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## Planning and Evaluating Educational Work in Slovene Preschools

MARCELA BATISTIČ ZOREC\*<sup>1</sup> AND ANDREJA HOČEVAR<sup>2</sup>

∞ The present article examines the changes in Slovene preschools subsequent to Slovenia's independence in 1991. In the socialist period, the national education programme for preschools was highly structured, goal- and content-oriented and subject to schoolization. The Curriculum for Preschools (1999) brought conceptual changes towards education "based on the child" and the process approach, as well as giving more autonomy to preschool teachers and their assistants. In the empirical study, we examine changes in planning and evaluating educational work compared to the past. The results show that the majority of professional workers have reduced the high level of structure and rigidity in planning, and that there is better cooperation between preschool teachers and teachers' assistants. Unlike in the past, most professional workers regularly evaluate their educational work. As the data was gathered in two phases, before and after the training of professional workers in the Reggio Emilia concept, we also search for the (probably indirect) influences of this training. We conclude that after the training the participation of children in planning and evaluating educational work is higher.

**Keywords:** Curriculum planning, Evaluation of educational work, The preschool curriculum, Preschool education in socialism, Slovenia

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## Načrtovanje in evalviranje vzgojnega dela v slovenskih vrtcih

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∞ V prispevku so predstavljene spremembe, ki so se zgodile v Sloveniji po osamosvojitvi leta 1991. V socializmu je bil državni vzgojno-izobraževalni program za vrtce zelo strukturiran, ciljno in vsebinsko orientiran ter »pošolan«. V Kurikulumu za vrtce (1999) so vidne konceptualne spremembe v smeri izobraževanja, »osnovanega na otroku«, procesnega pristopa in večje avtonomije za predšolske vzgojitelje in njihove pomočnike. V empiričnem delu so predstavljene spremembe na področju načrtovanja in evalviranja vzgojno-izobraževalnega dela v primerjavi s preteklostjo. Izsledki kažejo, da je večina strokovnih delavcev zmanjšala visoko raven strukturiranosti in togosti pri načrtovanju. Boljše je sodelovanje med vzgojitelji in njihovimi pomočniki. V primerjavi s preteklostjo večina profesionalnih delavcev redno evalvira svoje vzgojno-izobraževalno delo. Podatki so bili zbrani v dveh fazah (pred izobraževanjem in po izobraževanju) v okviru izobraževanja profesionalnih delavcev o konceptu Reggio Emilia, zato so bili raziskani tudi vplivi – verjetno posredni – tega izobraževanja. Končna ugotovitev je, da sta bila po izobraževanju vključenost otrok v načrtovanje in evalviranje dela zastopana v večji meri.

**Ključne besede:** evalviranje vzgojno-izobraževalnega dela, kurikularno načrtovanje, Kurikulum za vrtce, predšolsko izobraževanje v socializmu, Slovenija

## Introduction

Following Slovenia's independence in 1991, the reform of the complete educational vertical triggered the systemic and content reform of Slovene preschools as well. The present article examines changes in the planning and evaluating of educational work in Slovene preschools after the introduction of the Curriculum for Preschools (1999). The changes are of importance because the quality of preschool education at the process level is very closely related to the planning and evaluation of educational work in preschools (Marjanovič Umek, Fekonja, Kavčič, & Poljanšek, 2002).

The question as to what changes occurred in Slovene preschools can only be answered by showing how things used to be done in the past. In Slovenia, as part of former Yugoslavia, the system of preschool education used to be regulated relatively well. After World War II, the large increase in the employment of women initiated the establishment of a wide network of preschools, which provided for the day care and education of children. As early as in 1961, a unified system of early childhood education and care for all preschool aged children was established (Dolanc, Levičnik, Kolar, Smasek, & Glogovac, 1975). In 1979, the first national curriculum (The Educational Programme for the Education and Care of Preschool Children, hereafter referred to as the Educational Programme) was delivered.

We will emphasise the changes in the pedagogical concept and practice that occurred as consequences of the altered social conditions and the development of the scientific discipline of preschool education both in Slovenia and abroad. The changes led away from the previously rigid and strictly prescribed approaches to preschools, opening them up and giving preschool teachers more autonomy. They aimed at reducing the high level of structure and rigidity typical of preschools between World War II and the end of the twentieth century. The fundamental conceptual change, however, was a shift from education "based on the teacher and the programme" to education "based on the child".

The research presented in the present article was undertaken within the project *The Professional Training of Professional Workers to Include Elements of the Special Pedagogical Principles of the Reggio Emilia Concept in the Area of Preschool Education* (hereafter referred to as the RE project). The first phase was undertaken before a training held for about 200 professional workers from Slovene preschools, and the second phase was completed after this training. In introducing the Reggio Emilia concept, we stressed the elements that can be implemented in our practice and are not in discordance with our national curriculum. We do not assume that the training had a direct effect on the planning

and evaluation of educational work, but it might have had an indirect effect.

We suppose that changes in planning and evaluating educational work in the national curriculum and their effects on practice in Slovenia could be interesting for the international audience because similar developments have taken place, or are still taking place, in many states. There is no doubt that experts today advocate preschool education “based on the child”. However, as international research carried out by Weikart, Olmsted and Montie (2003) shows, in preschool practice, education “oriented towards the adult” still predominates. We believe, as Blaise and Nuttall (2011, p. 103) say, that “a good way to start imagining how (pre)schools and classrooms might be different /.../ is by learning about education systems in other countries”.

### **Slovene preschools between World War II and Slovenia’s independence**

One of the considerable advantages of Slovene preschools after World War II was the common preschool for all preschool children between the end of the mother’s maternity leave (one year) and the beginning of primary school. The quality of the work in preschools was guaranteed by the appropriate education of preschool teachers and by the national (Slovene) Educational Programme (1979). Planning of the work in preschools was goal-oriented and content-oriented (see Kelly, 1989; Kroflič, 2002). The Educational Programme (1979) clearly defined the goals, methods and content of preschool education, which were specified in some detail according to age groups and educational areas (physical, intellectual, moral, aesthetic and technical education).

Preschool teachers planned their work at various levels. Long-term planning was related to individual periods (introduction period, three terms and the summer period) and short-term planning consisted of weekly and daily plans (Batistič Zorec, 2003). The stress was on the activities planned and led by the teacher since it was thought that directed activities “/.../ encourage common interests in children and help to form a collective where egotistical tendencies of individuals must give way to common benefits” (Kolar, Cilenšek, Osterc, & Černe, 1969, p. 43). Other preschool activities – simultaneous and obligatory for all children – were also defined: resting, eating and activities related to the children’s personal hygiene. Rather than addressing the children’s individual needs, they encouraged the adjustment and formation of the individual as a member of the collective, which was a consequence of the ideological trends of the socialist society of the day. The Educational Programme (1979) formulated the principle of the child’s obligatory participation in directed activities.

Because it was highly structured and activities for children were planned in advance, the teacher was given very little opportunity to take account of the differences between environments and children. To provide the same or “equal” education was more important than catering for individual differences in children’s abilities, needs and interests (see also Batistič Zorec, 2012).

There is no mention of evaluation in the Educational Programme (1979) at all, even though it was content- and goal-oriented. In a (quite limited) column at the end of their daily preparation, teachers only had to make a note on the “realisation”, i.e., state whether they had attained the goals with all of the children in the class. Their notes were mostly very short, and they only indicated whether any of the children had not participated in the directed activity (Batistič Zorec, 2003).

Some researches criticised preschools at that time for their rigidity, as more or less everything happening in them had to be foreseen and planned in advance; each activity had to have goals that needed to be reached by all of the children. The Educational Programme (1979) was thus modelled on the primary school programme, which brought about the schoolization of the preschools. As Kaga, Bennet and Moss (2010) argue, schoolization denotes the downward pressure of primary school approaches (classroom organisation, curriculum, etc.) on early childhood education.

We can say that preschool teachers were not autonomous; rather they were in a subordinated role of implementing the prescribed programme. The position of their aids was even worse. Teachers planned daily tasks for them and gave them direct instructions. There was a strict division of work into “educational” and “caring” tasks. The teacher primarily planned and conducted the so-called directed tasks; the aids’ duties were hygiene, child minding and occasional discipline enforcement. Such a division meant that education was conceived of as a fully conscious and planned process carried out by the teacher, transmitting knowledge, values, etc. to children. On the other hand, it presupposed that children could merely be “looked after”, cared for, offered toys, etc., with no educational effect on them.

Criticism in the mid 1980s brought about changes in numerous preschools and a greater variety in practice among different preschools and teachers. In professional articles and in preschools of that time, the urge to take into consideration children’s needs, interests and wishes was highly stressed (e.g., Miljak, 1984; Vrbovšek, 1993). Preschools became more open towards parents, as well as towards various disciplines and professionals, which led to the introduction of interdisciplinarity in the field of preschool education.

## The national curriculum for preschools in the Republic of Slovenia

After Slovenia became an independent state in 1991, preschools "... faced certain critical points which at various levels hindered preschools from developing towards more plural preschool education, from recognizing children's rights and their systematic inclusion in the life and curriculum of the preschools" (Marjanovič Umek & Fekonja Peklaj, 2008, p. 26). Empirical research from the 1980s and 1990s helped to create new notions of the child and childhood and the role of the curriculum in preschools, and all of this significantly contributed to the preparation of a new conceptual basis and the Curriculum for Preschools (1999).

The conceptual basis for the Curriculum for Preschools (1999), published in the White Paper on Education in the Republic of Slovenia (1996; hereafter referred to as the White Paper) proposed an open curriculum and suggested that the curriculum should be directed towards the development of the child's achieved and potential abilities and skills, as well as towards the optimum relationship between them. The planning of educational work was defined as "... the planning of the whole life in the preschools" (ibid., p. 51). The preschool teacher plans educational work based on theoretical assumptions about the developmental characteristics of the child, the specifics of learning in a particular period and the characteristics of the environment. Kroflič (1999) believed that the process approach to curriculum planning was most suited to preschool education because it no longer set goals in the form of ideal images; rather, it was conceived in the form of procedural principles. When conducting educational work, the teacher ensures adaptability within the organisation in time and space, the content, the methods, the forms of educational work and the educational means. The teacher also follows the children's development, analyses her/his own procedures and evaluates the achieved results (White Paper, 1996).

These were the bases on which the Curriculum for Preschools, as a national document, was developed in 1999. It laid out the professional foundations for work in preschools (ibid., pp. 7–8). It emphasised that the notion of the curriculum had been introduced in Slovene preschools "... because it is broader and more comprehensive than the notion of the programme and it also implies the shift from the traditional stress on contents/subject-matter to the process of preschool education itself, to the totality of interactions and experiences on the basis of which preschools learn" (ibid., p. 7). In the introductory chapters, it lists the goals of the curriculum and the principles for its implementation. A chapter on the child in preschools talks about development and learning in

the preschool period, daily routines, relationships between children, between children and adults, social learning, the space as a curriculum element and co-operation with parents (Curriculum for Preschools, 1999, pp. 10–14). Next are chapters on various areas of preschools' activities: movement, language, art, society, nature and mathematics (ibid.). Each of the areas lists goals, examples of the activities for children aged one to three years and three to six years, and the role of adults.

The Curriculum for Preschools (1999) is open (i.e., loosely structured); it also takes account of the principles set forth in the introduction. It is based on the process approach and the principle of active learning, as “the goal of learning in the preschool period ... is the very process of learning, the aim of which is not right or wrong answers, but encouraging children's own /.../strategies of understanding, expression, thinking, etc. that are typical of their developmental period” (ibid., p. 16). Process planning underlines the importance of the quality of interactions and relationships among children and adults in preschools. Professional workers can employ global goals, concrete goals and examples of activities as a framework of their work, within which they can autonomously select the goals, content, methods and forms of educational work. Kroflič (2001) emphasised that the official curriculum is not an educational factor, but it is, nevertheless, required by institutional education. If we define the educational process as a form of communication that aims at the transmission of specific knowledge, skills, habits and values, and, therefore, at influencing the development of the individual's personality, then planning the educational process seems to be necessary, on the one hand, and an obstacle to the pedagogical process, on the other. It is necessary because education is a goal-oriented activity that presupposes open and covert forms of expectations in relation to the set goals.

The Curriculum for Preschools (1999, p. 19) takes the view that each stage in the child's development has to be understood as important in itself, and not just as preparation for the next phase of education. Yet it also highlights the fact that preschools must not allow the schoolization of the curriculum (ibid., p. 14). Education in preschools should be based on direct activities and broadening first-hand experiences, on reflection, on forming the first generalisations, on internal motivation, solving concrete problems and gaining social experience (ibid.).

One of the principles set by the Curriculum for Preschools (1999, p. 10) is to allow individuality, choice and difference in preschool education – as opposed to the group routine that dominated the concept of preschools during the time of socialism. The principle of balance is explained by saying that the curriculum or the teacher must “ensure activities from all the areas and encourage



all the aspects of the child's development, while also actively encouraging and opening up a wide range of the rights to choice and difference /.../' (ibid., p. 13). A special section is dedicated to sleeping, eating and other everyday activities for which flexibility and respect for freedom of choice are recommended.

The evaluation of work in Slovene preschools is based on guidelines from the White Paper (1996, p. 51), which stress the importance of the evaluation (a critical analysis of the process and the achieved results) of educational work. The Curriculum for Preschools (1999) called for the development of modern concepts of establishing and ensuring quality in preschools (Hočevār & Kovač Šebart, 2010). The tools that allow preschools self-evaluation have, therefore, already been developed in Slovenia (see Marjanovič Umek, Fekonja, Kavčič, & Poljanšek, 2002; Marjanovič Umek, Fekonja, & Bajec, 2005).

If we compare the pedagogical concept evident in the Educational Programme (1979) and the concept brought by the Curriculum for Preschools (1999), for the latter we can say that:

- it is less structured and much more open,
- individual differences among children are taken into account,
- it is not focused only on teacher-directed activities but rather on the whole life in preschool,
- it gives more emphasis to the educational process and its evaluation,
- it stimulates teachers' autonomy,
- it stresses cooperation (instead of subordination) between the teacher and teacher's assistant.

We can say that the conception of early childhood education in the socialist period is a typical example of the empiricist (Bruce, 1997) or didactically oriented (Špoljar, 1993) approach to the curriculum, which authors relate to behaviourist psychological theory. On the other hand, the Curriculum for Preschools (1999) can be seen as an example of interactionism related to the cognitive theories of Piaget and Vygotsky (Bruce, 1997). If we analyse both pedagogical concepts according to the three curricular positions of MacNaughton (2003), preschool education in socialism represents the "cultural transmission – conforming to society" position, while the new national curriculum introduced the "cultural transmission – reforming society" position. According to MacNaughton (ibid.), such curricula are child-centred, emphasising the autonomy, individual growth and development of the child in order to achieve his or her full potential and self-government. Instead of tightly organised planning controlled by the teacher, in the second position planning is flexible, and reflects children's changing needs and daily happenings.

The national curriculum is a curriculum framework that guides teachers' planning and assessment (Blaise & Nuttall, 2011), but that does not mean that every teacher who uses the same curriculum framework has the same preschool practice. As Blaise and Nuttall (ibid.) argue, teachers are themselves curriculum theorists because they are constantly developing their own "working theory" of what the curriculum is and how it is implemented. Through the empirical data of our research presented in the next chapters, we will try to understand how the curriculum changes have influenced the planning and evaluating of educational work in the preschool practice of Slovenes.

### **Purpose and goals of the research**

Our research within the RE project was conducted in two phases.

- (1) The first phase, in 2009, aimed at gaining an insight into the work of Slovene preschools, and the results were intended to form part of the planning for the two-year training associated with the present project. The purpose was to identify the present situation as perceived and assessed by preschool teachers and teachers' assistants.
- (2) The purpose of the second phase, in 2011, was the same, with the additional goal of determining any changes that may have occurred due to the influence of the two-year training.

In the present article, we will only present the part of the research that relates to planning and evaluating educational work in preschools from the second phase (2011). We have also obtained data about conducting educational work, but we have not included these because they would have made our article too extensive. We will first focus on the issue of whether, and to what extent, planning and evaluating educational work in preschools have changed in the twelve years since the introduction of the Curriculum for Preschools (1999) in comparison with the past. The data for the past that would allow comparison at the level of empirical analysis are, unfortunately, not available. Therefore, we will base our comparisons on documents, professional texts and the criticisms of preschool education from the recent past, as presented in the theoretical introduction above. Our second aim was a comparison with data from the first phase (2009), in order to recognise possible influences of the training in the RE project on planning and evaluating educational work.

## Method

### *Sample*

- (1) Of the 331 respondents who took part in the empirical research, 96.4% were women. More than three quarters (76.1%) were preschool teachers and slightly less than a quarter (23.9%) were teachers' assistants. Just under half (47.1%) of the respondents surveyed had a university degree, 12.1% had completed college, 37.6% had completed secondary school and 3% had other degrees.
- (2) Of the 167 respondents, 96.4% were women. More than three quarters (76%) were preschool teachers and slightly less than a quarter (24%) were teachers' assistants. More than half (56.3%) of the respondents surveyed had a university degree, 7.8% had completed college, about a third (32.9%) had completed secondary school and 3% had other degrees.

### *Instruments and techniques*

A questionnaire for preschool teachers and teachers' assistants was used as the instrument for our research. We prepared the questionnaire ourselves within the above-mentioned project. (1) In the first phase, all of the (26) questions, except for one, were of the closed format (multiple choice and evaluation scales). (2) In the second phase, we used the same questionnaire but omitted the last two questions (regarding their knowledge of the RE concept prior to the project and their expectations regarding the training) and added four new questions about documentation and evaluation in class.

### *Data collection and analysis*

- (1) The first data collection took place in April and May of 2009. The questionnaires were sent to 96 preschools. Out of the 430 questionnaires distributed, 331 (77%) were returned.
- (2) The second data collection took place in March 2011, with all of the present participants of the RE training who work in preschools as teachers or teachers' assistants (167).

The data was quantitatively analysed at the level of descriptive and inferential statistics, where the frequency distribution (f, f%) of attributive variables was used. The independence hypothesis was tested with the hi-square ( $\chi^2$ ) test.

## Results and interpretations

### *Planning educational work*

The surveyed preschool teachers and teachers' assistants answered questions about how often they formally (in written form) plan their educational work (Table1) and which activities they plan in this way (Table 2).

**Table 1.** Frequency of the formal planning of educational work.

<i>I plan educational work:</i>	Number	Percentage
every day	32	19.2
weekly	38	22.8
for thematic sections or projects of varying lengths	43	25.7
other	3	1.8
I cannot answer	51	30.5
Total	167	100

The shares of answers for each of the three possibilities are distributed quite evenly. A quarter (25.7%) of the respondents said that they formally plan their educational work for thematic sections or projects of varying lengths. More than a fifth (22.8%) do so on a weekly basis and slightly fewer of the respondents (19.2%) formally plan educational work in writing every day. It is difficult to explain why the most frequent (30.5%) choice was *I cannot answer*. We suppose that many preschool teachers do not have a consistent way of planning. It is also possible that preschool teachers avoid formal (written) planning, which experience shows that teachers do not like. It is quite obvious that planning in various preschools and by different teachers varies considerably, especially when compared to the past, when teachers were prescribed exactly how often and in what way they were supposed to plan their educational work. We found no statistically significant difference between the first and the second phase.

**Table 2.** What do the professional workers usually plan in their formal/written preparations?

<i>In my formal/written preparation I usually plan:</i>	Number	Percentage
the areas of the activities defined by the curriculum	158	95.0
interdisciplinary activities	105	63.3
play	88	52.8
routine activities	39	23.3
transition periods	39	23.3
other	20	12.0

As Table 2 shows, almost all (95%) of the professional workers put the activities defined by the Curriculum for Preschools (1999) in their written preparations. Almost two thirds plan interdisciplinary activities (63.3%) and more than half (52.8%) plan children's play. Only about a quarter of the respondents plan routine activities (24%) and transition periods (25.1%). In the Educational Programme (1979), the emphasis was on planning directed activities and activities among which the children could choose, whereas routines and transition periods were completely excluded from planning. As can be seen here, the latter are still only planned by the minority of professional workers. It has to be emphasised that planning routine activities does not mean more rigidity, but just the opposite. Instead of following the same daily routine day after day, planning such activities gives them meaning, bringing with it consideration of the various aspects of different children's needs, as well as opportunities for social development and learning. There are no statistically significant differences between the first and the second phase of the research.

The share of the answer *other* for this question being quite high, we also analysed these responses. In terms of content, most of the activities belong to the first category of Table 2 (*the areas of the activities defined by the national curriculum*), some belong to the answer *play* (e.g., the organisation of play in playing corners) and daily routine (e.g., activities for children who do not sleep). The other answers are: work with parents, the morning circle and individual work with children.

Two questions referred to the cooperation between the two professional workers in the preschool class – the preschool teacher and the teacher's assistant. When asking respondents about the frequency of cooperation, the majority answered that they always (73.1%) or almost always (21.6%) plan educational work together with their co-worker in the preschool class. In order to gain a deeper insight, we asked for the most common method of their cooperation (Table 3).

**Table 3.** Method of cooperation between the preschool teacher and the teacher's assistant when planning educational work in the class.

<i>What is the cooperation between the teacher and the assistant when planning educational work in the class like?</i>	Number	Percentage
We plan all educational work together.	76	45.5
The basic plan is prepared by the preschool teacher, who then discusses it with the teacher's assistant.	70	41.9
Educational work is planned by the preschool teacher with the assistant only occasionally cooperating.	7	4.2
Other	9	5.4
Missing data	5	3.0
Total	167	100.0

However, when we examine their answers to the question about how they do the planning (Table 3), the situation turns out to be less ideal: fewer than half (45.5%) plan all educational work together. In the case of 41.9% of the respondents, the basic plan is prepared by the preschool teacher, who then discusses it with the teacher's assistant. It has to be added, though, that the majority of the answers in the *Other* group belong to the category *we plan all educational work together*, with some respondents giving a more detailed description of what the cooperation entails. We could, therefore, argue that in half of the cases (50.9%), the cooperation is in line with that presupposed by the Curriculum for Preschools (1999), and in just under half of the cases (41.9%), the preschool teacher is in charge of the planning.

Our experience – based on various discussions with professional workers – suggests the following possible reasons for why almost half of teachers' assistants do not actively participate in planning educational work:

- some preschool teachers are used to being (or want to be) the one “in charge”, that is, they take all of the responsibility for planning educational work;
- some teachers' assistants are not willing to participate in planning; they often quote the difference in salaries between the two professional workers as the reason; and
- bad organisation of work or lack of time for joint planning.

We found no statistically significant difference between first and second phase according to the frequency and method of cooperative planning of the two professional workers in the same class.

We were also interested in the role of children with regard to the planning of educational work.

**Table 4.** Method of including children in planning educational work.

<i>In what manner do children participate in planning educational work?</i>	1. PHASE		2. PHASE	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Children do not take part in planning, because they are too young.	50	15.2	19	11.4
Children do not take part in planning; that is the task of professional workers.	4	1.2	1	0.6
The teacher plans educational work on her own, taking account of the children's wishes and interests.	129	39.1	32	19.2
The teacher chooses a topic and prepares a basic plan herself, which she later discusses with the children, and then takes account of their wishes and suggestions.	172	52.1	102	61.1
Professional workers choose a topic and content, and then plan activities together with the children.	97	29.4	66	39.5
Other	41	12.4	16	9.6

More than half of the professional workers (52.3%) in the first phase, and 61.1% in the second phase, say that they choose a topic and prepare a basic plan themselves. Later, they add children's wishes and suggestions. For this answer, the difference between phases is not statistically significant. However, we can see that in the second phase there are significantly fewer (19.2% compared to 39.1% from the first phase) professional workers who plan educational work on their own, taking account of what they know of children's wishes and interests. The difference is statistically significant:  $\chi^2 = 20.110$ ,  $g = 1$ ,  $P = 0.000$ . On the other hand, in the second phase there are statistically significantly ( $\chi^2 = 5.160$ ,  $g = 1$ ,  $P = 0.023$ ) more professional workers (39.5% compared to 29.4% from the first phase) who choose the topic and content, and then plan activities together with the children. The Reggio Emilia approach values children's participation, and we can conclude that training in the RE project influenced the professional workers to include children's participation in planning more often. A smaller share of the professional workers think that children cannot take part in planning because they are too young (15.2% in the first phase and 11.4% in the second phase), or because planning is the task of the professional worker (1.2% and 0.6%).

If we examine the *Other* category more closely, we can see that the majority of the responses belong to the category *The teacher plans on her own, taking account of the children's wishes and interests* (e.g., "depending on the children's age", "if they show an interest", "I often start from children's initiatives", "I accept their suggestions and wishes if they are within the context of the topic", etc.).

### *Evaluation of educational work*

As for evaluation, in the first phase the respondents' answers revealed that the great majority of them (85.1%) *always* or *almost always* evaluate their work with their co-worker in class. In the second phase, the answers showed that even more professional workers (92.2%) *always* or *almost always* evaluate their work with their co-worker. The data obtained seems very encouraging, but we think that respondents may have chosen the answer they felt was expected (i.e., the answer in accordance with the Curriculum for Preschools, 1999). In the second phase we therefore added three more questions on evaluation to our questionnaire. The first additional question was about the content of evaluation. The results are shown in Table 5.

**Table 5.** Content of evaluation.

<i>What do you include in your evaluation?</i>	Number	Percentage
Realisation of the goals planned for the class.	116	69.5
Realisation of the goals planned for individual children and their particularities.	108	64.7
Analyses of the educational process (consideration of the principles, deviations, dilemmas, etc.)	107	64.1
Other: .....	17	10.2

More than two thirds (64.1%–69.5%) of professional workers include all three proposed elements in their evaluations: realisation of the goals for the class and individuals, including their particularities and analyses of the educational process. Among the answers *Other*, there are some more concrete explanations that belong to the categories in Table 5. Few respondents added other elements of their evaluation: ideas or children's interests for future planning, self-reflection (including feelings), and collaboration of all of the participants.

Next we were interested in whether the respondents had evaluated their educational work in the previous week and which method they had used. All except two (98.8%) answered that they had made an evaluation, many of them oral and in writing. The share of oral evaluations (i.e., evaluations with a co-worker in class or with other colleagues in preschool) is slightly higher (74.7%) than the share of written evaluations (60.5%). As stated above, evaluation was not an obligation or a significant part of educational practice in preschools prior to the introduction of the Curriculum for Preschools (1999). However, almost all professional workers from our research now undertake evaluation at least once in a week, which is in accordance with the national curriculum.



The Curriculum for Preschools (1999) stresses that all of the adults in preschool have a significant role in the educational process. It also highly values collaboration in class and team work in preschool. From Table 6, we can see with whom the respondents had collaborated in the previous week when preparing the evaluation of their educational work.

**Table 6.** Collaborators in evaluation.

<i>With whom have you collaborated in your evaluation of educational work in the last week?</i>	Number	Percentage
With the co-worker in the class.	160	95.8
With colleagues in the preschool or preschool's unit.	100	59.9
With the head of the preschool.	28	16.8
With an advisor (psychologist, pedagogue, etc.) in the preschool.	11	6.6
With the children in the class.	91	54.5
With the children's parents.	38	22.8

As we expected, almost all (95.8%) teachers and teachers' assistants had evaluated educational work with their co-worker in the class in the week prior to answering the questionnaire, many of them (59.9%) had also done so with other colleagues. We find the relatively high shares of collaboration with children and parents interesting. More than half of professional workers (54.5%) regularly include children in evaluation and almost a quarter of them (22.8%) include children's parents. We suppose that this result should be seen as one of the effects of the RE project, although we do not have data to support a comparison.

## Conclusion

The research attempted to discover whether Slovene preschool teachers and teachers' assistants have managed to change planning and evaluation of educational work according to curriculum changes at the end of the previous century. The empirical data obtained show that in the work of the majority of professional workers at least some degree of change has occurred in comparison with the past. We find that the planning in different preschools and by different preschool teachers varies much more than it did in the past, when the manner and frequency of planning were precisely prescribed. More spontaneous work might help to bring about less rigid educational work, but it also brings the danger of acting unsystematically and arbitrarily and, thereby, the danger of not fulfilling the goals of preschool education in preschools.

As for cooperation between preschool teachers and teachers' assistants during planning, the results show that in half of the cases the cooperation follows the Curriculum for Preschools (1999). In just under half of the cases, the preschool teacher still has a dominant role in planning educational work. There are no statistically significant differences between the first and second phase of the research.

We found that more than half of the professional workers choose a topic and prepare a basic plan by themselves. The plan is later discussed with children and takes account of their wishes and suggestions. The change that we can ascribe to the training in the RE project, however, is precisely the participation of children in planning. After the training, there are statistically significantly more (two fifths) professional workers who choose a topic and content, and then plan activities together with the children. On the other hand, there are statistically significantly fewer professional workers who plan on their own, only taking account of what they know about the children's wishes and interests.

A vast majority of the respondents always or almost always evaluate their work together with their co-workers. To avoid respondents giving the answers they felt were expected of them, we added three additional concrete questions about evaluation in the second phase of the research. About two thirds of professional workers include in their evaluations realisation of the goals for the class and individuals, children's particularities and analyses of the educational process. Almost all of them undertake oral and/or written evaluation at least once a week, which is in accordance with the national curriculum and very different from the practice before its introduction.

Besides collaboration with their co-worker and colleagues, we appreciate that more than half of the respondents include children in the evaluation of the educational process. This can also be regarded as one of the positive influences of the training in the RE project.

Slovene preschools have undoubtedly been changing since the systemic and curricular change at the end of the twentieth century, even though this might not be true for all of them and might be happening more slowly than we would want. Based on our experience from formal education courses and in-service training of professional preschool workers, we presume that the differences between preschools are even more important than the differences between individual professional workers (e.g., experience, age and motivation). Preschool management that strives for development, quality teamwork and communication within the preschool, as well as with parents and the environment, is sure to motivate professional workers in the best possible way to evaluate their own work critically and to change any fixed and routine practices

that are out of sync with the national curriculum. In this respect, our sample is biased and – in spite of its size – it does not represent the actual situation of Slovene preschools, because the participants in our research were the preschools and professional workers who “want something more”. After two years of training in the RE project, we can conclude that at least half of the participants strive to include children’s participation in planning and evaluation of the educational process in preschools.

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