

University Kindergarten: The Story of a Little Big School

*Jana Majerčíková – Anna Rebendová**

Received: August 23, 2016; received in revised form: October 9, 2016;
accepted: October 10, 2016

Abstract: The study is of empirical character. It presents a story of a kindergarten which is a private, a company and a university kindergarten. The establishing authority is a university that can preferentially accept children of its employees. The parents of the children financially contribute to running the kindergarten.

The research was based on the strategy of a one-case study. This integrated quantitative and qualitative research approach. Data from two types of questionnaires were used in the study presenting interviews with parents, teachers, students in teacher training and members of the school board, as well as data from observations of the educational process and from the analyses of the available school documentation. The aim was to describe the kindergarten and the contexts in which it operates, explain its operation and clarify the mechanics, circumstances and subjects it is most influenced by. Three basic factors influencing the school's operation and fulfilling its function emerged from the collected data: the relations with the establishing authority, the community of university-educated parents and the status of a faculty school providing space for practical training of the students in teacher training. The major conclusion that emerged from the study is: The kindergarten works in specific conditions with strong contextual conditioning linked to the university environment and the authority's conditions.

Key words: company kindergarten, university, parents, practical training of students, case study.

1 Introduction

The title of the paper is an analogy of a story about a school that on one hand fulfills the goals of preschool education, i.e. it is aimed at the little ones, and on

* Jana Majerčíková, Faculty of Humanities, Tomas Bata University in Zlín, Zlín, Czech Republic; majercikova@fhs.utb.cz
Anna Rebendová, Faculty of Humanities, Tomas Bata University in Zlín, Zlín, Czech Republic; arebendova@centrum.cz

the other hand it is located in the university context aimed at the big ones. Such a location of a kindergarten in the university context brings benefits as well as risks to all the participants – to children, their parents and the staff of the kindergarten, too.

The issue of university kindergartens can be viewed as a topic bordering social policy and preschool education. On one hand, there is a potential of the kindergarten as an institution that specifically aims to coordinate the parental and work-related roles, on the other hand there are the educational possibilities of a standard educational institution for pre-school children. Both of these aspects diffuse and variously determine the running of the kindergarten.

2 Terminological Basis

The crucial parameter that differentiates university kindergartens from the other types, predominantly public ones, is the fact that their establishing authority is a public higher-education institution – a university. Specifically, it is the academic staff and students who are for the most part the parents of the children attending the kindergarten. A university kindergarten also typically presents a space for pedagogical practical training of university students provided the university is accredited to offer degrees in such programs. In the terminology of university teacher training, it is a faculty training kindergarten. The links described appear to be interesting and troublesome at the same time. The question posed here is, what influence they have on the educational reality of the university kindergarten.

Preparing the conditions for establishing university kindergartens is a part of family-supporting measures enforced in the Czech Republic in the recent years. The support of pro-family measures via promoting the availability of child care-taking services is to ensure higher participation of Czech mothers in the labor market, which is generally considered low in the young age of their children. After 1989, the availability of such services dropped considerably especially for children under the age of three. This contributed to lowering employment of women.

The establishment of university kindergartens in the Czech Republic is also a reaction to the lack of available placements of pre-school children in the kindergartens in a given region. It should contribute to coordinating parental and professional roles of employees, the young parents. These circumstances became one of the main reasons for establishing university kindergartens. The intention of the university kindergartens was to cover the requirements of the universities' academic staff and students to accelerate their return to the workplaces or continuation of studies after their parental duties during the young age of their

children. A university kindergarten thus appears to be an effective tool applied specifically towards young families with children at pre-school age, in the early stages of their parenthood. Another fact which deserves mentioning is that the possibility of placing a child in such a type of school is an employment bonus that raises the credibility of the workplace.

University kindergartens are based on the principle of private educational institutions authorized by a legal person – a public higher-education institution. The subject of operation of university kindergarten's activity is providing education, so the School Act with its subsequent regulations applies. In the case that a university kindergarten is listed in the Register of Schools and School Facilities, it operates as a school legal person and concerning its curriculum it follows the Framework Educational Program for Pre-school Education. Such a school is entitled to funding from the state.

University kindergartens also fulfill the criteria of the so called company kindergartens. Their rules allow preferential placement of the employees' children based on the employer's decision so that children's discrimination is avoided. Each kindergarten's own criteria for placement of children are also followed. Except for its other duties, this is also a duty of the School Board.

3 Methodology

The aim of this research survey was to depict the uniqueness of the kindergarten determined by its contextualization in the academic environment combined with its environment of pre-school education. A case study was used to describe and understand the activities in the university kindergarten. The case study integrates quantitative and qualitative research orientation. It also offers an opportunity to study, learn and understand one case or a few cases in a detail.

Following K. Yin (2014), we believe that the combination of qualitative and quantitative approach can be an effective device with a potential of enabling and grasping the reality under investigation in all its complexity. At the same time, a complex view of the events under investigation should be reflected in raising the credibility of the possible research findings and it should lead to the accuracy improvement of the theory and to possible practical applications of the outcomes (Mareš, 2015).

3.1 Research aims

In the Czech pre-school education, there are eight university kindergartens. One was chosen for the purposes of the research. Via a single case study, the ambition was to “depict the intricacy of a case and describe the relations in their complexity” (Hendl, 2005, p. 104). In this context, the following key research

question was formulated, “How can a school be characterized by factors that most significantly determine its functioning?”. The question was further specified into the following aims:

1. To describe the school and the contexts in which it operates.
2. To understand how the school operates.
3. To clarify the mechanisms, factors and subjects by which the school is most influenced.

3.2 Research methods and obtained data processing

A case study is a research strategy, a research approach. Its frame presumes combining various sources of information obtained through several research methods. A unit of such research is one case – a university kindergarten. It is thus a single-case study of an organization – a social unit.

The data were collected in the research via the following research methods:

- contents analysis of the official, pedagogical and other documents connected to the running of the university kindergarten (available records of various meetings, plans, inspection reports, school educational program, rules and regulations, minutes from parents’ meetings and pedagogical board discussions, criteria for children’s placement, the concept of school development, etc.);
- interview with the university kindergarten’s principal;
- interview with two teachers of the university kindergarten;
- interview with five parents;
- interview with five students in practical training;
- interview with two members of the Board of the School Legal Person of the university kindergarten;
- a questionnaire administered to the parents;
- a questionnaire administered to the teachers;
- non-structured observation inside the university kindergarten.

The combination of the non-structured observation with the interviews seemed to be the most effective from the point of view of data collecting. Observation should provide the material for the description of behavior of the participants; the interviews are aimed at uncovering the experience of some participants. It is considered natural to analyze the available school documentation. The questionnaire for parents should provide for a more significant generalizing of their opinions.

The structure of the topics in the interviews was similar among different participants. The introduction concerned the first associations of the school

under investigation. Further on, the opinions on the advantages and limitations of the school, its equipment, material and personal background were elicited. The subjects of the research interest also included experiences with the environment and development inside from the point of view of education, practical training of students, relationships among the school employees, etc. Our interest lied in the parameters of mutual cooperation inside the school, and further on with parents, the board and the school authority in general. We also wanted to know the specifics of children in the school under investigation. The participants were asked about various aspects and topics arising from their positions in the environment of the given school (parents, students, teachers, etc.).

The obtained documents and interview transcripts were processed by a traditional technique of open coding. In accordance with recommendations for data processing in quality-oriented research, the data were analyzed and codes appearing in the data were noted continuously. Subsequently, we grouped the codes into concepts and categories and we tried to interpret them.

The quantitative approach in the case study was represented by distribution of two questionnaires. We administered a standardized questionnaire with a scale to measure self-efficacy of teachers in parents' involvement (Majerčíková & Gavora, 2013) to become acquainted with this issue. This four-dimensional questionnaire that originated in Slovakia was adapted to the conditions of the Czech Republic in 2014 (Majerčíková & Syslová, 2014). The possibility of a simple comparison of the results of Slovak and Czech teachers in the school appeared under investigation.

We used the second questionnaire for communication with the whole community of the kindergarten parents. The research tool created for this purpose was administered to the parents in the electronic form. The questionnaire consisted mainly of scale items; it also contained several open and closed questions. In terms of topics, it was supposed to cover the opinion range of the parents on the management of the kindergarten that was derived from their experience with the school and from their own opinions on the education of pre-school children. The reasons for choosing the school, experience with other schools of their own kind, cooperation with parents, the level of educational activity, child's feedback on the school, opinions on the activity of students in practical training, etc., created the contents of the second questionnaire.

3.3 The Case Choice

Similar to other kindergartens of the type described above, the school under investigation was established with the financial support from the European Social Fund. The idea of their own university kindergarten that should cover the

needs for care for employees' and students' pre-school children during their work and study time accelerating their return to work and studies was a part of employment policy of the progressively advancing university (the establishing authority) for several years before its actual establishment. The actual space and material facilities of the university kindergarten were provided by the university. The research showed that the facilities are modern, pleasant, supporting the work of the school; it was evaluated as children-friendly by all the participants.

The university kindergarten under investigation is one of eight kindergartens of this type that operate in the Czech Republic. The university kindergartens established after 2009 originated through ESF projects and they are located in larger university towns and cities.

In our case, the original aim of the university was to build a kindergarten with a standard limitation of three to six years of age. The employees' requests uncovered in a service demand survey were aimed at a lower age of children as well – from the age of 18 months in average. That is why the university decided to implement the establishment of a kindergarten and a linked babysitting children's playroom for children under the age of three in the project phase. It was for such a project structure that the university requested the ESF funding and the request became successful and funded. The kindergarten was to operate according to a standard and tested routine of pre-school institutions in the Czech Republic. The aim of the babysitting playroom was to ensure a short-term care for children under the age of three, for example during lectures, exams, etc. Eventually, the university kindergarten was founded as a single-class kindergarten with a mixed age group with a separate babysitting playroom with the maximum capacity of 10 children.

During the functioning of the university kindergarten, it turned out that the parents of children under the age of three are also interested in a full day care using the educational activity of the kindergarten. That is why another form of family friendly employment policy was introduced – the establishment of a class for children of approximately two years of age within the organizational structure of the kindergarten which is evaluated as one of the major benefits of the school. There are not many school institutions in the classical routine of pre-school education in the Czech Republic that would react to such a request in the same way. The reason is in higher demands for care and education in terms of the needs and developmental possibilities of children of such a low age.

Deriving from the assumption that it is a private school where higher quality is reflected in higher price (Bastos & Straume, 2013), with functioning under a specialist supervision of a university training future kindergarten teachers, the kindergarten gained a potential to offer above-standard services.

3.4 Ethical aspects of the research

The research was specific in many ways. The declared specificity was underlined by the circumstances and their consequences that were significantly connected to observing the rules of ethics in the investigation. These were among the crucial parameters determining the research process and its results.

We consider it important to clarify the relationship and motivation of the researchers in the research. An important criterium of the school choice was its accessibility. In this case it was the local and social accessibility but comfort and various possibilities of communication with the participants providing data played a significant role as well. In the project phase of the research, in this case study, we based on an interpretative social-constructivist paradigm that Hyett et al. (2014) position within personal relationships of researchers and informants; in our case the institution under investigation. The researchers had easy access and relatively strong working relations with the university kindergarten under investigation. It transpired during the research that such relations tend to complicate the whole process. That is why the researchers had to change the perspective into a positivistic direction, which relies on a precise research plan a part of which is checking the validity of the results, the risks and potential distortions (Hyett et al., 2014).

As specified above, the kindergarten under investigation is an integral part of the university which is its establishing authority. This fact significantly influenced all the decisions and processes in individual areas of its operation; naturally, relations based on the employer – employee supervision were a part of it. A tight relationship of the university and the university kindergarten was considered a critical prerequisite for realizing the research from the very beginning, the university being the recipient of the research results as well as the employer of the university kindergarten's staff. It appeared essential to provide an ethical framework of the research, specify the formally shared rules that would navigate and follow the ethical behavior of the researchers, their conduct and advancements during the whole research process.

During the whole research investigation and especially prior to publishing the research results, we had to closely observe the research ethical aspects. We paid attention to observing the rules we had stipulated in the project phase of the research before applying each of the research tools. The rules included, among others, obtaining a written permission from the participants to be a part of the research investigation and publication, the possibility to withdraw from the project in any phase, preservation of absolute privacy and discretion, participants' eligibility for acquired data, authorization of interview transcripts and participants' validation of the final report.

4 Results and discussion

Within the analysis of the empirical data three major dimensions of school operation emerged in sequence; each dimension originating due to certain factors. These identified dimensions offered a draft of the school under investigation. The dimensions were clearly observable in the data obtained from the mentioned sources. In certain connotations and through various prisms, they resonated mainly in the statements of all the participants and respondents. We handled them as three major parts of the interpretative frame of the research investigation. They are:

- administrative and economic dimension – originating in the agenda of cooperation between the school and the Board of School Legal Person (further on referred to as the Board) representing the authority;
- educational dimension – originating in the agenda of cooperation between the school and the faculty of the establishing university which runs a teacher training program (cooperation via pedagogical practical trainings of the students);
- dimension of cooperation with the parents – originating in the agenda of communication between the school and the children’s parents (mostly members of the academic body and students of the establishing university).

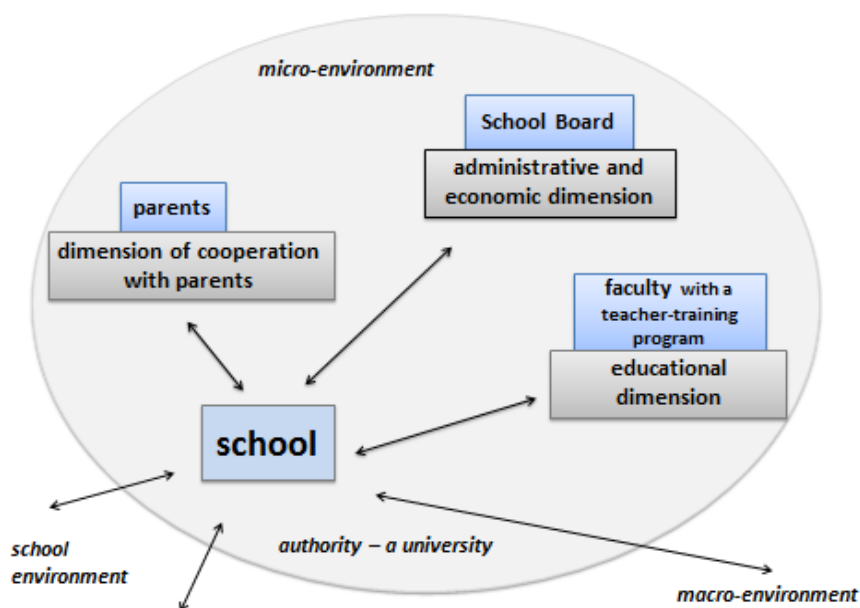


Figure 1. Interpretative frame of the research.

The three mentioned dimensions (Figure 1) had already been indicated earlier in connection with the school status as a university, private, company and faculty kindergarten. This setting was the point of departure for the requirements placed on the school; the school was confronted with them when fulfilling its mission which is a considerable part of its story. Based on our investigation, the indicated requirements can be described and summarized as follows:

- The school under investigation is thus a university one, its establishing authority being a university, which means that it covers the remaining costs and bears responsibility for its operation (it answers to the Rector, the Bursar and the parents – co-workers). The university is considerably engaged via the Board.
- The school under investigation is also a private one, which means that the parents contribute to its funding; the school fee they pay is understood to be paid for above-standard, above-average conditions.
- The school is also labeled as a company one, which enables it to preferentially accept the children of the employees of the university. It is “our kindergarten and our university kids”; everybody wants their best; the school is here for them and their parents with all the advantages.
- Finally, the school under investigation has a status of a faculty school where future teachers “go to learn”; the education should be on a very high specialist level; the teachers must be qualified and able to provide supervision and mentoring.

Eventually, how does the school operate depending on the fact that it is established by the university, what is the interaction with university-educated parents and what happens in the pedagogical practical training of students taking place in the kindergarten?

4.1 The establishing authority with three S's – Screening, Supervision, Support

The necessary links between the authority and the school are performed through the cooperation of the school's headquarters and the Board of School Legal Person. The Board is one of the organs of the School Legal Person which is the school under investigation. It is noteworthy that the school is established by another legal person – a public higher-education institution. Representatives of the authority as well as parents comprise the Board of School Legal Person of the school under investigation. In the case of the kindergarten, it is a double position that the parents comprise – they are both representing the authority and parents, which sometimes leads to complications in decision-making processes. It is not always a rule that the interests of the parents and that of the authority overlap. A typical case is the school fee paid by the parents and the salaries of the kindergarten employees.

The mission of the Board is in accordance with the legislation aimed primarily at the economic activity of the school. The Board approves of the school budget and its changes, funding prospects, internal salary regulations and annual balancing of the books. Obviously, the school's rules of procedure, the rules and regulations of the organization, the subject, conditions and range of its supplementary activities and staffing are all part of the Board's missions. Upon the Board's proposal, the principal of the school is appointed and dismissed by the school authority – the Rector in office, to whom the principal also answers.

After two years of the kindergarten's functioning, the financial support by the ESF has been terminated and the costs and the operation were transferred upon the parents, the establishing authority and the state. As the establishing authority intensively began to participate in the kindergarten's funding, it became clear that mutual relations and competences would have to be extended and clearly defined. The parents started to voice their issues as they had found themselves in the positions of the clients of a private facility in which they had to start paying the appropriate school fee along the meal allowances after the ESF funding was no longer available.

The establishing authority is exceptionally engaged in the school's operation via the Board. The head of the Board is a Vice-Rector of the establishing university. The teachers characterize the relationship with the authority as relatively tight, sometimes limiting their pedagogical autonomy in comparison with kindergartens they have experiences with. The "expectation" of operative adaptation to suggestions and claims of the authority (performances at various university events, production of gifts for guests, visits of the university's guests, etc.) are sometimes perceived by the teachers as a pressure. In the staff's interpretation, the claims do not have sufficient basis, which would be expected in a private facility. This is a subject of the communication between the school's headquarters and the Board.

The kindergarten was established in the interest of the university's employees. It is a company school agenda which shows that acceptance of the Rules for Newly Placed Children is a thoroughly elaborated document that originated in a vivid discussion; it ensures of a responsible approach of the school as well as the authority. As soon as the circumstances indicate a funding-related problem in the school's operation, there is an elegant solution from the point of view of the school – offering placements to the wide, non-university public. However, a problem appears of placing potential new university children in the following year when the school would be full with – in the school's terminology – "foreign" children. The solution is a limited placement of "foreign" children for the duration of one year, which, on the other hand, predicates a problem for the

parents as it does not offer security and continuity of pre-school education from entering the kindergarten to entering a primary school.

The authority's representatives in the Board are obviously strongly interested in the school's prosperity. It is presupposed in every relationship of an establishing authority and a school; nevertheless, in case of the kindergarten under investigation, this attitude is determined by two important circumstances: first, the establishing authority and the kindergarten are closely linked through intensive contacts between both institutions. The second is the fact that the establishing institution has the kindergarten in its authority as the only facility of its kind. The attention paid to the kindergarten is most probably far greater than the usual attention paid by an authority to a school it established. This fact is a factor that places more significant claims on the school's headquarters not only in the kindergarten's operation but also towards the establishing authority. In the form of the Board, the authority is on one hand significantly helpful when solving the kindergarten's problems on which the headquarters regularly informs and turns to the Board for help. On the other hand, the authority requires from the Board a clear and elaborate organization and school management, suggestion of problem solutions when they appear, specialist pedagogical competence and rigorous communication with parents.

The unconventional relationship of the establishing authority and the kindergarten is reflected in how the Board reacts to critical situations in the school management. The school management answers to the Board in full range; the Board not only helps but also supervises and checks. When failure or a problem appears that would call for a tougher intervention that the Board is obliged to take, eventually the Board acts so that the staff's positions are not endangered. It is all done in the interest of the kindergartens's stability and the comfort of the children and their parents. The Board is very demanding but it is ready to help; it has confidence in the kindergarten and supports it. We suppose it is caused by the interconnection with the children's parents. The Board members are quite often the colleagues in the employment relation to the establishing university; the responsibility stemming from the financial participation on the operation of the kindergarten within the university budget also plays a role here.

4.2 Just and demanding parents

One of the specific areas of the operation of the kindergarten was clearly identified as the relationships with parents. Parents, as the representatives of under-age children responsible for the children's proper development, now figure as customers seeking their education. It transpired that the attitudes of parents were determined by various factors. With an intensive interest in their child always featuring as a background, the research showed three other factors

– the parents' affiliation to the establishing authority, i.e. the university, the education of parents and the financial side of education in the university kindergarten (fees paid by parents for the services to cover the investment costs). These determinants contributed to certain reactions and attitudes of parents.

A double role of some parents emerged as remarkable from the data. Primarily, it was the role of parents performing their parental duties. This role was dominant as it was based on an acute and distinctive interest in well-being and comfort of their child. The second role was a parent as an employee of the establishing authority contributing to searching for problem solutions and defending the interests of the kindergarten as well as the university, which sometimes results in unpleasant situations.

Another aspect that influenced the relationships and approaches of the parents to the university kindergarten was of a financial character. The school fee which the parents contributed to the school operation was understood as a signal for expecting adequate services without exceptions; the most significant interest of the paying parents was raised towards the kindergarten's meals. Experience from educational practice reveal that the quality of food and its attractiveness for children is a never-ending story in schools. In case of the university kindergarten, however, the parents were expressing clear objections and suggestions for changes in this area. Intensified answering to parents gradually became an agenda of the university kindergarten; it intensified from the moment of terminated financial support by the ESF, i.e. from the time when the new financial burden was transferred to the parents themselves.

As was already stated, the highest obtainable education was graded as an important parameter contributing to the character and quality of the parents and the kindergarten. One of the best known theses on the influence of the children's environment on their school results is a positive correlation between the socioeconomic status of the family and the school success of the child. In our conditions, a similar link has been verified by Katrňák (2004) who proved that university-educated parents preserve a tight relationship with school. Positive reactions to the kindergarten's appeal for cooperation are also assumed. The parents of children in the kindergarten under investigation held a Master or a Doctoral degree. Quite often they formulated their requirements in clear and understandable communication with the kindergarten; similarly, they showed their interest in observation and co-decision-making. In case the parents showed dissatisfaction with the headmasters' approach or with the personnel policy they were not reluctant to contact and initiate meetings with the Board. This indicated their interest in being involved in decision-making processes and the prerequisite to pass more legitimate decisions towards the benefit of children. These activities of parents are being closely linked with their socioeconomic status and experience. The parents were interested in participating in the school's

management via the Board in available positions. This phenomenon is not quite common; the willingness of parents to cooperate mostly focuses around the personal interest in their own child. In the Czech Republic as well as abroad, it is not perfectly easy to get parents to participate as members in the School Boards or Boards of Parents (Munn, 1993). The interest to participate in school management is usually lower.

At first sight, the manifestation of parents' engagement appeared to be a sign of their client approach (Rabušicová & Emmerová, 2003). That is based on a premise of expectations of the provided services to the clients of the kindergarten, i.e. the parents. This approach was further fortified in the followed case by understanding the affiliation and predetermination of the kindergarten to help the employees of the university; it was "our kindergarten", a benefit from the employer. What slightly disrupted the model, though, was the active participation of parents in the school issues. Parents in the roles of consumers tend not to have ambitions to actively participate in school management (Šed'ová, 2004). This could not be stated about the parents of the given kindergarten. Through their approach, they tended towards the partner role as well which is based on an active participation and cooperation with the kindergarten. The parents so far have not come to establishing their own voluntary organization; however, they have had their representatives in the Board who "looked after" the parents' interests.

The parents manifested themselves as highly ambitious and demanding when it comes to the educational activities in the kindergarten. In some cases, it was felt as endangering, disturbing the kindergarten's and the teachers' autonomy. We have to keep in mind that the autonomy of teachers includes the possibilities and competences to judge the needs of a child and to exercise the teacher's own will and independence. Eventually, it is the decision-making (Team of authors, 2006) on the issues of school predominantly linked to the area of pedagogical activity. The "strongest" suggestions and recommendations of parents in the given context concerned the educational procedures as such (e.g., "such a small child is not ready to...", "I recommend more activities developing fine motor skills in art activities") or similar pedagogical intrusions. These were guided by parents' conviction of justification of their suggestions when not taking the context of the kindergarten, its conditions and pre-school education as such into consideration. They relied more on the direct interest in the child and their personal ambitions to develop the child. We can see a parallel here with Štech's (2004) statement on imperatives of modern education based on personalization and psychology insight on the child care that frequently direct parents to ambivalent attitudes towards schools and teachers. As the author claims further, on one hand it is the acceptance of the mission of the school as an institution, which the university kindergarten's parents reflected in their effort to have and develop "the best, the

highest quality kindergarten”, on the other hand it is the parents’ own demarcation of their independence and competence in the relationship to teachers through questioning their opinions. In case the school and its teachers are not able to argue well and defend their strategy, or at least enter discussions on these issues, a door opens to possible problem-creation in the relationship to the kindergarten’s parents.

As a result, despite the objections and critical comments, the parents perceive the kindergarten in a very positive light, as was revealed mainly from the questionnaire survey. They trust the teachers and their specialist competences, they value the interest groups and other above-standard activities of the school. They are able to lucidly formulate problems they see and very often they present suggestions for solutions as well. They are ready to value and recognize the difficulty of a teacher’s profession. They are interested in reflecting the causes of situations (both positive and negative) which, in our opinion, is significantly linked to their education.

4.3 Students in practical training – Help and burden

In case a kindergarten is listed in the Register of Schools and School Facilities, it has to realize its education based on a curricular document – the Framework Educational Program for Pre-school Education [Rámcový vzdělávací program pro předškolní vzdělávání] 2004, further on referred to as FEP PE). The kindergarten creates its own school educational program in the second round of contents creation. The kindergarten under investigation is also a “register” school which is not necessarily a rule with private and company kindergartens. Its activity is inspected by Czech School Inspection.

The security of realization of a state-guaranteed curriculum on a certain level was one of the pre-conditions for realizing practical pedagogical training of teacher trainees of the establishing university. The student pedagogical training was presented in the kindergarten as a school agenda on all levels of its work, with both positive and negative connotations.

On one hand, the students were seen as the bearers of new ideas and sources of inspiration, as those who enable the realization of a truly individual approach to children and who help teachers. The majority of parents also appreciated the attention paid to the children by the students, their presence for the sake of variety and the positive reactions of children were also noted. Furthermore, the parents accepted the premises of the school as an instructional workplace, which we ascribe to their experience with students, even if on a different content platform. One parent convincingly assessed it in one sentence, “The students will benefit, the teachers will get help and the kids will get to know new people.”

These positive points were a unifying element of positive reactions to the presence of teacher trainees in the kindergarten.

On the other hand, negative features can be observed; there are certain disadvantages stemming from the duty of the school under investigation, which is an instructional, faculty school. The disadvantages of students being present at school were interpreted mainly by those directly involved in the process, i.e. by teachers and parents. The other surveyed participants, whether the Board members or the students, perceived the demanding character of the situation, but as they were not directly touched by it and it did not limit their activity at the kindergarten, they did not reflect it as a problem. Understandably, the kindergarten presented the ideas on how difficult it is to manage the activities of the students so that all the participants in the role of educators were working effectively. Sometimes, an unfavorable effect of “new authorities” taking turns arose (students themselves became authorities for the children especially during the long periods of pedagogical training). It was with them that the self-confident and intelligent children were testing the limits, they were trying to get the power and superiority on their side, which eventually appeared as indiscipline perceived mainly by the teachers. This was considered as “over-work” by teachers which has not been duly appreciated. The genesis of practical trainings of students in the kindergarten has its roots in the requirements of the kindergarten towards the teacher-training faculty with the aim to obtain help. In the words of the principal, changing staff caused by “accepting young employees” created problems for which students in their practical trainings were to be a part of a solution by helping the teachers.

What is perceived as another problem with both teachers and parents is the presence of students in training in the class of the youngest children. As was already mentioned, the school under investigation features benefits among which, without a doubt, is accepting children from the age of two. It is in this class of children between the age of two and three where “overload of practical trainings” is seen as a destabilizing element for the necessary conditions for work with such young children. The conditions are based on the homogeneity of the environment and people in it which is disturbed by the students. The teachers in the university kindergarten are very important people in their lives and “their changing causes the children’s confusion”.

The fact that the kindergarten would provide an opportunity for pedagogical training of students was declared already in the project seeking the ESF support and further on in establishing the kindergarten. It appears that it is the kindergarten’s staff inside its demanding school operation who forget about it. It is a fact that it requires willingness to “teach practically” (with everything it entails), it is built not only through professional loyalty to pass on what one

knows to the younger and less experienced ones. It is also a sign that should be a part of the kindergarten profile thus predicting the acceptance of this condition at the very beginning, when entering the kindergarten. This presumes sufficient communication of the “over-work tasks” from the side of the headquarters and everybody competent, which probably did not always happen.

5 Conclusions

The kindergarten under investigation functions according to a set of rules in a specific space. This specificity is given by a high context conditionality of a university and pre-school education. The sources of data were documents, interviews and observations; the empirical data analysis gradually showed certain dimensions for their interpretation. Three factors determining life in the school under investigation and telling its story were identified. They were the links with the establishing authority and the parents with university education as well as the status of a faculty kindergarten providing space for practical training of students in teacher training. These determinants eventually contributed to the fact that the kindergarten is on one hand being exposed to the requirements from the establishing university via a demanding Board, the parents or the faculty with teacher training programs. On the other hand, these subjects intensively help, they are interested in supporting the school and participating in its running; they want to be parts of decision-making thus accepting a share of responsibility and actively contributing to its prosperity and quality.

Acknowledgement:

The text is published with financial support of Internal Grant Agency of TBU in Zlín and it is a part of the IGA/FHS/2015/009 University kindergarten – a case study project.

References

- Bastos, P., & Straume, O. R. (2013). *Preschool Education: Does Public Supply Crowd Out Private Enrollment?* IDB, University of Minho and University of Bergen. Retrieved from <http://idbdocs.iadb.org/wsdocs/getdocument.aspx?docnum=38238994>
- Framework Educational Program for Pre-school Education [Rámcový vzdělávací program pro předškolní vzdělávání]*. (2004). Praha: VÚP.
- Hendl, J. (2005). *Kvalitativní výzkum. Základní metody a aplikace*. Praha: Portál.
- Hyett, N., Kenny, A., & Dickson-Swift, V. (2014). Methodology or method? A critical review of qualitative case study reports. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies on Health and Well-being*, 9, 1-12. Retrieved from www.ijqhw.net/index.php/qhw/article/view/23606
- Katrnák, T. (2004). *Odsouzení k manuální práci: Vzdělanostní reprodukce v dělnické rodině*. Praha: Sociologické nakladatelství.

- Majerčíková, J., & Gavora, P. (2013) Vnímaná zdatnosť (self-efficacy) učiteľa rozvíjať spoluprácu s rodičmi. Konštrukcia výskumného nástroja. *Pedagogika*, 63(2), 128-146.
- Majerčíková, J., & Syslová, Z. (2014). Ako učiteľky materských škôl vnímajú svoju profesijnú zdatnosť pre spoluprácu s rodičmi. In J. Vašátková, E. Kaněčková (Eds.), *Pedagogický výzkum: spojnice mezi teorií a praxí* (pp. 47-58). Sborník z XXII. ročníku konference ČAPV. Olomouc.
- Mareš, J. (2015) Tvorba případových studií pro výzkumné účely. *Pedagogika*, 65(2), 113-142.
- Munn, P. (1993). *Parents and Schools: Customers, Managers or Partners*. London: Routledge.
- Rabušicová, M., & Emmerová, K. (2003). Role rodičů ve vztahu ke škole – teoretické koncepty. *Pedagogika*, 53(2), 141 - 151.
- Šedřová, K. (2004). Role rodičů ve vztahu ke škole: teoretické koncepty a empirická zjištění. In M. Rabušicová et al., *Škola a /versus/ rodina* (pp. 33-51). Brno: MU.
- Štech, S. (2004). Angažovanost rodičů ve školní socializaci dětí. *Pedagogika*, 54(4) 374-387.
- Team of Authors. (2006). *Profesijný rozvoj učitel'a*. Prešov: MPC Prešov.
- Yin, R. K. (2014). *Case study research: Design and methods*. Los Angeles: Sage.