
Comparison of Interpersonal Communication and Interpersonal Relationship Between Early Years Educators and Children in Selected English and Slovenian Nurseries

Jana Hafner and Maja Krajnc

Being an early years educator¹ is a responsible job where daily the individual shows the ability to understand interpersonal relationships, apply effective methods of communication in these relationships and develop their social skills. As we, at Srednja vzgojiteljska šola in gimnazija Ljubljana, wished to develop these competencies during formal education at the secondary level, we formulated a project for students of the preschool education program. The main aims of the project are to promote broad linguistic diversity and intercultural awareness and thus contribute to the acquisition of key competences needed for the students' successful life and career (communication skills, interpersonal and social skills, cultural awareness and expression). We selected 16 students of the 3rd year preschool education program to add practical training in English nurseries² to their existing experiences with practical training in Slovenian nurseries.

Although we recognize that this represents a small group of students in the formal education process in addition to having limited experience with working in nurseries, we therefore cannot generalize their findings. However we think that their unladen view can contribute to the relevant findings on interpersonal communication and interpersonal relationship between early years educators and children in the nurseries regarding the similarities and differences between the Slovenian and English system of early childhood ed-

1 Throughout the paper we will use the term »early years educator« as a uniform term to describe the professional staff that work with children in nurseries.

2 Throughout the paper we will use the term »nursery« as a uniform term to describe the early childhood education and care settings in England and Slovenia. We are aware of different types of early childhood education and care settings in England and Slovenia and the differences between the two systems, the term is used to ease the reading process.

ucation and care. In addition to the students' experiences, we will outline the importance of communication in the preschool period and also present the two national documents that regulate the institutionalized early childhood education and care in Slovenia and in England.

The Definition and Classification of Communication

There is no single, universally accepted usage of the word »communication«. Definitions differ according to the theorist's view of communication. In the scientific study of communication, there are two general and basic views about communication: a technical view and a meaning-centered view (Steinberg, 2007). From a technical point of view, communication can be defined very simply as *sending and receiving messages*, or *the transmission of messages from one person to another*. From the meaning-centered view, communication can be defined as *a dynamic process of exchanging meaningful messages*. For the purpose of this article, we used Adler's and Rodman's (2003) definition of communication as the term for the process of human beings responding to the symbolic behavior of other persons, where the term *symbol* is used to represent things, processes, idea, events etc.

Communication can be divided into several types according to different criteria: according to the used signs, channel, content, goals, etc. Below, we look at some of the most common classifications of communication (Ucman, 2003, in Larikov, 2015).

Communication can be *direct* or *indirect*. Direct communication is when there is no intermediary between the sender and the recipients of the message. This is a conversation between two or more people who are in contact with each other. Direct communication is generally most effective for immediate feedback and efficiency is affected primarily by the psychological factors of participants to communicate directly. In indirect communication there is a communication channel, an intermediary, between the sender and the recipient of the communication channel of communication. It is less effective than a direct way, since immediate feedback is generally not possible and the efficiency can also be reduced by disruptions in the communication channel (Ucman, 2005; in Larikov, 2015).

Communication can be analyzed from *a contextual* or *a relational* point of view. The contextual aspect deals with the content of the message, while relational aspect determines how to understand the relationship between the sender and the recipient (ibid.).

Communication can be *conscious* or *unconscious*. Mostly, we communicate consciously and with a particular intent, but many messages are transmitted unconsciously. We are fully aware of only some of the mo-

tives that determine our behavior, some motives we recognize when we are alerted to them, but of some we are not aware of and do not recognize them, although they were pointed out to us. We communicate unconsciously when we use certain gestures, expressions that we have little or no control over, as well as when we speak (Larikov, 2015).

Communication can be *unidirectional* or *bidirectional*. One-way communication means that the impact takes place in one direction only, from the sender to the recipient of the message, but with no feedback. In this case, this cannot be defined as a dialogue, because the recipient does not affect the sender. Two-way communication means that the recipient forwards feedback to the sender. Both the sender and recipient respond, they influence each other, they are complementary and coordinated. In two-way communication we forward the messages, we accept and explain misunderstandings, so this type of communication means higher efficiency in solving misunderstandings compared to one-way communication (Larikov, 2015).

We will now explain the last, but perhaps most common classification of communication, but in a context of early childhood education and care – that is, of *verbal* and *non-verbal* communication.

When we think of communication, we tend to think about spoken messages. However the way in which we understand messages depends on more than words. The tone of voice, gestures, the use of space and touch, facial expressions, accent and the clothes of the communicator all influence our understanding. Verbal communication refers to the spoken or written signs called words which make up a particular language, such as Slovenian or English. People who speak the same language understand one another because they usually ascribe similar meanings to words (Steinberg, 2007).

Education and interactions in the nurseries depend on verbal communication to a large degree, with the use of speech while describing, explaining or encouraging child's understanding of activities. Children develop their speaking competency with listening, asking, the formation of assumptions and claims and whilst interpreting early years educator's answers (Larikov, 2015). A. Browns (1996; in Larikov, 2015) connects the successfulness of the early years educator to encouraging the speaking development of children as being dependent on early years educator's:

- a) understanding of value of the conversation in group (discusses certain contents and problems together with children, they allow children to explain their opinions and expand their knowledge);

- b) standpoint towards verbal communication (if an early years educator shows an interest for what children have to say, then children can express and speak more relaxed);
- c) organization of time for conversation (children need opportunities for testing different manners of speaking in different situations, with different partners – with this, they expand also their own vocabulary and they are assimilating grammar);
- d) own speaking expression (an early years educator represents an important adult person in a child's life, therefore with their manner of speaking influences children's communication);
- e) knowledge of strategies and activities that encourage listening and speaking in children (they are encouraging speaking development with planning and including all sorts of situations, that make talking and listening of peers possible for children).

Nonverbal communication refers to all human communication that does not use written or spoken signs, such as smile or a nod of the head (Steinberg, 2007). Essentially, a nonverbal message functions in one of five ways: it reinforces or accents the verbal message when it adds to its meaning, it complements the verbal message when it conveys the same meaning, it can contradict the verbal message, it can replace the verbal message or it can function to regulate the flow of verbal interaction. Early years educators can use their face, eyes, posture, gesture, voice, touch as well as clothing, distance, or even physical environment to communicate with children in their group (*ibid.*).

Each of these types of communication can, of course, be intentional (knowingly started and directed) or spontaneous (as a result of a sudden impulse or inclination and without premeditation or external stimulus) (Oxford English Dictionary, 2016).

Kurikulum za vrtce and Framework for Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS)

In order to compare the two national documents, i.e. Slovenian Kurikulum za vrtce (1999) and English Framework for Early Years Foundation Stage (2014), which regulates the center-based early childhood education and care in Slovenia and in England, it is necessary to outline the systems of early childhood education and care in both countries.

A Brief Review of Early Childhood Education and Care Systems in Slovenia and England

There are similarities and differences between the two countries on the *organizational level* of early childhood education and care systems. Both

countries have early childhood education and care regulated at the national level (Kameraman, 2000), but the systems within differ. In Slovenia, we have a unitary system of early childhood education and care, which means it is organised in a single phase and delivered in nurseries catering for the whole age range (children from 11 months until the start of compulsory primary education - the year when the child reaches 6 years) (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice/Eurostat, 2014). The vast majority (nearly 90% in year 2015/2016) of nurseries in Slovenia are public nurseries (*Predšolska vzgoja in ...*, 2016). Education and care are intertwined in the programs which are carried out in Slovene nurseries. In Slovenia, children have a statutory right to a place in a nursery after the end of maternity leave. Jurisdictionally Slovene nurseries all fall under the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport. Public nurseries receive their financial resources from the local community (the founder of public nurseries), as well as from parental payments that can be subsidized, but only a minority is exempt from payment (Devjak et al., 2012; Lipužič, 2002; Lindeboom and Buiskool, 2013; Vidmar and Taštanoska, 2014).

In England the present early childhood education and care system has evolved from two separated systems, one being a system where the primary focus of early childhood was on education and the other being a system where the primary focus of early childhood was on care (Early childhood education ..., 2000). In the 1990's that slowly started to change into an integrated system of education and care where now the Department for Education has primary responsibility for early childhood education and care in England (*ibid.*).

Early childhood education and care in England takes place in a variety of settings in the state sector (state nursery schools, nursery classes and reception classes within primary schools) and in voluntary or private sector (voluntary pre-schools, playgroups, privately run nurseries or child-minders) (Education system in ..., 2012). Part of the early childhood education and care in England is free of charge for children aged 3 and 4 years. In recent months, The Childcare Act 2016 was passed which gives the right to free childcare to the extent of 38 weeks at 30 hours per week for working parents (The Childcare Act, 2016). The remaining is up to the parents to decide how, where and if their child will be enrolled in a state or a private early childhood education and care setting.

In Slovenia, the area of early childhood education and care is covered by two mayor laws, one being *Zakon o organizaciji in financiranju vzgoje in izobraževanja* (1996) and the other one *Zakon o vrtcih* (1996). In England, early childhood education and care area is more broadly covered by different acts such as *The Childcare Act* (2006, with integration

in 2016), The Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act (2009), The Children and Families Act (2014) and Early years (under 5s) foundation stage framework (EYFS) (2014). Both systems of early childhood education and care have a binding national document that represents and sets the basis for the work of early childhood educators in nurseries.

Kurikulum za vrtce

In Slovenian system, Kurikulum za vrtce (1999) represents the professional basis for carrying out the programs of early childhood education and care and was adopted in 1999. It is designed to be wider than just an educational program as its content covers fundamental principles and objectives of early childhood education and care and is written with the understanding that the child perceives and understand the world as being wholesome, that they develop and learn through an active connection with their social and physical environment and that they develops their own sociability and individuality through interactions with peers and adults in a nursery (ibid.).

The content of Kurikulum za vrtce is divided into four main parts. The first and the second part define the objectives of Kurikulum za vrtce and the principles behind these objectives. All of the objectives and the 16 principles are consistent with the objectives and principles of early childhood education and care in Slovenia, as is reflected in legislative documents.

The third part includes a description of the characteristics of children in pre-primary stage such as knowledge of the child's development, the relational aspect of early childhood education and care, the description of space as an element of the curriculum and the description of cooperation with parents. The fourth part of Kurikulum za vrtce represents six prime areas of activity (movement, language, art, society, nature, mathematics). Each area defines a description of the area, objectives, proposed examples of contents and activities and the role of adults in educational work in that area. There are also four support areas that intertwine with the prime areas throughout the content of the Kurikulum za vrtce. These areas are: health education, safety, traffic education, moral education (ibid.).

Kurikulum za vrtce is suitable for all preschool programs, is designed for early childhood educators and it emphasizes process-oriented early childhood education and care instead of target-oriented (Kurikulum za vrtce, 1999; Marjanovič Umek et.al., 2008). With Kurikulum za vrtce Slovenia gained a more open program that recognizes professional autonomy of early childhood educators in the planning process. This furthermore

implies the need for better qualification and greater professional responsibility of early childhood educators (Batistič Zorec, 2003; Kroflič, 2008).

Kurikulum za vrtce is a substantive document that provides a framework for the planning process and implementation of educational activities for early childhood educators in institutional settings (Dolar Bahovec and Golobič Bregar, 2004; Marjanovic Umek et.al., 2008).

Framework for Early Years Foundation Stage

A similar role as Kurikulum za vrtce in Slovenia has the Framework for Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) in England, although its content is designed wider. The Early Years Foundation Stage came into force in September 2008, and is a single regulatory and quality framework for the provision of learning, development and care for children in all registered early years settings between birth and the age of 5 (Bertram and Pascal, 2000).

EYFS establishes standards to ensure progress in the development of children aged from 0 to 5 years. It focuses on the progress of the individual child and is at the same time focused on the child's proper preparation for school. It seeks to provide quality and consistency in all early years settings, a secure foundation for each child, a partnership between practitioners and with parents and an equality of opportunity for every child (EYFS, 2014).

The document comprises of three sections which are: the learning and development requirements, the assessment and the safeguarding and welfare requirements (ibid.).

The learning and development requirements section covers three prime areas of learning and development: communication and language, physical development and personal, social and emotional development. Furthermore these three prime areas are supported with four specific areas which are: literacy, mathematics, understanding the world and expressive arts and design. EYFS defines the early learning goals for each of these areas, prime and specific.

Every early childhood education and care program must contain activities that promote these areas and when planning, they must take into account the characteristics of successful learning in early childhood which are: play and exploration; active learning; creation and critical thinking (ibid.).

The assessment section defines the review of the child's progress. There are two progress checks, one at age two and the other at age five (at the end of EYFS). The progress check at the age of two is to assess the child's development in terms of the objectives reached at this age and to suggest possible support for the child to be implemented in the institution

or to be advised to parents (*ibid.*). A portfolio is made for each child where the early years educators record the child's progress. The early years educators are observing children throughout the day and making notes whenever a child makes a progress in its development (*ibid.*).

At the end of EYFS, there is an EYFS Profile made for each child. It represents a comprehensive review of the child's knowledge, skills, progress and general school readiness (the EYFS profile is given to parents and to the school that the child will be attending the following year).

The safeguarding and welfare requirements set out the requirements for the safety and welfare of children and staff such as child protection (the signs of abuse and how to proceed in a case of abuse); suitable people and staff qualifications; staff-child ratios; how to care for children's health; the requirements for the safety of the environment and equipment; information and records (what information is collected, who reports and what, who has access to the data collected, regulations about informing the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted ...)) (*ibid.*).

By comparing the two national documents we can see they represent two similar yet also different early childhood education and care systems. Both documents share the definition of the main areas of child development, which the nurseries should pay particular attention to. We can also notice that the prime areas defined by the two documents intertwine (e.g. language, mathematics, art), although EYFS (2014) sets the areas wider and also includes areas like the child's emotional and social development. The definition of objectives for individual areas of activity in Kurikulum za vrtce (1999) is more specific, but it is important to note that the early years educators in England have the help in the form of two documents, Early years outcomes (2013) and the Early years Foundation stage profile (2015). Within the first document, development achievements in all areas for a certain age of the child are written (from birth to 60+ months) while written in the second document there are details on the purpose and content of the EYFS profiles for the child. Slovenian Kurikulum za vrtce (1999) does not have any similar official documents to help early childhood educators. The only exception is perhaps *Otrok v vrtcu* (Marjanovic Umek et. al., 2008), a guide that was first released in 2001.

Comparing the volumes, EYFS is vaster than Kurikulum za vrtce. If Kurikulum za vrtce is a more open and substantive document and it serves as a professional support for planning, implementation and evaluation of educational activities, then we can say that the EYFS involves the process and structural indicators (personnel profiles, cooperation with other institutions, the relationship between the early childhood educa-

tor and children, health care ...) that are not found in Kurikulum za vrtce (EYFS 2014, Kurikulum za vrtce 1999). Maybe the reason behind this is the difference in historical development of early childhood education and care in both countries (Devjak et al., 2012, Early childhood education ..., 2000, Education system in ..., 2012, European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice/Eurostat, 2014, Kameraman, 2000, Lipužič, 2002, Lindeboom and Buiskool, 2013). Early childhood education and care in Slovenia developed as a constant and simple system that turned into a more complex, more professional-founded system. Early childhood education and care in England, on the other hand, can be defined as an attempt to combine different systems in an increasingly uniform (but not entirely uniform) system (ibid.). Such a system needs more complex rules in the field of structural and indirect indicators.

Both the EYFS and Kurikulum za vrtce mention language as one of the areas of learning and development. In the remainder of the paper we will present how the mentioned areas intertwine in implementing curriculum.

Communication, Interaction and Quality of Early Childhood Education and Care

Communication to an early years educator is, for a child, simply a continuation of communication that they established in family (Devjak, Novak and Lepičnik Vodopivec, 2009). It is also one of the key routes in achieving the goals of early childhood education. Communication between children and early years educators is an active link, which must be unconditional and positive. Therefore, the early years educator must handle their verbal or nonverbal communication intentionally, independently, creatively and goal-orientated. Quality interaction and communication in the educational world of the field of early childhood education represents a multi-faceted process and because it is impossible not to communicate with each other, we must consciously strive towards all aspect of this process (Devjak and Petek, 2011).

Establishing suitable communication between an adult and a child and between children in the playgroup could be one the most important tasks of an early years educator. It is important that an early years educator plans activities appropriately, that they engages in them, encourages and develops communication and expressing of children, expands a child's speech and offers as many as possible opportunities for expressing. An early years educator can carry out all of it successfully with appropriate funds and materials, encouraging mutual communication of children at play, within daily routine activities and also with directed activities in smaller

group and with a suitably organized place. A child must be engaged in diverse activities actively, must have enough possibilities for listening, talk, narrative, describing, explaining, explaining, the dialogue conversation etc. This way, child's vocabulary expands and social and cognitive development are also being encouraged (Janžič, 2011). As Kumer (2014) points out, the competent early years educator acknowledges the importance of quality communication, which influences well-being, acceptance and cooperation, and the need to develop this competence throughout lifelong learning.

The importance of communication in early childhood education and care is recognized by both national documents that outline early childhood education in England and Slovenia, Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage (2014) and Kurikulum za vrtce (1999). To start with early childhood education and care in England, the Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage (2014) defines »communication and language« as one of the three prime areas and therefore recognizes communication as a crucial developmental area for supporting other specific developmental areas (literacy, mathematics, understanding the world and expressive arts and design). According to this document, educational programs should involve activities, opportunities and experiences for children to develop their confidence and skills in expressing themselves, to experience a rich language environment and to speak and listen in a range of situations. According to the , Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage (2014) the early learning goals in the area of communication and language are (1) listening and attention (children listen attentively in a range of situation; they listen to stories, accurately anticipating key events and respond to what they hear with relevant comments, questions and actions; they give their attention to what others say and respond appropriately, while engaged in another activity), (2) understanding (children follow instructions involving several ideas or actions; they answer »how« and »why« questions about their experiences and in response to stories or events) and (3) speaking (children express themselves effectively, showing awareness of the listeners' needs; the use of past, present and future forms accurately when talking about events that have happened or are to happen in the future; they develop their own narratives and explanations by connecting ideas or events). The use of quality communication is also emphasized in one of the four themes of the Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage (ibid.) that is in positive relationships. Through positive relationships children learn to be strong and independent. According to this document positive relationships should be warm and loving and foster a sense of belonging,

sensitive and responsive to the child's needs, feelings and interests, supportive of the child's own efforts and independence, consistent in setting clear boundaries, stimulating and built on key person relationships in early years settings.

Secondly, the contents of Slovenian national document for early childhood education and care, *Kurikulum za vrtce* (1999), underline the importance of communication as well. Although we could connect communication to various curricular principles, mentioned in *Kurikulum za vrtce* (*ibid.*), the principle of active learning and enabling possibilities for verbalization and other ways of expressing is the one that directly refers to it. It points out the importance of enabling and encouraging children to verbally communicate and express themselves in various ways while paying attention to their individual needs, interests and the right to privacy, and the importance of enabling and encouraging the use of language in different functions. The early years educators should set an example with their communication and, at the same time, plan and carry out the activities to develop children's language, which is defined as one of the six prime curricular areas. One of the goals in that particular curricular area is for children to listen to language and to engage in communication processes with children and adults, and therefore developing verbal and non-verbal communication, different styles of communication, politeness and culture of communication.

Kurikulum za vrtce (1999) directly describes the sought-after interaction and relationships between early years educators and children. An early years educator is seen as a regulator of interaction, but not a directive one. The important elements of interaction between the early years educator and the children (and among children themselves) is the frequency of positive interactions with children (smile, touch, speaking on the level of children's eyes); responding to children's questions and requests, encouraging questions, discussions, involvement; encouraging children to share their experience, ideas and feelings; attentive and respectful listening; the use of positive instructions and directions (encouraging expected behavior, redirecting to a more acceptable activity and behaviour, solving conflict in a socially acceptable manner, consistent and very clear instructions and no critiques, punishments or humiliation in a general way) and encouraging appropriate independency (according to the child's age).

Last but not least, the quality of communication can be understood also as an indicator of the quality of early childhood education and care. Marjanovič Umek, Fekonja, Kavčič and Poljanšek (2002) list structural and process indicators of early childhood education and care quality, which - in mutual interaction- either directly or indirectly enable the con-

ditions for child's development and learning in the context of nursery. Social interactions between a child and early years educator, the use of speech in different speaking positions, the child's well-being, engagement, responsiveness and sensibility of an early years educator, are all considered as process indicators of quality early childhood education and care. Their self-evaluation questionnaire for nurseries, in which they employ a seven point rating scale for different process indicators, including informal use of speech, encouragement of speech comprehension, encouragement of verbal expression, frequency of book-reading and picture - narrating activities, communication encouragement, and connecting speech to thinking and various aspects of social interactions. With this self-evaluation questionnaire the early years educators can get an over-all and detailed insight of the quality of their work in nursery and we used it as a theoretical background of our focus interview.

Problem

There is quite a history of comparing different national early education and care systems. The comparison of these systems is mostly based on quantitative research and statistical data analyses, while direct classroom experience and in-depth information is rarely considered. In our paper, we wanted to introduce a different, direct, although a subjective look of future early years educators on an area that is an important indicator of quality of early education and care – communication.

The purpose of this paper is to answer the question of how the differences between Slovenian and English early childhood education and care system reflect in interpersonal communication and interpersonal relationship between early years educators and children in nursery. We focused primarily on the differences in communication and interpersonal relationship between early years educator and a child.

We expect that the results will show that differences in communication exist, notably in events and activities tied to the prescribed framework of early childhood education and care system in each country. At the same time, we expect that the quality of interpersonal relationships is tied also to individual personality characteristics (e.g. age or sex) of early years educators rather than just the differences within the prescribed framework of early childhood education and care.

Method

We use a qualitative research approach, direct unscientific observation to participation in a natural situation, focus interview and analysis of documents as data collection techniques (e.g. Kurikulum za vrtnice, Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage, nursery publications, students written records, etc.).

Description of the Sample

The sample consists of 17-year-old female students of the 3rd year pre-school education program from Srednja vzgojiteljska šola in gimnazija Ljubljana who attended a 14-day international mobility in Leeds in England within the Erasmus + Project World in our hands. The project involves 16 students, but the focus interview was attended by 10 students. Students had practical training in Leeds in eight nurseries which differ from one another:

- Nursery 1 is a private nursery part of a larger group of nurseries and was attended by 43 children. It was registered in 1997. Latest Ofsted report on the quality and standards of the early years provision: good³.
- Nursery 2 is a playgroup run by the local Methodist church and was registered in 1974. 20 children were attending. Latest Ofsted report on the quality and standards of the early years provision: good.
- Nursery 3 and Nursery 4 are private nurseries part of a larger group of nurseries. Nursery 3 was registered in 2010 and was attended by 80 children. Latest Ofsted report on the quality and standards of the early years provision: outstanding. Nursery 4 was registered in 2005 and was attended by 69 children. Latest Ofsted report on the quality and standards of the early years provision: good.
- Nursery 5 is a private nursery. It was registered in 2011 and was attended by 59 children. Latest Ofsted report on the quality and standards of the early years provision: outstanding.
- Nursery 6 is a private nursery part of a larger group of nurseries that were established in 1989. This particular nursery was opened in 2015. No Ofsted report on the quality and standards of the early years provision yet.
- Nursery 7 is a private bilingual (English/Lithuanian) nursery. It was registered in 2014 and was attended by 30 children. Latest Ofsted report on the quality and standards of the early years provision: good.

3 Ofsted grades on a scale from 1 to 4, grade 1 being outstanding, grade 2 – good, grade 3 - requires improvement and grade 4 – inadequate.

- Nursery 8 is a voluntary nursery. It was registered in 2005 and was attended by 45 children. Latest Ofsted report on the quality and standards of the early years provision: outstanding.

Students involved in the project previously had 14 days of practical training in Slovenian nurseries in the first two years of their education in preschool education program. They had their previous practical training in 16 different nurseries from 16 different towns in Slovenia. 15 nurseries were public nurseries and 1 was a private nursery run by Karitas. 11 nurseries were independent nurseries while 5 nurseries were part of a primary school. All of the nurseries followed the program Kurikulum za vrtce (1999).

Research Instruments

For the purpose of the focus interview we created a network plan with elementary questions covering the following four areas:

1. The non-verbal communication:

In non-verbal communication, we focus on two areas, the first being the perception of facial expressions, tone of voice, relaxation in the relationship, establishing physical contact, eye contact and the second being the use of non-verbal communication to control the behavior of children.

2. Verbal communication:

In verbal communication, we focus on asking questions and the use of explanation (the use of closed and open questions, the explanation used for description of events, the characteristics of objects or phenomena ...) and the use of verbal communication to control the behavior of children.

3. Encouraging communication:

We focus mainly on encouraging communication activities with children when changing clothes, during daily routines, during free activities ...

4. Spontaneous communication:

We focus on the spontaneous involvement of early years educator in talks, taking the initiative to communicate, do they engage in discussions with children as an equal interlocutor or are they taking control in communication.

The students attended a 68-hour course in communication skills in their 2nd year of education in preschool education program. They did not have observation forms for interpersonal relationship and communication present at the nurseries, but they had observation guidelines for their written daily record of activities in the nurseries.

Procedure

The procedure was conducted in two parts. First, we examined documentation regarding the organization of systems of early childhood education and care in Slovenia and England. We reviewed the national documents of the two countries, Kurikulum za vrtce (1999) the Framework for Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS, 2014) and some legislative documents.

Secondly we conducted a group focus interview. The interview took place on 31. 3. 2016 and lasted about 60 minutes in total. We asked the students questions from the network plan and the majority of students answered questions from all the areas. If a student wished not to answer a question we didn't force an answer. The questions followed the areas as written above. In case of doubt, we asked sub-questions relating to the discussed area. The conversation was recorded with a recorder and we then made a verbatim transcript.

The main questions asked for each of the four areas were:

1. The non-verbal communication:

Early years educators constantly use non-verbal communication (adequate physical contact, eye contact, body responsiveness ...). Some also use non-verbal communication to control the behavior of children (e.g. to praise they applaud, to calm a child they touch their shoulder ...).

How much and what non-verbal communication have you observed in nurseries in Leeds?

Do your observations differ in any way from your experiences with practical training in Slovenian nurseries?

2. Verbal communication:

Early years educators ask questions, they explain to children what's happening around them, they explain the characteristics of objects or phenomena. Some also use verbal communication to control the behavior of children (e.g. they praise the children, they moderate their behavior ...).

How much and what verbal communication have you observed in nurseries in Leeds? What was the main purpose of verbal communication?

Do your observations differ in any way from your experiences with practical training in Slovenian nurseries?

3. Encouraging communication:

Early years educators encourage communication during activities with children e.g. when they are changing children's clothes, during daily routines, during planned activities in the play corners.

Have you observed any kind of communication encouragement in nurseries in Leeds?

Do your observations differ in any way from your experiences with practical training in Slovenian nurseries?

4. Spontaneous communication:

Early years educators spontaneously engage in communication with children e.g. when they take the initiative to communicate with children, when they engage in discussions with children as an equal interlocutor or they can even assume control of the communication.

Have you observed any kind of spontaneous communication in nurseries in Leeds?

Do your observations differ in any way from your experiences with practical training in Slovenian nurseries?

Results and Interpretation

Focus Interview

Non-verbal Communication

The students did not detect many noticeable differences in the use of non-verbal communication between English and Slovenian nurseries. Most of them connected the use of non-verbal communication to the personal characteristics of early years educators, such as age and work motivation.

Some of them mentioned a more restrained attitude to children in English nurseries, as Student 4 said: »...as if they were afraid to touch them or to develop an attachment to them«. Two students (Student 4 and Student 7) reported of a more relaxed attitude towards younger children as opposed to older ones – the early years educators were holding them more, allowing them to sit in their laps and comforting them when they were crying, while they interacted less with the older ones. The early years educators in English nurseries didn't refuse physical contact with the children, and if a child came to them they comforted them. The students thought that there is more physical contact in Slovenian nurseries and that the early years educators show more affection in a non-verbal way than in English nurseries. As for the use of non-verbal communication for behavior regulation the students noticed that the early years educators used more non-verbal communication to praise the child's achievements and didn't use that much non-verbal communication for unwanted or unacceptable behavior. The students noticed that non-verbal communication for praising the child's achievements in English nurseries was more obvious when the early years educators were filling out the portfolios of

children. Non-verbal communication for praising the child's achievements involved clapping, smiling, frequent eye contact while non-verbal communication for the regulation of unwanted behavior included serious facial expression, stern looks and finger pointing.

Student 2 linked the non-verbal skills for the regulation of the behavior of Slovenian early years educators with educator's age and therefore their education (meaning that the younger early years educators knowledge is more contemporary). She said that in her experience the younger early years educators used more appropriate ways of non-verbal communication when addressing the child than the older ones.

Verbal Communication

The students perceived more verbal communication between early years educators and children in Slovenian nurseries compared to English nurseries. They reported that Slovenian early years educators use more verbal communication throughout the whole day with more use of describing everyday activities (present and future activities of the group or individual), giving explanations, asking questions (frequent use of open- and closed-ended questions or asking questions about the child's activities). Student 10 said: “/.../ as much as I could hear, their early years educators didn't talk to them for example now we're going to put on the trousers and socks and now the slippers, as we are used to in Slovenia, where we use that speech to develop their vocabulary.”

In English nurseries verbal communication appeared mostly while filling out the portfolios. One of the nurseries had a list of questions for encouraging the child's play in every play area but Student 4 said the early years educators didn't use them except when they were filling out the portfolio. Our students tried to explain the difference in the use of verbal communication between Slovene and English nurseries with the number of early years educators in a group – because there were more early years educators in English nurseries⁴ they had less chance to communicate with the whole group so they communicated more with one or two children. In Slovene nurseries there are two early years educators and they are more accustomed to addressing the whole group and each child. Student 8 said: “I noticed, in England, that the early years educators talked more with one or two children, it wasn't often that they talked with all of them. In Slovenia we have an activity called morning circle and there is a chance for each child to tell something and then everybody talks to each other.”

4 The early years educator: child ratio in nurseries increases with the age of children and goes from 1:3 to 1:13 in English nurseries and from 1:6 to 1:11 in Slovene nurseries. The ratio in English nurseries is more flexible to changes (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice/Eurostat, 2014).

Another reason our students found the difference of the use of verbal communication between English and Slovenian nurseries is that Slovenian nurseries have a daily routine that includes a planned activity carried out by the early years educator. In their opinion, the English early years educators don't have to communicate as much with the children, because their main focus is on observation and taking notes of the child's development.

Regarding the use of verbal communication for regulating behavior the students noticed that in English nurseries the early years educators used a lot of praise again especially when observing the child and filling out the portfolio. In their opinion, the Slovenian early years educators use praise as well, but not as much as the English early years educators.

Some of our students described a practice in English nurseries where the early years educator sent a child who was misbehaving to sit away from the group. After a while the early years educator came to the child and talked to him about his behavior. The students did not report about any special observations regarding the use of verbal communication for regulating unwanted behavior in Slovenia nurseries but they did mention a practice where early years educator takes the child that was misbehaving to another group and leaves them there. After a little while the early years educator comes back and takes the child back to his group.

Encouraging Communication

The students reported that they perceived more communication encouraging activities in Slovenian nurseries than in English nurseries. They noticed that communication when encouraging activities in English nurseries occurred mostly when the child was doing an activity and the early years educator interacted with the child to observe their development and take notes for the child's portfolio. The students said that in Slovenia, the early years educator tend to encourage communication with the children as a group and/or the child as an individual regardless of the activity or part of the daily routine.

Spontaneous Communication

Regarding the differences in the amount of spontaneous communication in different English nurseries, the students had various experiences. Some of them observed more spontaneous communication, others less. Some of them thought they perceived more spontaneous communication in Slovenia, as Student 6 said: "In my nursery, in England, there was spontaneous communication, but not as much as in my Slovenian nursery. When the early years educator was with a child, engaged in an activity, she was

asking him, what he is doing and...to whom will he give this, why does he need this...In Slovenia, I think, the early years educator is more engaging, knows the children better, asks them even about family members..."

Conclusions

In this paper we tried to show the differences in interpersonal relationships and communication between the early childhood education and care systems in Slovenia and in England as observed by students during their practical training in nurseries in both countries. The analysis of the national documents regulating early childhood education and care i.e. Slovenian Kurikulum za vrtce (1999) and English Early Years Foundation Stage (2014) revealed contextual differences between the two documents. Early Years Foundation Stage (ibid.) requires a different planning method and implementation of educational activities from early years educators, which focuses mainly on observation of the child's individual development without their influence on the child's development while Kurikulum za vrtce (1999) helps early years educators to actively contribute to and help the child's development. Both documents however list communication as one of the child's important developmental areas.

According to our results, we did not find many noticeable differences in the use of non-verbal communication between English and Slovenian nurseries, only in more often observed physical contact in Slovenian nurseries, mostly to show affection towards children. The differences, however, were more often connected to the personal characteristics of early years educators, such as age and work motivation. Therefore we could assume that the differences within each group of observed early years educators are larger than between the groups of English and Slovenian early years educators.

The differences were, however, observed on the use of verbal communication. These differences can be explained by two major factors: (1) the ratio between the number of early years educators and children in Slovenian and English nurseries, and (2) the main focus of each national early childhood education and care system (daily routine vs. observing child's development through portfolio). Since there are less early years educators in a group in Slovenian nurseries, the verbal communication is more needed and, so, more often used. While the amount of interaction, and therefore verbal communication in English nurseries is focused mostly on the event (or procedure) of filling out the children's portfolios, the interaction and verbal communication in Slovenian nurseries is effectuated and distributed through the day, naturally with its peak during daily planned activity. This was also observed in comparing the use of communication

for encouraging activities between early years educators in Slovenian and English nurseries.

Regarding the differences in the amount of spontaneous communication in different English nurseries, the students had various experiences and therefore we could not make any conclusions.

Considering that interaction between early years educators and children derives from all of the observed types of communication, we could assume that the structural differences (such as the size of the nursery, the ratio between the number of early years educators per child etc.) and process differences (focus on daily routine vs. focus on portfolio) connected with the amount and distribution of interaction in a similar way as communication. The conclusions or comparison about the contents of these interactions can, however, not be made.

We would like to emphasize that all of the conclusions above were made based on the subjective experiences and views of students, future early years educators, and should be considered with appropriate caution. They do, however, suggest that structural (as listed above), indirect (e.g. early year educator's personal characteristics, professional development, work motivation and satisfaction etc.) and process (e.g. activities in nurseries or program implementation) indicators of both national preschool systems certainly have an impact on interpersonal relationships and communication in nurseries. In the future it would, of course, be necessary to include also quantitative research methods and to include cultural differences between countries and personality characteristics of early years educators in the independent variables.

References

- Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act* (2009) <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2009/22/contents> (1.3.2016).
- Batistič Zorec, M. (2003) *Razvojna psihologija in vzgoja v vrtcih*. Ljubljana: Inštitut za psihologijo osebnosti.
- Bertram, T., Pascal, C. (2000) *The OECD thematic review of Early childhood education and care: background report for the United Kingdom*. Worcester: centre for research in early childhood: University College Worcester.
- Children and families Act* (2014) <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2014/6/contents> (1.3.2016).
- Devjak, T., Novak, L., Lepičnik Vodopivec, J. (2009) Kakovostna interakcija in komunikacija. In Devjak, T., Skubic, D. (eds.). *Izzivi pedagoškega koncepta Reggio Emilia*. Ljubljana: Pedagoška fakulteta, pp. 189–207.

- Devjak, T., Petek, T. (2011) Besedna komunikacija med vzgojiteljem in otrokom, spremljanje in dokumentiranje proces. In Vrbošek, B. (ed.). *Kakovost učenja in poučevanja jezika v kurikulumu v vrtcu*. Ljubljana: Supra, pp. 22–29.
- Devjak, T., Skubic, D., Polak, A., Kolšek, V. (2012) *Predšolska vzgoja: od starega k novemu*. Ljubljana: Pedagoška fakulteta
- Dolar Bahovec, E., Golobič Bregar, K. (eds.) (2004) *Šola in vrtec skozi ogledalo*. Ljubljana: DZD, d. d.
- Early Childhood Education and Care Policy in the United Kingdom* (2000) <http://www.oecd.org/unitedkingdom/2535034.pdf> (27.2.2016).
- Education system in the UK*. https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/219167/v01-2012ukes.pdf (1.3.2016).
- Early years foundation stage profile* (2015) https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/488745/EYFS_handbook_2016_-_FINAL.pdf (2.2.2016).
- Early years outcomes* (2013) http://www.foundationyears.org.uk/files/2012/03/Early_Years_Outcomes.pdf (2.2.2016).
- European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice/Eurostat (2014) *Key Data on Early Childhood Education and Care in Europe*. 2014 Edition. Eurydice and Eurostat Report. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.
- Kammerman, S. B. (2000) Early childhood education and care: an overview of developments in the OECD countries. *International Journal of Educational Research* 7, pp. 7–29.
- Kroflič, R. (2008) Temeljne predpostavke, načela in cilji kurikula za vrtce. In Marjanovič Umek, L. (ed.). *Otrok v vrtcu: priručnik h Kurikulu za vrtce*. Maribor: Obzorja.
- Kumer, M. (2014) Profesionalna komunikacija – kompetenca vzgojitelja. In Željeznov Seničar, M. (ed.). *Kompetence vzgojitelja – izzivi, izkušnje, spoznanja: zbornik prispevkov, VII. Mednarodna strokovna konferenca vzgojiteljev v vrtcih 2014 (Hrvaška, Italija, Slovenija)*. Ljubljana, MiB d.o.o, pp. 30–38.
- Kurikulum za vrtce: predšolska vzgoja v vrtcih* (1999) Ljubljana: Ministrstvo za šolstvo in šport: Zavod RS za šolstvo.
- Larikov, N. (2015) *Komunikacija z otroki v predšolskem obdobju: diplomsko delo*. Univerza v Ljubljani: Teološka fakulteta.
- Lindeboom, G. J., Buiskool, B. J. (2013) *Quality in early education and care*. Bruselj: Policy Department Structural and Cohesion Policies.

- Lipužič, B. (2002) *Globalna razvojna vprašanja v Evropi: primerjalna analiza izobraževalnih politik v državah EU, EFTE in predpristopnih kandidatkih za EU*. Nova Gorica: Educa.
- Marjanovič Umek, L. (ed.) (2008) *Otrok v vrtcu: priročnik h Kurikulu za vrtce*. Maribor: Obzorja.
- Marjanovič Umek, L., Fekonja, U., Kavčič, T., Poljanšek, A. (2002) *Kakovost v vrtcih*, Ljubljana: Znanstveni inštitut Filozofske fakultete.
- Oxford English Dictionary* (2016) <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/37309?redirectedFrom=communication#eid> (18.7.2016).
- Predšolska vzgoja in izobraževanje v vrtcih, Slovenija, šolsko leto 2015/16* (2016) <http://www.stat.si/StatWeb/prikazi-novico?id=5916&idp=9&headerbar=7> (18.7.2016).
- Statutory framework for the early years foundation stage* (2014). https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/335504/EYFS_framework_from_1_September_2014__with_clarification_note.pdf (2.2.2016).
- Steinberg, S. (2007) *An introduction to communication studies*, Cape Town: JutaCo.
- The Childcare Act* (2016) <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2016/5/enacted> (15.3.2016).
- The Childcare Act* (2006) <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2006/21/contents> (15.3.2016)
- Vidmar, M., Taštanoska, T. (2014) *Umestitev predšolske vzgoje v Sloveniji v evropski prostor s pomočjo mednarodnih primerjalnih poročil*. <http://www.eurydice.si/index.php/fokus/9366-umestitev-predsolske-vzgoje-v-sloveniji-v-evropski-prostor-s-pomocjo-mednarodnih-primerjalnih-porocil> (1.3.2016).
- Zakon o organizaciji in financiranju vzgoje in izobraževanja. (1996)* <http://pisrs.si/Pis.web/pregledPredpisa?id=ZAKO445> (15.3.2016).
- Zakon o vrtcih* (1996) <http://pisrs.si/Pis.web/pregledPredpisa?id=ZAKO447> (15.3.2016).