An Analysis of Teacher's Didactical Activity in the Context of Children's Preconception Usage

Petra Trávníčková*

Abstract:

Introduction: This paper presents the results of research focused on identification of preschool teachers' progress in relation to the use of children's preconceptions in formal pre-elementary education. It represents the theoretical concepts that are applied in the work with children's preconceptions in schools. It analyses them and creates a platform for their own empirical investigation. This research was carried out in the Czech Republic.

Methods: The empirical part of the study was conducted in the form of a qualitative research. Participant observation and interviews with preschool teachers were used for the data collection. The research findings were analysed and a model for using children's preconceptions was created and interpreted subsequently.

Results: The presence of children's preconception in educational activities in preschool was found in the realised participant observation. The ways and types of practice of preschool teachers in relation to using children's preconception are interpreted based on the research findings. Afterwards, based on the participant observation, in-depth interviews were carried out. From the collected data, it was observed that the practices of the teachers in connection to using children's preconceptions are determined by the agency of the child, the experience of the teacher and the overall philosophy of the preschool.

Limitations: This research was realised in the Zlín region in the spring of 2017. Data from the research cannot be generalised for the whole population. However, the following research will address agency theory in connection with children's preconceptions.

Discussion and conclusions: The practices of teachers in relation to using children's preconceptions in formal education in preschools. The results show that the approach of teachers in connection with using children's preconceptions differs. There are three ways interpreted out of the research findings:

1. A preschool teacher notices the preconception but does not react to it.
2. A preschool teacher notices the preconception and reacts to it.
3. A preschool teacher intentionally identifies the preconception and uses it further during the educational activity. The results show that a child's agency plays an important role in relation to using children's preconception. Additionally, they show that the decision to use or not to use children's preconceptions is influenced by the preschool teacher's experience and the philosophy of the preschool.

Key words: children's preconceptions, agency theory, preschool teacher.

----
* Petra Trávníčková, Tomas Bata University in Zlín, Zlín, Czech Republic; ptravnickova@utb.cz

1 Introduction

Every child coming to a preschool has already got his/her own experiences, thoughts, and opinions and is ready to present them. Preschool children are at the best age for beginning to explore, mainly because they are in their early life, entering the society and beginning to discover themselves and the world around them. They are constantly asking questions like "What is it?" and "Why?" (Koutníková, 2017). Each life experience is reflected on the child and is considered standard and absolutely relevant by them. Based on their need of meaningfulness and stability, they put this knowledge into their own logical context and they create their own authentic theories about the world around them. These theories are called "children's preconceptions". These fixed constructs following their own logics and meaning are very strong (Turek, 2005). They are not just nonsensical fiction formed by misunderstanding and insufficient amount of information. They are tools of child knowledge. They represent the only available knowledge for children. Children's preconceptions have become a phenomenon in connection with pedagogical practice. But how can children's preconceptions be perceived in relation to children's learning? Is it necessary to substitute this subjective child conception with a relevant answer? Or can they be perceived as the first step on the way to knowledge? Is a teacher able to observe the way how a child creates and understands the content of his or her concept?

Preschool teachers play an important role in this context. A teacher chooses a more or less appropriate developmental approach, which is offered to a child by him or her subsequently. This is also influenced by the teacher's agency, in fact his/her "belief" in himself/herself as a teacher (Fives & Gill, 2015). If we want children to be active in discovering and identifying the world around them, it is necessary to give them enough space – not only formal space, but also personal space. In relation to that, we need to think about the child's role in the educational process (Wiseman & Hunt, 2014). Is a child perceived as a subject we need to forward information to, or is this the child's main task? We need to focus on the question whether the child is provided wiht an opportunity to present his/her own hypotheses and opinions. The DAP model (Development Appropriate Practise) is a suitable tool for teachers, who are interested in leading children to an efficient and natural way of learning. This model supports children's active exploration and integration of all educational areas included in the curriculum. The DAP model deals with creating suitable conditions for enriching the educational process for teachers, children and also specifying mutual relationships with parents (Fives & Gill, 2015).

The theoretical part of the study is based on academic literature concerning the definition of the cognitive approach to learning. Our attention was focused mainly on children's preconceptions as a prerequisite to child learning and the agency theory as a new view on learning. The aim of this work was to find out whether preschool teachers use children's preconceptions as part of their didactic processes. The partial objectives were to describe how preschool teachers work with children's preconceptions and understand their reasons, why they do or do not use them. In the research, the qualitative method of participant observation was used which was completed with in-depth interviews with the teachers.

2   The theoretical definition of cognitive approaches to learning

From birth, the mind of a person is oriented to find new meanings in new experiences. Dewey perceives experiences as an important factor in the learning process (Howes, 2016). In preschool age children, it is advisable to focus attention on the development of concrete thinking. It is necessary to concentrate on presenting the cultural context of the world in contact with specific materials. In other words, to give children a chance to work actively with information and build on their knowledge on the basis of our experiences (Šíp, 2016). In the context of child preconceptions and their further development, it is necessary to use both the above mentioned experiences and skills. The formation of children's preconceptions is of a great importance, and if appropriate conditions are created and accessed systematically and in time to this genetically conditioned trait (Nakonečný, 2013), we can perceive them as a prerequisite for a child's learning.

Children who either come to pre-elementary education already have different experiences with the world and ideas about it. They have already created their own theories on different phenomena, and these built-in constructs, which have their own logic and meaning, are very strong (Turek, 2005). Furthermore, they also differ significantly from the relevant theories of the adult world frequently. However, they are the subjective interpretations of the phenomena and, therefore, children acknowledge them (Slavík, Chrz, & Štech, 2013). When a child's preconception is generated, the child does not change it until he/she has the right incentive to modify it. The child is further mentally working with the incentive for change, which may be a new piece of information, experience or knowledge. This theory is based on the thoughts of J. Piaget. On the other hand, L. S. Vygotskij understands preconceptions differently. His idea is based on the assumption that human psychological development is strongly influenced by the environment (Vygotskij, 2004). According to his theory, the child – teacher cooperation resulted in the development of concepts. Vygotskij and Piaget agree with the idea that the child not only acquires the concept, but also reworks and enriches it with the elements of his/her thinking and creates his/her own insight (Škoda & Doulík, 2011). This is the reason why children's learning should not be of outer and remote nature for being dealt with by a child. It should be something close, something he/she has his/her own opinion about and what he/she wants to know more about.

There is a need for considering children's preconceptions to be real, equivalent theories, and these should be taken into consideration by us as the real and equivalent ones. Children's own ideas can be described – description, they can be explained – explanation, they are predictable – prediction, and there can also be instructions given on how to carry out the activity – techniques. So they have all features of a scientific theory (Gavora, 1992).

The basis of the theory of preconceptions in learning has a very strong connection with cognitive psychology. This is especially because it concerns various aspects of learning. It focuses on a child's development of judgment, decision making, and analysis. Teachers whose work is based on this theory, offer pupils problematic situations and encourage them to address them, and deliberately and systematically use children's preconceptions in their work. Bertrand, in his book, which characterizes various theories of education in the context of cognitive psychological theory, focuses mainly on constructivist theories as a process of construction in a learning child (Bertrand, 1998, p. 17).

Children's preconceptions are the current decoding structures of individuals giving information, which are meaningful for them. In other words, they appear to be the tools of knowledge. This is how Gordon's model works with children's preconceptions (Bertrand, 1998). This model understands preconceptions as an instrument of a child that is understandable and natural to him/her and encourages him/her to be aware of it and systematically work with it. In contrast, there is the Paradox of cognitive conflict, which treats preconceptions as obstacles in the development which lead to mistakes and which must be replaced by relevant ones as quickly as possible (Žoldošová, 2006). These two opposite approaches to working with children's preconceptions were further used in the interpretation of our research findings, where I try to identify different perspectives in the undertaken observations and interviews.

3   Methodology

The main aim of this study is to find out whether preschool teachers use children's preconceptions as a part of their didactic procedures. The following two partial objectives are further pursued from this overarching aim:
1.   To describe how preschool teachers work with children's preconceptions.
2.   To learn about the reasons for preschool teachers to use or not to use children's preconceptions.

This study focuses on the didactic activities of preschool teachers in the context of using children's preconceptions. I used constant comparison to implement a qualitative research (Gavora, 2010, p. 182). I intended to capture and describe the work of preschool teachers with children in relation to children's preconceptions.

The participants were observed during the preelementary educational process. At the beginning of the research, I wanted to concentrate mainly on observation of the participants. However, during the survey, it seemed useful to extend the scope to an in-depth interview.

3.1   Characteristics of participants:
Teacher A: A woman aged twenty-four. She has been working in pre-elementary education for about a year and a half, and is currently pregnant, so she is to start her maternity leave. She works at a kindergarten in a smaller village in the Zlín Region. Her class is mixed with children aged from 4 to 6/7. She graduated with a Bachelor's degree in Preschool Teacher Training at Tomas Baťa University in Zlín. She is going to attend a follow-up Master's program in Olomouc. The teacher's approach is transmissive. As a personality, she is dominant and principled.

Teacher B: A woman aged twenty-six. She has been working in pre-elementary education for two years. At this time, the kindergarten is going to join the "Start Together" program. She graduated with a Bachelor's degree in the program of Preschool Teacher Training at Tomas Baťa University in Zlín. She plans to continue her education, however, now under the new kindergarten program. The teacher is influenced by this program, and she said during the interview that she had changed her view on children. She wants to approach them more sensitively and with respect. In the class, she has a mixed group of children aged from 3 to 6/7 years.

Teacher C: A woman aged twenty-six. She graduated from the Higher Technical School in Litomyšl specializing in Pedagogy and received the title Dis. Later she worked in an Alzheimer senior home and now she has been working at nursery school for the second

year. The kindergarten in which this teacher works uses the elements of the "Start Together" program. She shows a big interest in this program and she takes part in training that concerns this program. Among children in her class, she has a child with an autistic spectrum disorder and a child with ADHD. She works with an assistant, who is always with her in class. In the class, there is a mixed group of children aged from 4 to 6/7. In the interview, the teacher revealed elements of self-reflection and her intention to improve in her job. She is aware that she has not always done well and wants to change her attitude.

Teacher D: A woman aged twenty-six. She has been working in pre-elementary education for seven years. She started working in a kindergarten in the final year of her studies at the faculty of education. She studied Social Pedagogy at Tomas Baťa University in Zlín, ending with a Bachelor's degree. In the class, she has a mixed group of children aged from 3 to 6/7 years. She is currently planning to complete a follow-up Master's program in Preschool Pedagogy at Tomas Baťa University in Zlín. She would like to study this specialization because she would like to teach and the studies of social pedagogy have not provided her with appropriate information. The teacher also favours a more transmissive way of teaching, among other things, also because she has tried it in practice, as she told in the interview.

Teacher E: A woman aged thirty-one. She has worked in pre-elementary education since graduation from university for almost 12 years. In the course of her practise, she changed her view on the educational process and not long ago, she earned a Bachelor's degree at Tomas Baťa Univesity in Zlín, specializing in Preschool Teacher Training. She said in a conversation that the transmissive way of teaching did not prove to be effective in practice. And she noticed that children better respond to the activities they are interested in. Based on this information, she was looking for ways how to work more effectively with children. Considering that availabe literature was not sufficiently comprehensive, she decided to apply for bachelor studies. As a part of her studies, she gained useful information and she is planning to continue in her education.

I used free writing to implement the participant's observation. So I did not create an observation sheet and record everything that was happening at the moment in the classroom. Then, I asked some observational questions during the observation. For example: Does the teacher give children an opportunity to express their opinions? How does she react to the children's preconceptions? Who is the main agent of the process? The observation took place in five kindergartens in the Zlín Region. I observed a total of five preschool teachers, each of them twice. So I collected a total of 10 observations. I was particularly interested in the mainstream education after breakfast (snack) and before going outdoors, so I tried to catch the "main didactic activity". This activity lasted for a very long time, from 20 till 70 minutes. During observation, I tried to capture all the events in the classroom, whether they were the children's activities, the teacher's response, their dialogues, asking the questions, or the answers, which the children interpreted. As a part of my observation of activities, I tried to have a kind approach to the children and I tried to maintain all the ethics of their personality, as the qualitative research with children requires (Kirk, 2007).

4   Interpretation of research findings

4.1   The child may not have an opinion

In pre-elementary education, a teacher can be more a manager who not only organizes didactic strategies, environment preparation, etc., but also children. The teacher is an authority for children, and then they act according that. It is obvious that these teachers identify more with the paradox of cognitive conflict. The children's opinions are more or less perceived as an unwanted hit into their work, as they know the child and know best what he/she needs. These teachers often act not only as organizers, but also as leaders and evaluators of the educational process. In fact, the teacher does not really care what he/she thinks about her proposal, he/she absolutely expects to fulfil his/her expectations:

Teacher: *"So, Eliška will be counting."*
Eliška stands up. *"One, two, ..."*
Teacher: *"So, Kubík, here you have a marker and you can cross out the day."*

It can be seen that the teacher instructs the child in this example. In fact, it seems to be automated, and the child blindly takes the marker and counts, as if he/she does not even need to think. And it really is so in this case, it is really essential for the child to obey. It is clear that in this type of approach to the child, the teacher especially aims to organize the children. In this category, there was no conflict between the teacher and the child when the child did not obey and expressed his/her own opinion, for example in the sense that he/she does not agree with the task. It is certain that in this educational style, there is not much space for children to express their opinions or to decide based on their own personality. Another situation is demonstrated in the second example.

Teacher: *"Try to think out how to do it in the way you see each other."* Children are making a circle.
Teacher: *"So how have you solved it? ... I would like to know what you have decided for."*

Here, it is clear that the teacher is interested in the views of the children and wants to know what they think and why. By the end, we can see that she tries to ascertain how they decided. So she works not only with what just children say, but also with how they act. As the children's answer to the question how the problem has been solved is connected with another question, this relates with the choice of activity and how the children act in the particular situation. Therefore, they will go to do the activity for which they have opted for. Undoubtedly, this approach to children is both more demanding and more enjoyable; the teacher gives them an opportunity to choose and express their opinions. It is necessary for them to have an opinion already.

4.2   The child must know the correct answer

In elementary schools, it is common for children to be evaluated on the basis of correct answers. This phenomenon also occurs in pre-elementary schools. The teacher asks questions and the children have to answer them. Of course, the answers must be correct. In this phase, a teacher who has a great authority at that time, becomes even more authoritative as a judge and evaluator. The child knows that the teacher wants to hear

one right answer. If he/she knows it, he/she is happy because he/she is praised, if not, punishment comes.

Teacher: *"But you did not say it correctly. How is it right?"* Children recite. Teacher: *"Well, before you messed it up."*

Here, we can see that not only individuals but also the whole group is required to give correct answers. In the records of the observation, we can encounter different dialogues and discussions. But it is mainly that the teacher asks a question, waits for the answer, gets the correct answer, and then a word of praise (excellent, yes, well, etc.) follows. However, another example is needed, where the teacher asks questions and does not evaluate the answers.

Teacher: *"Which sense have we not mentioned yet? You said sound, sight, smell, and what else ..."*
Child: *"Taste."*
Teacher: *"I think we can try whether we recognize it and if it is good."*

We can see that there was no real subjective assessment of the child's response and the correctness of the answer. In this case, the child did not hear "Yes, you are right!". The teacher accepts the child's answer and continues the activity.

4.3 The child may not be independent
Leading children towards independence is one of the most important things during the educational process. It is also in the period when a contradiction is set. By defending their natural needs, we are holding children on a string and dragging them back. In this category, it is important whether the preschool teacher leads or does not lead children to independence both in instruction and organization. In the first example, we can notice that the teacher instructs and controls their performance. She determines not only the rules that are important within the organization, but also the trivial ones with which the children would certainly be able to cope by themselves.

Teacher: *"Someone will stand up, take a basket and you all will throw your candy papers there. Has everyone given a piece of paper?"* The child nods. Teacher: *"Okay, we will finish eating calmly ... quietly, we finish eating quietly and then we throw away the papers."*

In that example, we can observe a way of educating a child. Maybe it is not entirely leading to independence, but at least I feel like this is the first phase. The teacher does not say the right answer; however, she guides the child to it. Moreover, the teacher does not give him instructions in this case, she does not favour him. Through questions and answers, she helps him figure out what he needs to do. Another phase of this development could be that the teacher would only ask the first question.

Teacher: *"So what do you need?"*
Child: *"A pencil."*
Teacher: *"You have got it. What else besides the pencil?"*

Child: *"The book."*
Teacher: *"The book. What else?"*
Child: *"Paper."*
Teacher: *"And have you got it?"*
Child: *"No."*

The third part of the observation tells us that the teacher pursues the children to suggest the answer by themselves. We can notice that when the children were sitting at another table, instead of reassigning them or reminding them of the right place, she asked them a question that was supposed to bring them to the right answer.

The children go to the table, where two other teachers are sitting. The teacher goes to the boys and asks them. Teacher: *"Are you guys sitting at the right table? Do you think the table is ready for drawing?"*
Children: *"No."* The children stand up and go to sit to the drawing table.

And it really happened. The boys looked around the table and found out that they were sitting at another table. They stood up and moved to a table that was ready for artwork. In connection with this category, I feel that teachers are trying to work with independence. So far, they do not give the children enough freedom and responsibility for their actions, but I think that in the work of some observed teachers, we can find the basic elements of children's preconceptions.

4.4   Children must feel well
As I later found out, during the interviews, all the observed teachers said that it was very important for the children to feel well, comfortable, relaxed and entertained. In spite of the fact I found in the observations that sometimes it is not possible to talk about a pleasant climate. At least for the child mentioned here by me. In my opinion, it is basically a kind of disrespect for a child. Not only she evaluated that the child does not know the answer, what is insensitive from the teacher as an authority; the little girl is silent. And the third thing is that her ignorance is presented among all children. The children do perceive it, of course. It is the evaluation by adults, and it is quite possible that such statements also occur among them.

Teacher: *"And what colour is that?"* The child is silent. *Teacher: "L., you will go to school soon. K. has a sweatshirt like that."* The teacher is trying to help L.
Child: *"Green."*
Teacher: *"Yes."*

Such an assessments and comments by the teacher appeared on a daily basis. However, it is not like that the teacher is pleased by offending the child in some way. In my opinion, she is not aware of the consequences of her behaviour or what she says to the child. Maybe she does not even think about it, she just talks to them as to adults. If we take into account the importance of this period in a person's life, we have to consider how we are talking to children and what we are telling them.

Child: *"Teacher, I am sad ..."*
Teacher: *"Come to me, why are you sad? Because you do not go home after lunch? It does not matter. Come on, you will watch if I am not making mistakes."*

In this dialogue, the child comes to the teacher and seeks physical contact. I did not notice the reason, why he mentioned his home and became sad. I suppose, however, that it had to be caused by some activity that reminded him of his home or something unpleasant happened to him. But that is just my assumption.

The next part of the research continued after the creation of significant categories based on the observation. After this entry into practice, I decided that it was necessary to enrich the research with another qualitative method, which was in the form of in-depth interviews. The results, the ways the teachers think and the types of teachers included in the research are as follows:

4.5   Teacher as a manager

In this category, we present the statements of teachers who organize children. Thus, what is the educational process like? Is the environment well prepared? Whether there is a space for children's independence or they need support from the teacher in performing the activities. In the first example, we can read the answers of a teacher who has prepared some tasks for children. She is convinced that one version is enough for all ages. She believes that children will work on their own. However, it is questionable whether all the children in the group can be successful in performing the activity and experience success as children compare their work with the work of others. If the "philosophy" of the kindergarten is to lead children towards accepting differences and working independently, I do not see a problem, but if it is not, I am worried about the younger children who can be demotivated by their performance in comparison with the older pupils.

Teacher: *"In order to do that, I have to adjust the class environment appropriately. I have to reorganize it. I am not going to make them a harder and an easier version, but there is the only one, and they will do it on their own."*

But of course, it is possible that the teacher later finds out that it is more suitable to prepare more versions of the task. However, the way she has prepared the lesson does not correspond with the requirements for working with child preconceptions. Teachers should make an attempt to create an offer which is attractive for children and to stimulate their interest and internal motivation. The offer should be varied in order to provide children with sufficient incentives to choose from.

Teacher: *"I prefer guided management here. For instance, in the morning, we call them individually and then they learn in the controlled unit."*

The second example tells us about the organizational forms that the teacher uses and which she prefers. She prefers managed organizational activities, so, the children's interest in the activities is not important for her. As her statement shows, she calls the children and they perform tasks. Her activity is therefore based on external motivation. However, the predominant external motivation suggests that children are rather

organized from outside, and so, their activity is not based on their interest or experiences.

4.6 Teacher as a guide

During the interviews, I focused on what the teachers do in order to promote the children's independent work. A teacher who is a guide should monitor the children's activities and help only when it is necessary. It is a person who prepares the environment in a way that children do not really need him/her to do any activity. In other words, the activities are designed so that the children can do them alone. As it is clear from the above, the focus of this part of the research is on children's independence. In the field of education, the notion of a guide can be perceived as a kind of skill. In the following part, we can see that a teacher works with a child and finds his/her phonemic differentiation by a natural way of talking, but entirely deliberately.

Teacher: *In some normal conversation, when a boy tells me that his car is a fire-truck, I ask him what it is and what it begins with. And he tells me, "Well, a fire-truck!". And I ask, "And what does it begin with?", and he answers, "F – fire-truck – I see, F!".*

In this situation, the child does not notice that he/she is being tested. The teacher leads a natural conversation with him, except that the child "understands poorly". The child does not have a problem to repeat the word. The situation would be different if the teacher had called the boy and asked him, *"What letter does fire-truck start with?".* The child could feel like being tested and could be afraid to answer. Definitely, the first case is much more enjoyable for a child.

Teacher: *"Internal motivation plays a big role. If he/she wants to do something, then it is the way he/she does it. It is easy. If a child lacks internal motivation, I try to wake it up."*

Another important factor is whether the teacher is aware of the importance of internal motivation or whether he/she only gives instructions which children must follow. In the example above, we can see that the teacher is aware of the role of motivation. If there is no internal motivation, this teacher offers activities which motivate children externally. In the interview with this teacher, she says that her internal motivation is more important to her than the external one.

4.7 Teacher as a leader

This category is the opposite of the previous one. Here, very strong authoritative tendencies can be observed. In fact, if the teacher sets some rules, the children must follow them. We can observe a certain degree of consistency here. On the other hand, I have to say that this directive approach in working with children is neither effective nor pleasant for both sides. However, the teacher may not act as a leader all the time.

Teacher: *"Just when I set up something I want to happen and they do not do it, then we get back to it and we have to wait until it just happens. If I do not peddle, stomp, I am lax, they will get used to it and say, "Oh, it's probably not necessary".*
Teacher: *"And they did not know why, so I tried to lead them through questions. And then they came to the right answer. The correct answer was that there was no wedding".*

The question is how much children are encouraged to come up with their thoughts. The point is that there is something the teacher wants to hear and that is the correct answer. However, she does not act as a guide who gives them a helpful hand, but some kind of pressure is present. For example, children are asked questions as long as they get to a meaningful answer and nothing else is relevant – neither their ideas nor thoughts. This kind of pressure is clearly visible in the statement: *"They did not know it, so I had to lead them. I asked them questions and they finally came to it."*, etc. This approach, of course, does not correspond with children's preconception usage.

4.8 Teacher as an evaluator

It is obvious that preschool teachers must somehow evaluate their work with children. Thus, they should perform reflection. On the other hand, this category has a different meaning. The teacher evaluates the children's statements, their relevance and correctness. Based on the results of the interviews and observations, it can be assumed that teachers do not even realize that they are constantly evaluating the children.

Teacher: *"At the moment I record something that is completely wrong in quotation marks or should not be like that, I am not the evaluator. I give it back into that group of kids, highlight what the kid said, give additional information and so, we can all sort it out, and we can all get to some solution together."*

The first teacher is fully aware of his/her influence on children and their development, while the second one has not realised the contradiction between motivation and negative assessment so far. Within one sentence, she talks about motivation and a "bad" answer at the same time. If we give a negative feedback to children, it has a demotivating effect on them. Another opinion, as stated by another participant, is that when we evaluate children in some way, they feel tested. Hence, this is perfectly logical.

Teacher: *"We just go to the woods or play something what they are looking forward to... and they are just trying to find something, and I tell them that it is not what we have been looking for, it is something different. And they just remember that it is good."*

When we analyse this statement, we can find some signs of the paradox of cognitive conflict. For example, the teacher speaks about giving the children a task. When they fulfil it, she clarifies the expectations to children and gives them feedback during the evaluation, *"No, that is not what we have been looking for"*. Therefore, it is clear that the teacher completely ignores the children's preconceptions.

4.9 Teacher as the author of the educational offer

What is interesting, it was found out that one of the teachers really adapted the work to the children's needs and even the educational offer was changed by him or her. In other words, the children interfered with and changed this educational offer. Nevertheless, it was just one teacher among the participants during my research. So, I tried to find out, which criteria are important in planning the educational offer for other teachers.

Teacher: *"They figured out that a complete skyscraper could be built from that. And I said it was a good idea and we could show it to their parents and they came up with some other suggestions. So, one day, they created a plan of their own business."*

In most interviews, the main issue was the creation of the educational offer as the most important criteria in this process. This is followed by planning carried out by teachers. Another important aspect was setting the educational goals, and finally, there was also another phenomenon occurring in the interviews – planning activities based on teachers' intuition. Teachers decide which activities are interesting for children based on the knowledge of their personalities. One of the teachers also mentioned that the creation of the educational offer is inherently connected with perfect knowledge in the field of developmental psychology.

Teacher: *"I prepare the materials based both on their age and opinions on what can attract their interest. So, when I have a more demanding activity, as for example an atelier, I try to prepare something easier, something even the two-year-olds can manage."*

Here, the teacher prepares an educational offer considering the age of children. She also works with the idea that it is essential for children to be interested in the offer. So, we can see the first elements that could lead to children's preconceptions. Therefore, the activities she proposes are tailored to inspire all children's internal motivation. The second alternative of the explanation of her approach is that she wants the children to be successful and so she invents activities within which even the younger children can reach the expected goal.

5   Conclusion

A preschool teacher can work as a manager, an evaluator, a leader or a guide. In the research findings, I have learned that the approaches of the participants to the educational process were different. While one of them had a clear idea that a child needs strict discipline, another one left this theory and, based on her own experiences, let children be independent and let them decide about their own content of education themselves. In spite of the fact that teachers' personalities and approaches may vary, similar traits can still be found. It is a must that children feel good. When this need is satisfied by the teacher, the child learns better.

Another similarity is in the effort for a prepared environment. Even though each of them prepares it on their own, based on their best intentions, this preparation varies according to the teachers' approaches to children. If a child is perceived as an equal partner, the environment is ready for a child to engage in activities independently. If the approach is opposite, children are motivated mainly externally. Therefore, the teachers' task is to show an interest in children, accept their personalities or activity and to motivate them. The first approach is to work with children's interests, meaning that the prepared activities are attractive for them and they want to participate in them without saying so by the teacher.

Teachers can be divided into two groups in the context of their dominant position which also relates to communication and learning processes. The first group intentionally works with children's preconceptions and naturally builds on them, the second group of

teachers induces children to the right answers by various techniques of "pressure". The first technique can be in the form of permanent asking questions when the child finds the correct answer sooner or later. The second method is correcting the wrong answers and telling the right ones. The last possible alternative is that the teacher is not interested in the children's opinions or presumptions.

Moreover, we can also observe the teachers' behaviour following the children's answers, where the teachers have two options as for their reactions. One of them is to evaluate the correctness and relevance of the response and to fix it. The second option is that the teacher does not evaluate the children's statements at all.

The opposite situation occurs when teachers interpret the reality to children through their active involvement. The teachers' leadership cannot only be observed in terms of asking questions, but also in relation to independence. In my research, I was confronted with both possibilities. Teachers either guide children, when a problem which could be solved by them alone arises or, on the other hand, teachers who are aware of children's preconceptions supervise their problem solving processes from a distance. Thus, in the research, I could observe various teacher agency in the participants. While some of them are supporters of teacher agency, one of them sees children as the agents in the educational process, which make decisions not only as for the activities they want to perform, but also interfere in the educational offer in some way (Bandura, 2001).

Finally, at the end of the interviews, I was curious about what preschool teachers leads towards using or not using children's preconceptions. Their answers made it clear that the main reason was their own experience. They have often argued that they are doing so, because they have simply proven themselves to be effective. In contrast, one teacher claims that the traditional approach to the educational process has not been sufficient according to her experiences. So, she became interested in another model and was motivated to learn about the Gordon's model, in which children's preconceptions are used and worked with. Another factor influencing the attitudes towards preconceptions is the kindergarten's philosophy. For example, two teachers work in a kindergarten where the "Start Together" program was established.

References

Bandura, A. (2001). Social cognitive theory: An agentic perspective. *Annual Review of Psychology*, *52*(1), 1-26.

Bertrand, Y. (1998*). Soudobé teorie vzdělávání.* Praha: Portál.

Fives, H., & Gill, M. G. (2015). *International handbook of research on teachers' beliefs*. New York: Routledge.

Gavora, P. (2000). *Úvod do pedagogického výzkumu*. Brno: Paido.

Gavora, P. (1992). Naivné teórie dieťaťa a ich pedagogické využitie. *Pedagogika, 42*(1), 95-102.

Howes, E. V. (2016). Educative experiences and early childhood science education: A Dewey perspective on learning to observe. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 24*(3), 536-549. doi: 10.1016/j.tate.2007.03.006

Kirk, S. (2007) Methodological and ethical issues in conducting qualitative research with children and young people: A literature review. *Nursing studies, 44*(7), 1250-1260. doi: 10.1016/j.ijnurstu.2006.08.015

Koutníková, M. (2017). The Application of Comics in Science Education. *Acta Educationis Generalis*, *7*(3), 88-98. doi:10.1515/atd-2017-0026

Nakonečný, M. (2013). *Lexikon psychologie* (2nd revised ed.). Praha: Vodnář.

Slavík, J., Chrz, V., & Štech, S. (2013). *Tvorba jako způsob poznávání.* Praha: Karolinum.

Škoda, J., & Doulík, P. (2011). *Psychodidaktika: metody efektivního a smysluplného učení a vyučování.* Praha: Grada.

Šíp, R. (2016). Dewey a „český Dewey", pedagogika a ideologie. *Pedagogika, 66*(2), 134-153. Retrieved from: http://pages.pedf.cuni.cz/pedagogika/?p=11460&lang=cs

Turek, I. (2005). *Inovácie v didaktike: príspevok k realizácii projektu Milénium vo vyučovacom procese na základných a stredných školách* (2nd ed.). Bratislava: Metodicko-pedagogické centrum v Bratislave.

Vygotskij, L. S. (2004). *Psychologie myšlení a řeči.* Praha: Portál.

Wiseman, D., & Hunt, G. (2014). *Best practice in motivation and: management in the classroom.* Springfield, Illinois: Charles C. Thomas.

Žoldošová, K. (2006). *Východiská primárneho prírodovedného vzdelávania.* Bratislava: VEDA – TYPI Universitas Tyrnaviensis.