

Editorial

This year's first issue of the *Journal of Contemporary Educational Studies* brings a selection of three scientific papers by prominent authors from Slovenia and Hungary. The first two texts address the area of preschool education, presenting the findings of empirical research studies carried out in Slovenia. The authors of the first article examine some of the issues relating to children's early literacy and the authors of the second one deal with the participation of preschool children.

In their article *Children's early literacy: The effect of preschool and family factors*, **Ljubica Marjanovič Umek**, **Kaja Hacin** and **Urška Fekonja** present the findings of their study in which they set out to study the effects that the additional activities used by preschool educators working towards the goals related to early literacy more systematically have on children's achievements in several areas of early literacy. The authors placed special emphasis on the relationship between children's achievements and the education of preschool children's parents as well as some other indicators of the family's cultural capital. Marjanovič Umek, Hacin and Fekonja assert that the different aspects of early literacy are interrelated, which indicates that early literacy in early childhood should be understood as a child's holistic ability that includes various aspects of language, pre-reading and pre-writing competence as well as graphomotor skills. In contrast to some other studies that have suggested that family factors have an important impact on, especially, children's language ability, the authors' findings do not confirm the correlation between parental education, the number of all books and children's books at home, the age at which parents begin to read to children and children's early literacy. The authors assume that a reason for this may lie in the large proportion of children in their sample with highly educated parents, which indicates a relatively supportive family environment.

Research findings typically confirm that a high-quality preschool is a supportive factor affecting children's language and early literacy development, and it has compensatory effects especially on children from socially and culturally less encouraging environments. This is supported by the findings of this study, showing that the children whose parents had a lower level of education and had been enrolled in preschool for a longer period of time told developmentally more complex stories compared to the children who had entered preschool at a later age.

The next article, co-authored by **Sonja Rutar** and **Tina Štemberger**, focuses on the issue of *how children are manipulated and how they participate as experienced by preschool teachers and preschool teacher assistants*. The authors start by proposing that children's participation should be understood as a dialogic relationship that allows for ample opportunities for mutual listening, but also for standpoint adoption and committed contributions by individuals to their own development and that of the learning community in the field of learning and shared everyday life. They employed the research study, whose findings they present in the

article, to establish the perspectives that preschool educators adopt on the frequency of different levels and forms of children's participation in preschool education as well as on the frequency of practices that can more appropriately be designated as manipulative. The educators generally stated that participatory practices were most frequent at the level of planning activities and events, although the authors write that plans, joint evaluations and reflections recorded together with children, which require more planned and structured participation, were less frequent. They emphasize that making records together with children would enable children to discuss issues (plans, evaluations, reflections) with other children, adults and perhaps parents. The highest degree of participation, when children themselves initiate the process and identify issues of concern and adults help them realize the process, is even rarer. On the other hand, the authors conclude that extreme non-participatory (manipulative) practice does not occur frequently in Slovenian preschools either. Nevertheless, they recommend further research into the area, in particular by including other participants in the processes of planning, implementing and evaluating preschool education.

The next contribution, on *the developmental phases of Hungarian educational sciences in the 20th century*, is by **András Németh** and **Imre Garai**. The authors examine the characteristics of the communist-socialist dictatorship in Hungary in the area of educational sciences. They highlight that the Hungarian communist/socialist science of education opposed the Western-type meritocratic perception of science. Socialist scholars of education discontinued research based on well-established empirical approaches to pedagogic phenomena; rather, they implemented the pedagogical prescriptions of the Stalinist variant of Marxism-Leninism, using literary epic language instead of exact scientific language. According to Németh and Garai, this resulted in the suppression of scientific analytical thinking. The authors conclude that this had a major impact on pedagogy in Hungary, which had been an autonomous scientific field prior to these changes. The formation of the essential elements of the party state created the political conditions responsible for changing the whole spectrum of the scientific field. The institutional frameworks of providing the autonomy and standards of scientific work ceased, and they were replaced by collective governing boards, which – Németh and Garai argue – resulted in the elimination of the autonomy of scientific disciplines, which had been relatively independent of direct political influence.

*Dr Damijan Štefanc,
Editor-in-Chief, acting*