

New Competences for the Pre-school Teacher

A Successful Response to the Challenges of the 21st Century

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Abstract

Only those individuals who are prepared for the professional challenges of the 21st century can aptly respond to them. The quality of the educational-upbringing system, in particular the preliminary one, which is early childhood and pre-school education, is the priority for every society which has a clear development strategy and which has a systematic educational policy. Particular attention, therefore, should be devoted to the initial training and continuing professional development of the educator. This is necessary in order for them to acquire the necessary pedagogical competences needed for working with children of an early and pre-school age. Only a competent educator can achieve favourable conditions which enable the development of the child's competences.

Various roles demand various competences which the educator must possess such as: competences linked to understanding and advancing the child; learning; monitoring, evaluation, improving processes; school, family, local community; curriculum and the competences necessary for improving the educator's own personal traits and professional activity. By improving these competences, the educator systematically builds his/her professional identity.

Keywords: Children, Competences, Educator, 21st Century, Professional identity

1. Introduction

The professional competences of the teacher (Note 1) (at all levels) in upbringing and education is discussed. The diverse roles of the preschool teacher in institutions of early age and pre-school education demand more diverse pedagogical competences which contemporary pre-school teachers must possess in order to meet the upbringing and educational challenges of the 21st century.

In the latest scientific literature, in the context of *Partnership in skills for the 21st century* (Note 2) and *harmonisation processes with the EU* (Karacaoğlu, 2008) which is a current topic for candidate countries such as the Republic of Croatia.

If we want to be in line with the advanced upbringing and educational systems of the developed countries in the world, we have to step away from our familiar and worn out ways of learning and teaching (transmission of knowledge) which are usually only declaratively abandoned in our upbringing-educational system at all levels.

But, to step into what? We should step into something completely unknown or only partially known in the world of research, discovering and constructing our own knowledge in an environment which allows encourages and values this, starting from the family and institutions of early age upbringing up to the highest levels of the educational systems.

Today, we live in an "exceptionally complex and rapidly changing world" (Townsend, 2011, p. 121) In only the recent few decades society has completely changed its views on life, fundamental values, social and political structures (Drucker, 1993). Furthermore, individuals faced with chronic stress, reigning "valuelessness" and disorientation are with more and more difficulty finding adjustment strategies. Therefore, the issue of competences, or skills as they are more frequently referred to in recent times (Gonczi and Hager, 2010), both personal and professional are becoming imperative. It is necessary to "arm one's self" with skills (for the 21st century) which ensure survival in a dynamic, unpredictable and often chaotic world. Seely Brown (Note 3) states: "the speed of change in the 21st. century is constantly increasing, and the world is becoming more connected and complex, the economy of knowledge is demanding more and more intellectual ownership. In such an environment, the key is to redirect our focus from education to lifelong learning";

which requires considerably different competences from those which have only been considered to be lacking in last few decades.

What are these skills/competences and where, when and how can we begin to acquire them so that today's children/pupils/students can be equal and constructive participants in a society where those competitive factors are occurring in an ever more demanding labour market for which they are being prepared? We will attempt to provide answers to the questions posed, however, another fundamental question arises – what competences do those who lead children/pupils/students through the process of acquiring their own competences have (or should have)? Are their (parental, teacher) competences adequate for securing a successful outcome?

2. Determining the Concept of Competences

In the widest sense, Suzić (2010, p. 13) defines competences as the “ability to act”; for Lončar-Vicković and Dolaček-Alduk (2009, p. 24) competences represent a “combination of knowledge, skills and attitudes with the help of which the individual is equipped to carry out the particular task “. In the example of the terminology of the PISA project (2003) competences are referred to as knowledge, skills, attitudes and values (Note 4). Most often in contemporary literature one comes across determining competences as a “complex system which encompasses cognitive skills, attitudes and non-cognitive components”, and a capable individual “skilfully combines all sources “. (Note 5)

Competence, as Gonzi and Hager emphasise (2010, p. 405), can be understood in different ways depending on how “the standards of competence are used or assessed”. Therefore, there are three ways to discuss the concept of competence. The first, refers to capability, that is, the capacity of the individual to successfully complete a task (Waters and Sroufe, 1983) in which the ability and capability of the individual include concepts such as knowledge, skills and attitudes. The other, the general approach, views competence as a series of necessary attributes including appropriate types of knowledge, skills, abilities and attitudes directed at training and assessing individual achievements in each of the individual elements of competence (Gonzi and Hager, 2010). The third approach represents an integrated concept, in which competence is discussed in terms of knowledge, skills, and attitudes, and directed at key tasks and included in the concrete practice of particular professions. (Gonzi *et al.*, 1990; Biggs, 1994). This approach defines the main attributes of competence such as: cognitive (knowledge, critical thinking, and strategies for solving problems) and interpersonal skills and emotional and psychomotor capabilities necessary for the competent solving of key tasks in a certain area. The integrated and “holistic approach” to competence “connects the capabilities and capacity of the individual with the tasks “which enables “complete representation of practice which was not possible with the previous two approaches “(Gonzi and Hager, 2010, 405). Welcoming the holistic approach, Masterpsqua too (1991, p.1366) defines competence as “adaptable understandings, emotional, behavioural and social characteristics filled with hidden and clearly determined beliefs and expectations of an individual on the approach to those abilities and the possibility of completing them”. Precisely this aspect of “filling” points out the dynamism and changeability of competence and the possibility to build on and enrich it, which justifies efforts from both society and the individual to seek appropriate modalities which enable the acquisition of still new competences thereby affirming the justification of the concept of lifelong learning. The efforts of the scientific public in the last decades are directed at the enlightening these competences, (except for reading, writing and arithmetic) which are necessary for “the individual to lead a successful life and for society in general in facing current and future challenges” (Gonzi and Hager, 2010, 406).

3. Pedagogical Competences of the Pre-school Teacher

Contemporary views on professional competence (Cheetham and Chivers, 1996; Gonzi and Hager, 2010) and therefore pedagogical, which is at the focus of our interest, have two basic starting points: the need for a holistic approach in research (acknowledging scientific understandings of pedagogy, psychology, sociology, communicology etc.) and the alliance of formal education and programme of professional development (after formal education).

The starting point for the construction of the “holistic model of professional competence”, Cheetham and Chivers (1996, p. 24) can be found in known models and standards of competence and offer their own concept of “meta-competence” the basic components of which are: functional, personal or behavioural, understanding/cognitive and ethical/values competence. Related to this is the determination which is found in the terminology of the Tuning project (2007) according to which, competences constitute a “dynamic combination of cognitive and meta- cognitive skills, knowledge and understanding, interpersonal and practical skills and ethical values” (Note 6).

The European referential framework of key competences is a defined model which Gordon and associates offered (2009, p. 10) entitled “*Recommendation of key competences for lifelong learning*”, which the European Parliament adopted in December 2006. Their proposal defines 8 key competences which are:

- 1) communication in mother tongue
- 2) communication in foreign languages
- 3) mathematical competences and basic competences in science and technology
- 4) digital competences (computer literacy)
- 5) learning how to learn
- 6) social and citizenship competences
- 7) self-initiative and entrepreneurial competences
- 8) culture of awareness and research

This proposal covers (all) competences and the focus is placed on the last five, which are by their nature cross-cultural. These key competences are not final and their development can be assisted by skills such as: critical thinking, creativity, initiative, problem solving, risk assessment, decision making and constructively dealing with emotions (Note 7). Even though this model has been subject to criticism (Suzić, 2010), we believe that it is an acceptable starting point, that is, a framework for the (self)evaluation of pre-school teacher competences in practice in our institutions of early age and pre-school education. It is also a framework within which it is possible to offer some new solutions for improvement.

In the last few decades within the OECD (Note 8) a range of projects have been implemented with the aim of researching the influence of social and economic changes to education and to research how much education in certain countries is in accordance with the needs of modern times. One such project is DeSeCo (Note 9) which emphasised that a competent individual implementation (such as, for example, the pedagogical practice of the pre-school teacher), includes the “mobilisation of knowledge, cognitive and practical skills, as well as attitudes, emotions, values and motivation” (Gonczi and Hager, 2010, 406). In the project, three main categories of competence were mentioned:

- 1) Interaction in socially heterogeneous groups – (the ability to work with others around you, cooperativeness, the ability to deal with conflicts and resolve them) which is considered vital for life in the global world and multicultural society.
- 2) autonomy in action – (the ability to act within the “bigger picture”, planning and achieving plans, assertiveness in individual rights and the ability to support individual rights and to defend them as well as interests, needs and limits) – these are all vital aspects of life of the individual at work, in the family and society.
- 3) interactive use of “tools” – (ability to interactively use language, symbols, text, knowledge, information and technology). This category, among other elements, refers to reading and writing, mathematical equations and using professional and scientific literature. In the background of the afore-mentioned are critical thinking and reflection.

If one accepts and understands the idea of key competences, then it is necessary to abandon traditional curriculum institutions of formal education which place the emphasis on reproducing knowledge and abstract thought, and turn to new ways of acquiring (co-construction) knowledge through integrating formal and informal knowledge, and those are the capacities that develop gradually throughout growing up according to Gonczi and Hager (2010).

If we use this approach to competences as a framework within which we view our practice of equipping pre-school teachers in institutions of early age and pre-school education, then already at first sight it is evident that practice has very few similarities to the above mentioned referential framework. We point out, that there are also positive examples in institutions of higher education which equip future pre-school teachers for institutions of early age and pre-school education too. However, individual examples are not a sufficient guarantee for the preparedness of children and youth for the demanding labour market.

In order to make our thoughts understandable, we will display them in table form (table 1) thereby using the categories of competences according to Gonczi and Hager, (2010).

<Table 1 about here>

Table 1 A comparison between the most common practice forms of preparing the pre-school teacher and the most common practice forms in institutions of early age and pre-school education compared to the categories of competences by Gonczi and Hager (2010)

This comparative overview of the most common practice of formal pre-school teacher training and the most common practice of institutions of early age and preschool education compared to the suggested categories of competences

(Gonczi and Hager, 2010) reveals a direct, almost cause-effect connection to the training and pedagogical practice for pre-school teachers and their deviation from necessary competences. Even though, as mentioned, there are also positive examples in practice which lead to (pre-school teachers, students, children) in the acquisition of necessary competences, it is obvious that in the majority of cases, this is not the case which for individuals, the profession, institutions and society can have far reaching consequences. It is possible that (children and adults) who throughout their schooling and growing up have missed acquiring the necessary competences and who have missed internalising the idea of lifelong learning will not survive in society and in the labour market for which they are being prepared.

4. Skills for the 21st Century

The term “skills for the 21st century” is related to a new, modern approach to upbringing and education (at all levels) which includes new competences. *Partnership for skills in the 21st century*, is a leading organisation which purports the inclusion of skills in the 21st century (competences) in upbringing and education (Note 10). Those skills are recognisable in upbringing-educational institutions across the world, which achieve especially high results, and they relate to four key elements:

- 1) *“Subject” source and Topics for the 21st century*. - mathematics, language, art, science, history and administering/managing make the very essence of a study programme. In these basics, teachers have to integrate global awareness; financial, economic, business, civil and health literacy.
- 2) *Learning and innovation skills* – the working environment progressively is becoming more and more complex which demands creativity, critical thinking and effective communication. Collaboration and team work are considered to be real-life skills which are acquired and advanced while mastering the content of the subject source.
- 3) *Information, media and technological skills* – in the global economy, workers use various technologies which demand a wide range of critical thinking skills. As technology advances at an incredible pace, the majority of countries are making efforts for schools to lead the way in providing modern technology.
- 4) *Life and career skills* – modern jobs demand much more than merely satisfactory knowledge – workers have to be more adaptable to a variety of work environments, responsibilities and changing priorities. They have to be capable of working independently and in a team, determining priorities, planning and managing one's own work (often in a very short period of time) and very quickly “adapting” when they work with colleagues from different cultures.

Does one think about training the pre-school teacher for the needs of contemporary practice, keeping in mind the mentioned skills? Then it is clearly obvious that the existing programmes in the Republic of Croatia only to a certain extent enable the acquisition of competences. It is clear that curricula training of the pre-school teacher needs to be radically changed, unburdening them of unnecessary knowledge and information, introducing more contemporary, practically more useful contents (for example: an integrated curriculum for early age and pre-school education, evaluation and self-evaluation, civic duty, foreign languages, modern technology, administering/managing, sustainable development, partnership, quality communication etc). Together with this, it is necessary to put into function new strategies for teaching which will enable quality interaction between professors and students and among students themselves, the development of critical thinking, collaboration, team work etc., which will really and not just formally prepare students for the challenges waiting for them in practice. Highly developed countries within Europe (Ireland/England, Scotland, the Netherlands) have set professional frameworks, that is, national standards of competence for the teaching profession, which individuals must acquire in order to successfully meet the demands of practice. The Irish/English standard relates to: understanding the curriculum and profession, area of knowledge and its application, teaching strategies and class management techniques, confirming/following pupil progress and professional development. The Scottish standard encompasses: professional knowledge and understanding, professional skills and capabilities and professional values and professional dedication. The Netherlands' standard includes: interpersonal competences, pedagogical competences, subject knowledge and teaching methodology, organisational competences, collaboration competences with colleagues, collaboration competences with the external environment, capability for reflection and development (Note 11). Even though the mentioned standards are basically similar, the Netherlands' professional standard of teacher competences are directly aimed at the area of teacher/pre-school activity in practice, and the basic areas of the curriculum are founded on the competence which prepare them for that practice.

Townsend (2011, p.129) emphasises how we must consider new strategies for work with teachers which will make them “more flexible, adaptable and professional” according to the model. This model is made up of three interdependent elements: *abilities* (competences and capacities), *values* (ideals that direct abilities) and *self efficiency* (the way certain

individuals assess their capacities to efficiently complete activities) and emphasises: In order to improve teacher abilities, it is necessary to direct attention to their formal education and professional development particularly in the areas of curriculum development, relations and (self) assessment. In order to improve their value, it is necessary to focus on teacher professionalism and on what that means in this rapidly changing world. In order to improve their self-efficiency, we must 'provide' teachers with the ability to believe in themselves "points out Townsend, (2011, p. 130). It is to be expected that, if we focus on this kind of teaching training, teachers so prepared will be able to effectively "deal with" the many roles and tasks that await them.

Mentioning the complex roles of the pre-school teacher, Karacaoğlu (2008) talks of the professional competences which the pre-school teacher must possess in order to enable children's development. Those competences can be categorised in several groups such as competences related to:

- 1) *Understanding and advancing the child* – sensitive to the child's needs, supports/encourages learning, helps in advancing one's self, develops internal motivation, accepts/supports different learning styles, listens, understands and encourages the child, is a powerful model for identification;
- 2) *learning* – owns and develops: reflective, creative and critical thinking, supports a positive group atmosphere, designs an environment that encourages learning, uses/ensures different sources of knowledge, is capable of resolving conflicts, brings/respects the rules with children, is confident;
- 3) *monitoring, evaluation, process improvement* – follows and documents the child's progress in learning, analyses and interprets data (documentation), follows the child's development, avoids grading and assessment;
- 4) *school, family, local community* – recognises and uses advantages in the environment, knows the family, enables participation, builds partnership, sees the kindergarten as a culture centre, positively communicates with everyone out of the kindergarten;
- 5) *curriculum* – is informed and acknowledges the aims and principles of national upbringing and education, follows and implements scientific domains of early age and pre-school education, participates in researching his/her own practice; and
- 6) *competences necessary for advancing own personality and professional activity*– constant professional development, developing capability for self-evaluation, open to collaboration and team work in and out of the institution, collaboration with experts out of the institution.

Pre-school teachers that possess these competences recognise, understand and timely meet the needs, interests and wishes of children (and of other participants in the upbringing-educational process) and thereby enable the development of their competences. They design an encouraging pedagogical environment where children use skills and all available resources (for learning) "tools" in order to: research, develop critical thinking and constantly increase their knowledge; reach decisions and conclusions on the basis of information, applied acquired skills in concrete (life) situations and create new knowledge; share knowledge with peers and participate ethically and productively in a democratic environment, always yearning for personal advancement (Note 12).

These demands almost certainly will not be met by the kindergarten that stills puts children in homogenous groups with physical barriers that do not enable child contact, whose pedagogical context is formed to suit adults' needs and not children's, that disables co-construction of knowledge and learning, that does not build its own curriculum and in which neither adults nor children develop a culture of dialogue, co-operation and team work. Furthermore, contemporary practice also seeks "the complete involvement of the pre-school teacher" who is in a pre-school teacher role, is enthusiastic, creative and innovative and invests "constant effort in searching for the answer to the question: how does the pre-school teacher's practice and upbringing activity create an appropriate context for the optimal development of the child" (Fumoto, 2011, p. 28). Appropriate developmental practice is founded on quality relations which "the pre-school teacher builds with each child and his/her family so as to better understand the child's individual needs, interests and capabilities and so meet the parents' aims, values, expectations and parental upbringing practice" (NAEYC, 2009, p. 18). Those needs can only be met by that pre-school teacher who has a clearly defined professional identity, who represents authority and who can be trusted. By developing their own competences, pre-school teachers systematically work on building their own professional identity which is understood to be a "complex, multidimensional and dynamic system" (Coldron and Smith, 1999, p. 712) that is, a constant process which begins by acquiring a pre-school qualification and continues constantly through professional activity.

5. Conclusion

In this paper the question of competence is considered as being essential for competitive entry and survival in a demanding labour market in the years ahead..

Bearing this thought in mind: “We consciously teach what we know; we unconsciously teach what we are” (Hamachek, 1999), in this paper we attempted to “enlighten” aspects of pre-school competence in particular, those personal ones which “send” a direct and marked message to children/youth. Children and youth will develop their competences only with adults (pre-school teachers, teachers, parents) who are themselves competent and who design such a pedagogical context in a family environment and upbringing-educational institutions (at all levels) that enables the acquisition of necessary competences.

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www.p21.org/index.php?option=com (taken: 13. 6. 2011.)
<http://www.johnseelybrown.com/newlearning.pdf> (taken: 29. 6. 2011.)
<http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/46/14/33694881.pdf> (taken: 12. 6. 2011.)
www.i-learnt.com/Paradigm_Compencies.html (taken: 29. 6. 2011)
www.relint.deusto.es/Tuning Project/index.htm (taken: 1.7.2011.)
http://ec.europa.eu/education/more-information/doc/keyreport_en.pdf (taken: 1.7.2011.)
www.p21.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=254&Itemid=120 (taken: 13. 6. 2011.)
http://domus.srce.hr/iuoun/images/3radionica/3_nacionalni%20profesionalni%20profil_20-2-09.pdf (taken: 6.10. 2011.)
<http://www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/aasl/guidelinesandstandards/learningstandards/standards.cfm> (taken: 15.6. 2011.)

Notes

Note 1. The term teacher is used in the widest possible sense of the word, and refers to the pre-school teacher in institutions of early age and pre-school education and to teachers at all levels of education.

Note 2. www.p21.org/index.php?option=com (taken: 13. 6. 2011.)

Note 3. <http://www.johnseelybrown.com/newlearning.pdf> (taken: 29. 6. 2011)

Note 4. <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/46/14/33694881.pdf> (taken: 12. 6. 2011)

Note 5. www.i-learnt.com/Paradigm_Compencies.html (taken: 29. 6. 2011)

Note 6. www.relint.deusto.es/Tuning Project/index.htm (taken: 1.7.2011)

Note 7. http://ec.europa.eu/education/more-information/doc/keyreport_en.pdf (taken: 1.7.2011.)

Note 8. Organisation for economic cooperation and development

Note 9. Definition and Selection of Competencies: Theoretical and Conceptual Foundations

Note 10. www.p21.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=254&Itemid=120 (preuzeto: 13. 6. 2011.)

Note 11. http://domus.srce.hr/iuoun/images/3radionica/3_nacionalni%20profesionalni%20profil_20-2-09.pdf (preuzeto: 6.10. 2011.)

Note 12. <http://www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/aasl/guidelinesandstandards/learningstandards/standards.cfm> (taken: 15.6. 2011.)

Table 1. A comparison between the most common practice forms of preparing the pre-school teacher and the most common practice forms in institutions of early age and pre-school education compared to the categories of competences by Gonczi and Hager (2010)

Categories of competences: Interaction in social heterogeneous groups (collaboration, administration and conflict resolution)	
Formal preparation of pre-school teachers (most common practice)	Practice of institutions of early age & pre-school education (most common practice)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - overcrowded groups of students (40-60), - lectures take place in classrooms/ amphitheatres with fixed desks which disable interaction among students and between students and professors, - compulsory and elective subjects are taken at the level of the study group, - rare possibility of choice of subjects in another 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the number of children in groups is rarely in keeping with Pedagogical standards; - insistence on homogenous age groups of children (“because then it is easier to work with them”, “older children are not disadvantaged in their learning because the younger ones do not bother them”) - “not mixing” of children is ensured by physically unbridgeable barriers (closed doors) and lack of in between-space seen as

<p>study group, and when it does occur students do not “mix” among themselves,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -the student is oriented towards him/herself and focussed on his/her achievement, - group work and project work is very rare during and out of class, - organised and directed opportunities for students to confront each other with their opinions are rare or non-existent, - professors never or rarely give lessons collaboratively and rarely bring other professors or associates- practitioners to their classes, - rarely or never do students have the chance to do seminar or team work, - rare opportunities for students to do project work. 	<p>unattractive for children,(“otherwise it will be rowdy and noisy”)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - infant groups are mostly commonly physically isolated from the kindergarten group, - conflicts among children are resolved by the pre-school teacher (“because that is the quickest”) and equipping children to be able to prevent conflict and to successfully resolve conflict is not insisted upon, - pre-school teachers insist on transmitting knowledge, and in order to do so, sit the children in a “circle” (“so that they listen carefully”) - collaboration and children’s work on projects is not encouraged/made possible, because it demands huge pre-school teacher and space preparation (“I’m not paid enough for that”, “we don’t have the conditions”) and a lot of didactic and unformed material (“and that creates mess”); the project is adapted to the topic, - the pre-school teacher exclusively works with the children individually (“within his/her own four walls”; “in that way I know what I have taught them”)
<p>Formal training of the pre-school teacher (most common practice)</p>	<p>Practice of the institution of early age & pre-school education (most common practice)</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - student autonomy is enabled occasionally and within the given framework that the teacher imposes, - students are inadequately informed of the lesson plan and the flowchart of activities for a particular subject so they cannot make their own plan or follow its implementation, - collaborative planning and student and professor implementation is most often non-existent, - the point of orientation for final student planning is test or examination date (external incentives), - student rights are guaranteed by law but individuals (professors) occasionally ignore them, - the professor is usually not aware of the special interests and desires of the students because s/he approaches them frontally, - topics for seminar papers are most commonly known in advance and determined by the professors so in that sense students do not have the possibility for choice and satisfying their own interests, - satisfying the need for power, belonging, freedom and entertainment for students (during the teaching process) is most commonly not made possible, 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - children (or their parents) do not participate: in making up the plan of activities , enriching the offer of materials, spatial organisation, organising the daily routine etc., - the plan which the pre-school teacher makes up is more often in the interests of fulfilling the set norms, and not in the aim of following the child's progress, development and process of advancement, - the rights of the child are only declaratively respected, that is, they are systematically infringed under the guise of “protecting children's interests” – forcing them to go for a break when the child has no need, and denying the child when s/he has the need (“put up with it a little bit longer and then we'll all go for a sleep “), consuming food in quantities and types that do not suit the child, toilets which do not protect the child's privacy, drinking water not available at all times, the inability to isolate a child within the group when it is feeling tired and the often the “fox-stork effect” is present when fluids are available to the child but in inappropriate containers the holding of which could cause discomfort and frustration to the child - parents' rights are only declaratively respected - neither their participation and nor their planning in the implementation process are allowed, not in the least their evaluation, longer stays are not permitted in the group(“so that they do not dirty the space in which children spend their time”, “so that the other children do not suffer from the fact that their parents are not there “, “that parents present do not disturb”); - the children's' interests and desires cannot be followed because the children are approached frontally, knowledge is transferred to them and they are expected to reproduce it as faithfully as possible,

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - students are inadequately prepared for assertive behaviour in seeking and protecting their own rights at a pleasant academic level 	<p>(when adults ask this of them ,most commonly at final concerts),</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - only those interests and wishes of the child which are in keeping with the pre-school teacher's and institution's work plan are welcomed - often the elementary rights of children with special needs are infringed because s/he is not able to participate in the institution for early age and pre-school education's programmes (“we do not have the conditions necessary for them to be accepted”, “we are inadequately equipped”)
<p>Category of competences: Interactive use of “tools” (language, mathematical equations, professional and scientific literature, modern technology, critical thinking, reflection)</p>	
<p>Formal pre-school teacher training (most common practice)</p>	<p>Practice of the institution of early age & pre-school education (most common practice)</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the majority of students have the necessary level of competences (language, writing, mathematical equations) but, a large number of them “battle with” the use of literary language in speech, grammar, syntax, style. - elementary customs of business communication for most students in their final year area are not known , - correspondence at an academic level is a major problem for the majority of students , - the great majority of students uses only the necessary minimum of professional and scientific literature (essential for preparing examinations) without the internal need for broadening understanding, - critical comments from students on what has been read is missing, or it is narrowly related to the student's topic, - almost as a rule students do not use professional literature written in a foreign language, - encouragement towards self-reflection (which is very rare) is meet by students with wonder and disbelief, and reflection (with much trouble) is done by them at a personal level, and not at the level of the content on which they over- use “dreadful” habits in communication. - students are often better at using contemporary technologies than their professors. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - mastering the “tools” in children of an early and pre-school age is the developmental process, however, the available sources which could facilitate and accelerate that process are not adequately used (interpersonal interaction among peers, interaction between children and adults , research activities, literary contents, encyclopaedias, picture books, role play, multimedia and so on.), - philosophy of the transmission of knowledge disenables children from asking questions, developing research interest, debate, curiosity, making and testing hypotheses, building/testing one's own theories and so on. - dominant role of adults in teaching disenables the development of critical thinking among children, - reflective dialogue is not encouraged neither among children nor adults, a direct consequence of which is the inability for self-refection, - children do not learn a foreign language or this occurs in an appropriate way in an artificially constructed out of context situation of a school lesson which produces resistance form children, - modern technologies are rarely available to children (and adults).