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# Professionalization of University Students of Pre-school Education (through the views of students on pre-school and the family in the Czech Republic)

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## Abstract

Pre-school is a space which provides an environment for the cognitive, affective, social and physical development of children at pre-school ages as well as conditions for their preparation for life. Pre-school facilities and teachers play a key role in facilitating this development. There is, however, little scientific research on how university students become teachers. The aim of this project is to describe the process of the professionalization of pre-school university students – starting from their initial concepts of the child, childhood and pre-school and continuing on to the creation of their own conception of self as a teacher and teaching in the course of the university programme.

The study provides the partial results of research which is still currently being worked on with the support of an IGA grant project under the number FHS/2015/04. The project will be completed in 2017.

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## 1. Introduction

Motivation is what drives us to perform, to make a choice. Furthermore, motivation includes the energy and effort to learn to work effectively and achieve one's own objectives.

The analysis of the motivation to be a pre-school teacher and the search for the reasons and the relational context of this choice, are the variables that constitute the fundamental axis of the present text.

In the last twenty years, the profession of pre-school teacher has been associated with continuous development and new considerations about where it should be headed in terms of theory and application. It is particularly interesting to see the motives and the reasons why young people select this profession. Studies observing the motives of students to become pre-school teachers are rather rare. Over the last five years extremely rare. Major studies include the work of the American author Frances O'Connell Rust (1993). F. O. Rust carried out qualitative research conducted using in-depth interviews on a sample of 30 novice teachers in pre-schools. The subject of the research was to monitor what was important in deciding to become a teacher. The main conclusion of the research was that students decided on their profession because they liked children. However, after analyzing their own career paths to teaching they understood that love for children would not suffice for the full performance of the teaching profession. "... *the primary reason was the love of children. But now I know it is not enough ...*" This quote also shows that the professional path of the student is supported by their own need to learn more and understand what all the work in the pre-school is about.

The present study focuses on early decisions on the career path of young people and their vision of the chosen profession. Its aim is to expand the knowledge base of the professionalization of pre-school through the ideas of young people about the job requirements for pre-school teachers and the method of their fulfillment. It loosely follows up on a study which was compiled past year (Wiegerová, Gavora, 2014).

To understand the context it is important to clarify who can work as a *pre-school teacher*, and what the pre-school is for in the socio-educational system in the *Czech Republic*.

Those who have completed higher education or a secondary school with a pedagogical orientation may become pre-school teachers. The need for obtaining a university degree is not stipulated by law. This of course raises a lot of professional discourse that is significantly discussed in the *Czech Republic*.

The role of a pre-school teacher is to ensure the professional care of children, their upbringing and education. The basic document, which is approved in the *Czech Republic* in relation to pre-school education, is the so-called Framework educational program of preschool education, which enshrines that pre-school teachers must regularly monitor the progress of children's education and assess its condition and results. The Framework educational program is an essential curriculum document and pre-schools develop their own school educational programs according to the frameworks specified therein.

A pre-school is an institution attended by children from 3 years of age. Attending pre-school is voluntary, so children go to pre-school based on the decision of the parents. 80% of the children population in the *Czech Republic* attends pre-school. More recently in professional circles, two issues are being discussed: obligation of education in pre-schools for children from 5 years of age and accepting children younger than three years into pre-schools. In the *Czech Republic* there is pressure on the last year of preparatory pre-school education on the part of parents, as well as pressure for the acceptance of children younger than three at pre-school. This situation stems from the fact that mothers want to return to work earlier so that they can build their careers. As a rule, women may remain on maternity leave until the child is three years old.

On the other hand, the pressure for compulsory preparatory classes results from the desire of parents to enhance the education of their child, so the child would adapt to the conditions at the primary school more rapidly. However, a large proportion of parents use the option of deferring the compulsory education of the child until the child is 7 years old (in the *Czech Republic* a child who turns 6 may begin the first year of primary school) and thus they actually prolong the stay of children in pre-school. At the same time, however, this changes the focus of work in pre-schools as well as the professional training of pre-school teachers in secondary schools and universities.

## 2. Research methodology

The research was begun in the academic year 2012/2013. The sample was comprised of students from the field of pre-school education. At that time they were in the first year of full-time study. At that time the faculty did not have an approved accreditation for combined (external) study. Full-time study in the academic year 2012/2013 was the only choice of study in the university field of pre-school education at pre-schools in the *Zlín* region.

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