn't agree with the bathroom.

PT: (hesitantly looks at the child, then she quickly moves to the rest of the group by the bathroom) Slowly... Is it in the bathroom? Nobody can run here. Everyone goes there

calmly. Now, slowly look to see if it really is in the bathroom. (2s) And careful, let's not frighten him.

4.1.4 The child needs help

Children often need help with a problem, looking for the teacher's support, but they must trust the teacher. Pre-service teachers expressed uncertainty in their reflections as they often must balance between the "strict teacher" and a "friend". This is a usual dilemma for beginning teachers. They feel better and relaxed in the role of a friend; they discover that children then prefer to contact them spontaneously. At the same time, however, they have concerns confirmed by the experience of children losing the established behavior boundaries. This nervousness may be a reason for inappropriate reactions of pre-service teachers when they evaluate the child's initiation only from the point of view of self-doubt because the planned activities are not successful.

Children and the pre-service teacher sit around two tables with prepared activities.

Child: What should I do?

PT: (mildly angry) If you do not like it here, go to another table.

Child: (surprised and offended) But I want to stay here!

4.1.5 The child wants to persuade the teacher to change the activity

Student teachers reflect on this experience often as a weakness which arises from a loving relationship with the children. *"I really like my children, so they occasionally manage to persuade me, and then I give up on what I wanted to do. For example, I planned to go out with the aim to observe something but the kids made sad eyes and persuaded me to go to the garden just because they like it there more."* This kind of initiations overlap the previous cases of concrete communication utterances. Children's initiations are moving towards an active influence on the events in the kindergarten; they test their ability to influence the teacher to achieve their demands. Pre-service teachers re-evaluate the situation as a failure, as the loss of boundaries that should remain firmly in the hands of teachers: *"Children were sometimes able to trick and beg me, and I gave way and allowed what they wanted"*.

4.2 The teacher's turn in initiated communication

We observed two different organizational forms that were related to the fact that the video recordings were taken during targeted educational activities between pre-service teachers and children in kindergarten. The first form was based on the joint work of all the children and their teacher – the children sat in a circle on the carpet-defined tags. This form is one of the most common in the morning section of the teacher's work with children in the kindergarten on the topic specified in the weekly training plan. This arrangement seems to be natural for preschool conditions; however, teachers are limited by the children's ability to keep attention and stay in one place without moving. This arrangement (incorrectly referred to as "community circle" in Czech kindergartens) rather serves to prepare children for education in primary school. The organizational form proved to be a crucial factor in creating a barrier to children's initiations, and it is especially limiting the subsequent reactions of pre-service teachers. In addition to identifying situations where the child decides to initiate communication, we focused also on pre-service teachers' strategies when reacting to the children's initiative.

4.2.1 The teacher's control

The teacher's dominance (as the teacher is usually the main communicator who controls the communication in the school environment) does not provide enough opportunities for children to participate in communication spontaneously; rather, the children's spontaneity gets suppressed over time. Children adapt to dialogical situations in which they may speak only if they are asked to. Interactions between teachers and children in kindergarten are rich in encouragement and praise, but otherwise they are unfortunately too concise. These interactions are often based on the teacher's closed question and the subsequent correct responses by the children (Rasku-Puttonen et al., 2012). We find little support of teachers for children's efforts to develop the topic of communication; teachers' strategies are focused on specific outputs (Suchodoletz et al., 2014).

PT: Now we will explain why this is so.

Child: I know why.

PT: (Just a quick smile and she begins with the explanation).

4.2.2 Empty reverberation

The term reverberation or echo means merely a response that does not develop the ongoing communication. It describes the types of teacher responses to students' answers in instructional communication across levels of education (Gavora, 2005). A review of the child's answer might be useful if the teacher wants to get time for further reaction or suggests that the answer may not be correct, or if the teacher is caught off guard by an unexpected answer. The term "empty echo" in our case tries to suggest that the pre-service teachers in our data really only repeated the child's utterances without developing it further. This kind of a teacher's reaction cannot produce any helpful information for the communication participants.

Child: I know it.

PT: (silence)

Child: I still know it!

PT: Well, you see, you still know it.

4.2.3 Heard response

Not all the observed dialogical episodes pointed to undesirable teacher's strategies. The interactions accounting for release of the communication by the teacher also appeared in our data material. *"I like when children react differently than I expect. Then we have a germ of an unusual situation or conversation, which I can also go on."* Creativity in communication with the child and especially awareness of mutual benefits arising from communication, so teacher and child become true partners, are important steps on the road to promote child-centered teaching practice.

Children sitting at the table where they are painting a picture with an Easter theme based on the story that they read before. The pre-service teacher is leading them to talk about their products.

Child: Alright. And Bob is climbing on these eggs. (She describes what the painted rabbit on her picture is doing.)

PT: Really? Why is he climbing there?

Child: I don't know. Perhaps he thinks that it's his chow.

PT: Oh, and what does Bob like to eat?

Child: Well... um...he eats baby carrots.

5 Discussion and conclusions

The effectiveness of an instructional procedure can be assessed in terms of analyzing communicative practices (Poimenidou & Christidou, 2010). In compliance with reality-reflecting research strategies with focus on the child as an active communication participant, we tried to propose some views on how exactly children initiate communication in kindergartens.

The selected research sample consists of pre-service teachers, who represent only a partial sample of potential interactions in the kindergarten environment. Thus, to some teachers the findings apply only partially in practice; with other teachers, we could possibly expand our research even deeper. This choice to only use a partial sample reflects both practicality and the need to improve the competences of future teachers through recording their unscripted interactions with children. Many captured teacher-child interactions in the kindergarten in which we sought the initiation of a child, show unfortunately that teacher dominance is manifested as early as on preschool level, and that it also concerns pre-service teachers who are still preparing for the role of a teacher. Authoritative communication controlled mostly by a teacher affects the possible participation of the child. The child, however, wants to become an active communicator. Data obtained in our research point to five circumstances that lead to the child's decision to enter the communication, even when the communication is managed by the pre-service teacher on the basis of prepared scenario concerning educational tasks. We can still notice spontaneity in children's speech when they introduce their own topic in communication. Sometimes, they do not hesitate to comment on the activity or course of work if they have objections. And it is certainly desirable that children have the opportunity to initiate a communication sequence related to their own experiences with the topic being discussed within the educational activities.

Children need teachers who are sensitive to their initiations (Myhill, 2006) – teachers who stop racing against time and offer space for children to initiate the communication. They need teachers who listen to children and gradually become able to integrate the requirements of the curriculum and children's need to learn with by the co-construction of knowledge, to apply communication patterns supporting children's initiations as presented by Rasku-Puttonen et al. (2012). The teacher needs to know his or her own strategy in the role of a communication partner of a child in the kindergarten. Pre-service teachers (as well as already practicing teachers) can benefit from video recordings of interactions with a child because they are not able to observe the whole context of interactions while they are happening. Syslová and Horňáčková (2014) deal with the perspective of intentional reflection of future practitioners in kindergartens. The results of their research supported the need to introduce a systematic development of reflection as early as during the undergraduate education of kindergarten teachers at pedagogical faculties. Our records show a certain range of responses of future teachers to children's initiation in interaction during educational activities. Besides evidence of releasing communication in terms of teacher management, less suitable kinds of responses to children's initiation occur. The teachers are not able to give up control over the ongoing communication.

Practitioners in kindergarten could argue that there is not enough space to devote to each child's initiation in a dialogue with the standard number of children per teacher in one kindergarten class. Above all, this limitation concerns learning situations during the whole class teaching. But still, even during such a "power play", we can at least listen

and start with the suppression of needs to be the largely dominant communicator, and so overcome barriers of being focused solely on the transmission of knowledge.

One of the greatest pleasures of working with young children is to see their fascination by and eagerness for communication of many kinds. We owe them not to destroy or damage this faculty and to cultivate it (Bruce, 2004, p. 69). If we want to have students at primary and secondary levels of education with developed life skills and the ability to discuss and argue, we need to offer such a manner of communication as early as at kindergartens.

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