

THE PARTICULARITIES OF (SELF-)EDUCATION OF 'LEARNING TO LEARN' IN A PRESCHOOL INSTITUTION

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Abstract: This article discusses (self-)education of 'learning to learn' in a preschool institution. It emphasizes the particularities of this (self-)education in the context of pedagogues' experiences. The (self-)education of learning how to learn at a preschool age is an essential foundation for lifelong learning, defined not only in documents of the European Union but also in those of Lithuania and ones regulating preschool education since 2014. This pilot research reveals pedagogues' experiences in applied education practice, as well as features of the children's (self-)education in 'learning to learn' in a preschool institution. Interviews provide an understanding of pedagogues' approaches to the structure, planning, and development of the 'learning to learn' concept. They also reveal results on how to manage (self-)education, as determined by the children's individual learning, experiences and abilities, learning topics initiated by them, and the significance of their educational environment. Pedagogues' preparedness to develop children's 'learning to learn' is expressed by the need for help necessary for them, to strive towards a more successful (self-)education of children's 'learning to learn' in the preschool institution.

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Introduction

The competence of lifelong learning is necessary for a person to develop a meaningful and successful life, and therefore underlines a person's essential competencies. In accordance with the Recommendation of the European Parliament and the Council on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning (The European Parliament and the Council of the European Union, 2006), the competence of 'learning to learn' is described as an ability to learn persistently and successfully, to manage effectively (to plan, organize, and correct) an individual's own learning independently, as well as in a group. Furthermore, 'learning to learn' is regarded a sphere, which, apart from offering new understanding and skills, provides values and beliefs that allow individuals to become more efficient, flexible, and organized with learning in different situations (Hofmann, 2008). The outcome of the learning to learn competence, as the majority of scientists acknowledge, is related to education in early childhood, as, according to Thanassis (2009), the whole education system seems inconceivable without the first step, i.e., preschool education. This first step helps shape a lifelong learning experience, and evidence suggests that important habits and approaches, that are inherent to lifelong learning, evolve at this age. Scientists (Broström, Johansson, Sandberg, & Frøkjær, 2012) note, that learning is a unity of care and education, where the focus is on a child's welfare and the foundation of lifelong learning. Sprigle (1968) prepared the Lifelong Learning Program, which was created and developed with the assumption that early-age education has to help a child to know how to learn. However, French (2007) argues, that early-age child education is complex, dynamic, and interactive, where knowledge arises through transformed experience. Scientists researching childhood learning (Broström et al., 2012; French, 2007; Mustard, 2006; Smith, Cowie, & Blades, 2003) concentrate on how children participate and become involved in the learning process and with a rich learning environment, where children can investigate, touch, interact with environment, ask questions, raise hypotheses, and develop thinking. During the learning process, children's relationships with other children and adults, their cooperation, a pedagogue's responsibility and preparedness, as well as an ability to inspire children to know the world surrounding them, are all necessary. Parents' involvement in their children's learning is highly appreciated. In Lithuania, newly prepared documents regulating preschool education (Description of Preschool Age Children's Achievements, 2014; Methodical Recommendations for Preschool Education, 2015), emphasize children's learning to learn. These documents also note that a preschool-age child acquires substantial experience, and this becomes the foundation for further learning and undermines the success of lifelong learning. In these documents, learning to learn is described as a wish to learn something and a persistent pursuit of this aim. This is

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an ability to set the goals of learning or other activity, to plan how to achieve them, to choose relevant activities, to consider what was successful and what the outcomes of the activity or learning as well as further aims are. These documents oblige pedagogues to rethink in-depth about the available experience, to form a correct approach to learning to learn, as well as to reconstruct educational processes to develop the ability successfully. The above has led to the formulation of the main research questions: what are the pedagogues' experiences in developing children's learning to learn in the preschool institution, and what particularities of this development are accentuated. Therefore, the aim of this research is to analyze pedagogues' experiences to reveal the particularities of learning to learn in the preschool institution.

Data and Methodology

To achieve the research aim, a pilot study was carried out by way of a guided interview approach, which is an appropriate way of approaching subjects on the definition of meanings and situations, as well as reconstructing their experience (Creswell, 2007). Six pedagogues consented in writing to volunteer for the study. To collect the research material, the researchers chose six subjects from a target group of preschool education pedagogues, with no less than 10 years of teaching experience (interval: 10-25 years) and in educating 5-year-old children. The pedagogues selected work in different preschool education institutions of Vilnius city. For the interview, the pedagogues were given five main questions, which covered an understanding of the 'learning to learn' concept, planning and organizing of learning to learn, the creation of an educational environment, and aspects of help needed for pedagogues. To collect more in-depth information, during an interview, a researcher would ask additional questions. Interview material was obtained using a phenomenological approach where a researcher seeks to interview a participant for self-expression of the research object (Husserl, 1989; Moustakas, 1994), in this case, their professional experience. Based on the research results and analysis of the content, meaningful categories and subcategories emerged from the ideas expressed by the research participants.

Research Results

In analyzing the answers given by pedagogues about the concept of 'learning to learn,' it was noted that their experience differed in how they described the main components (Tables 1-4). The pedagogues' statements about how they understood learning to learn distinguished the seven subcategories (Table 1). In the concept of learning to learn, 'formulation of learning aim' received responses relating to a child's ability to set and describe learning goals (Table 1). For 'selection of means suitable for learning' responses were around a child's activity to achieve this aim. The pedagogues, while describing the concept of learning to learn, indicated that it is important that children perceive the significance of knowledge, and that this conditions the application of knowledge, that children set the goal on the basis of their own experience. In the subcategory, 'child's initiative and independence' the responses emphasized a child's initiative for a new experience, independence, and reflection. Some pedagogues' experiences systematized in subcategory 'motivation and willingness to learn' suggested that children's desire to know is essential while talking about children's learning to learn and its development.

In analyzing the planning of learning to learn, the study defined five subcategories (Table 2). 'Integrity of planning,' revealed an integrated nature of learning to learn, emphasized by the pedagogues, i.e., responses indicated that this ability is developed in different spheres of children's activities and education (Table 2). The majority of interview participants emphasized 'targeted planning' that the pedagogues prepare in advance for children's learning to learn (Table 2). However, when the pedagogues prepare for a topic (subcategory 'linking of planned topic to children's experience') they relate it to the children's experience, plan considering children's and group's needs, and emphasize a pedagogue's flexibility in education planning process (Table 2). The pedagogues, while talking about learning to learn from a child's point of view, emphasized that planned topics and activities are often changed and amended, as determined by the children's wishes, needs, and situations (subcategory 'planning considering children's and group's needs', Table 2). In the subcategory, 'situation determined planning' the pedagogues' responses suggested that experience is reflected when a plan foreseen in advance is amended in accordance with unforeseen situation or case (Table 2).

Table 1: Component of concept of 'learning to learn' and answers from pedagogues

Category	Subcategory	Supporting statements
'Learning to learn'	Formulation of learning aim	"A child firstly has to be able to say what he/she will be striving for, what he/she wants to learn, i.e. to raise a learning aim"; "teaching a child to say what he/she wants..."
	Selection of means suitable for learning	"to select means in order to achieve this aim...", "the means are important in order to achieve the aim..."
	Activity selection	"A child has to be able to select an activity...", "...a child has to act, work", "A child's willingness to act..."
	Motivation for learning	"It is the most important to raise their motivation, that a child would want to know"; "a child's willingness to want something is the basis of learning to learn."
	Activity reflection	"children's reflection on what they would like to know..."; "for 'learning to learn,' it is important to discuss what children have learned, to find out gained experience," "...they see what else they need to know".
	Child's initiative and independence	"A child's willingness to act, take initiative, his/her independence."
	Perception of significance of knowledge	"a child's understanding why knowledge is necessary, that it is important to seek for knowledge"; "...it is important to what extent the gained knowledge is used practically..."

Source: Author

Table 2: Component of planning of (self-) education of 'learning to learn' process

Category	Subcategory	Supporting statements
Aspects of planning of (self-) education of learning to learn	Integrity of planning	"I integrate the development of ability of 'learning to learn' into all activities..."
	Targeted planning	"...I prepare a weekly plan"; "I always foresee a topic, prepare all means necessary for activity"; "...I feel responsibility, so I foresee what children will do, what means they will be able to select in order to achieve the aim..."; "...I want children to be active, have a possibility to act, so I get ready in advance..."
	Linking of planned topic to children's experience	"We discuss with children the foreseen topic, what we already know about this topic, what we still need, what we would like to know."
	Planning considering children's and group's needs	"Activity is planned according to children's needs"; "I plan considering the strengths and weaknesses of children's group"; "Though I am ready for some topics, children's wishes and needs make it change, so a pedagogue has to be flexible."
	Situation determined planning	"Plan is usually amended in accordance with the situation, or occurred event"; "An unforeseen event happens for group children, e.g. a tooth falls out, thus during that day we talk about this, and the planned topic is postponed to another day".

Source: Author

The pedagogues' responses from experience showed that, in the process of developing learning to learn, the pedagogues mostly emphasized and selected the children's activity. This highlights that due to their different abilities to learn it is difficult for children to select an activity and that they need help from the pedagogue, who encourages the children to perform this activity further themselves (subcategory 'need for help,' Table 3). The pedagogues' statements emphasize cooperation and that there is learning from each other (subcategory 'cooperation while learning', Table 3), the importance of children's experience-based learning (subcategory 'experience-based activity', Table 3), and that there are discussion and reflection of activities performed by the children (subcategory 'activity discussion and reflection', Table 3). In the pedagogues' statements, the children's abilities to set the

goals were reflected upon (subcategory 'formulation of learning aim', Table 3). In the pedagogues' opinion, positive emotions and encouragement of self-confidence seem important for the children as well (subcategory 'positive emotions and promotion of self-confidence, Table 3).

Table 3: Component of organization of (self-) education of 'learning to learn' process

Category	Subcategory	Supporting statements
Organization of (self-) education of 'learning to learn' process	Formulation of learning aim	"Children do not always succeed to raise the aim. More active children do this better"; "They look at each other and then say or do"; "Children raise aims very individually..."; "it is tried to find out what we want...".
	Experience-based activity	"An activity, when they can themselves try, touch, succeeded, failed, to experiment"; "Children want to try..."; "They look for ways how to learn or know this"; "...I encourage a child to try himself/herself..."; "It is important to arouse children's curiosity, that it would be interesting for them, firstly, through experiential education."
	Need for help	"Children need help, today we are going to learn this and that. It is necessary to give some hints"; "...you give some hints, try to do together"; "Children's ability to learn is not the same, so not all children come up with ideas what they will do, thus they are usually suggested with activity and then I pay more attention to this that children would think themselves how to do this"; "...in order children would succeed it is necessary to show how to do this or I ask that more gifted children would do this...".
	Activity discussion and reflection	"After performed activities, we discuss and reflect them..."; "...we clear out whether it has succeeded, what he/she has lacked, what he/she would do differently..."; "...I ask what he/she would do differently"; "In discussing the activities we emphasize what new things he/she has learned"; "...I ask to tell me what he/she has been doing ...".
	Cooperation while learning	"Children want to tell what was important and interesting for them..."; "...we learn from each other"; "I encourage that children would cooperate with each other, teach each other, correct each other's mistakes..."; "... to allow to tell about this, encourage, that later he/she would do his/her best again"; "...I ask them to tell friends, so general discussion is triggered, his/her own gaps of knowledge are seen".
	Positive emotions and promotion of self-confidence	"...to encourage the ability to be happy about this that you have learnt something new"; "...to be happy that you have done, that succeeded"; "...to encourage, promote them to be more self-confident, so they get used to think and express this in words"; "...you have to regularly encourage them to be happy with success, that a child would be brave...".

Source: Author

The educational environment has a significant influence in the process of learning to learn. This is indicated by the pedagogues' responses, as shown in Table 4.

The analysis of interview material revealed the pedagogues' preparedness to develop the children's learning to learn. This category can be broken into two subcategories: 1) the need for development and 2) the need for help to be provided for the pedagogue. Regarding the first subcategory, the emphasis is exemplified by these interviewee responses:

- "need to develop both in deepening the perception of the concept of learning to learn and practical aspects of the development of this ability";
- "I assess my preparedness as satisfactory";
- "I think that I have to deepen the experience in the development of children's learning to learn, especially, it is difficult to manage educational process conditioned by situations";

- “previously learning to learn was not emphasized in the programme – thus I regularly keep interested in this how to develop this ability”;
- “as this sphere of education is newly emphasized in preschool education, in critically evaluating my preparedness, I have to admit that it is necessary to deepen into both theoretical assumptions and especially in practical abilities of children’s learning to learn, as experience is gained while acting and looking for the best means and ways to implement this”;
- “I am not fully prepared to implement successfully the requirement to teach children to learn.”

Regarding the second subcategory, ‘the need for help to be provided for the pedagogue,’ the following responses substantiate the case:

- “I would need methodical material about this how to develop children’s learning to learn”;
- “the descriptions of concrete successful cases would help to understand better how to successfully develop children’s learning to learn in kindergarten.”

Category	Subcategory	Supporting statements
Educational environment and its suitability for (self-) education of children’s ‘learning to learn’	Attractiveness of environment	“Environment is very important. If children come to the group and see some changes, then a big interest occurs. Children immediately notice a new thing, new game”; “Environment has to be attractive, arouse curiosity.”
	Micro-climate in a group	“Good relationships are important for this, trust in a pedagogue, sincere communication”; “emotional environment is important that a child will not be afraid”; “micro-climate in a group and emotional environment are very important, that a child would trust in himself/herself, would not be afraid, would be able to perform spontaneously, would communicate and cooperate”.
	Means for (self-) education	“A variety and quality of learning materials are very important”; “that there would be spaces, where there are a lot of materials, that he/she would know, be able to take them”; “sometimes there is shortage of materials, so I have to bring them, we agree with children that they would bring themselves, create learning materials ourselves”; “modern learning materials have a big influence, however, there is a shortage of them in kindergartens”.
	Adaptation of environment for a child	“Environment has to be adapted to a child .”
	Family environment	“There are a lot of things which depend on the environment at home, or encourage a child to be interested in innovations, or a child is interested himself/herself, in this way children become more curious”; “Children together with their parents perform various tasks, they tell about this to other children...”.

Source: Author

Discussion

The results of this research distinguished several factors. First, the pedagogues’ experiences of the concept of learning to learn have not been fully expressed and do not reflect the overall perception of structural components of this ability. The scientists researching the concept of ‘learning to learn’ (Hofmann, 2008) emphasize the competencies necessary for an educator to support the process of children’s learning. Therefore, a clear understanding of learning to learn and its achievements determine the ability to develop this competence. The data obtained during the research about the pedagogues’ preparedness to develop the children’s ‘learning to learn’ highlight the need for improvement and help for a pedagogue. The data also provide insights into developing competence to evolve children’s ‘learning to learn.’ Information about the planning stage of the process of learning to learn reveals the pedagogues’ purposeful preparation, as well as the need for change and flexibility in this activity. These responses would be determined by topics initiated by the children’s interest, which depend on their different experiences in learning skills. This status highlights the context of ‘free’

education and reveals the existing expressions of educational interaction between children and pedagogues, as well as emphasizing the exceptional culture of children's learning to learn. This concept is emphasized in the works by childhood researchers (Seefeldt & Barbour, 1998; Juodaitytė, 2004) and actualizes in-depth studies of pedagogues' experiences. In organizing learning to learn, cooperation and mutual assistance at all stages of learning to learn are important, as substantiated by the children's experience that was emphasized by the pedagogues. This amends and influences the change of a pedagogue's experience. A pedagogue's role is highlighted by promoting, initiating, and providing assistance to children while learning. The pedagogues' statements about the development of learning to learn in the educational environment that are favourable for children's learning to learn reveal controversial aspects and indicate the need for more detailed analysis of this issue.

Conclusion

The results presented in this article reflect the conclusions of a pilot research. The findings will be developed and widely discussed in future research stages, with the aim of examining, in greater depth, the tendencies observed in this research, and to formulate proposals for a more effective development of children's learning to learn in the preschool institution.

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