Sigita BURVYTĖ, Kęstutis RALYS

CHALLENGES TO CHILDHOOD EDUCATORS

Abstract. The paper analyzes challenges faced by parents and other educators striving for creation of optimal conditions for the realization of adaptation options during sensitive developmental periods. In childhood and juvenility it is necessary to acquire positive experience, which does not impair the natural emotional, mental, physical and social development of child’s personality. The main challenges to educators are to create favourable conditions for this. Diverse and positive experiences that correspond to the developmental stage of a child, enable a young personality to recognize the situation and choose the most appropriate behaviour, which promotes emotional well-being. Thus, individual’s readiness to successfully cope with personal crises and to positively adapt to the changes in society in later stages of development is nurtured. The child’s learning process, which successfully started in the family, has to continue in pre-school education institutions as well. A major challenge to educators is to choose the right educational approach as early as birth of a child and to consistently observe this assessing the situation, which would lead to a balanced emotional, spiritual, physical, mental and social development of child’s personality.

Key words: pre-school child, primary school student, parents, challenges to educators and parents in sensitive developmental periods, experiences.

Introduction

Childhood is a product of not only human development but also the educational, spiritual and cultural development of the society. The need for change is often determined by the historical society and change of its separate, which occurs changing living and economic conditions. A child is a part of society, and all what is happens in the world in some way is reflected in his life and experiences.

Social changes in society affect family processes and lead to changes in children’s education. Change in education requires a lot more of pre-parenthood, better preparation of teacher, especially of pre-school teacher, when foundation for the further spread of the personality and self-development is laid.

The family institution is the first, whereof effect starting with child’s birth; and what is experienced in the early stages of development, leaves a strong mark in personality structure and in later stages of development can be hardly changed (Helbiuge, Hermann von Vimpfen, 1998). The main challenge to parents nowadays is a constant self-assessment regarding the signal which is sent to the child one way or another by parents’ behaviour with him. Social adaptation is most intensive in the early stages
of human life, when children are specifically prepared for independent living and adult activities in the world. A major challenge to educators (the term ‘educators’ refers to parents, pre-school educators, primary teachers and all the people raising a child) is to provide a suitable environment for children to experience a wide range of positive experiences of learning the surrounding world (which do not break child physically or morally). Educators here play a particularly important role: relationships of parents and other family members - brothers, sisters, grandparents and those of pre-school teachers and primary school teachers. The significance of early (primary) stage is determined not only by its antecedence in human development, but also by characteristics of childhood - emotionality, sincerity in child’s communication with family members. It is the period when children acquire the basic primary knowledge, initial skills of thinking, later they are gradually taking over more and more complex rules of behaviour and start to get acquainted with simple examples of cultural values. Communicating with parents or other close people in the family, children acquire basics of adaptation tools through experiences of real communication, i.e., they gain ability to communicate with other people, to observe the rules, to manage emotions, develop their will and learn to speak. Language becomes the most important condition for formation of child’s consciousness and thinking and for his/her further development.

The goal of this article is to reveal challenges of childhood - youth to educators and guidelines for coping with them.

This article is based on the analysis of applied scientific-pedagogical, psychological, spiritual philosophical literature.

Unemployed possibilities of adaptation in infancy and early childhood greatly complicate and reduce the possibility to adapt in other stages of development. A pre-school child has the opportunity to adopt more than 50 percent of experience necessary for high-quality and successful existence. D. T. Dodge, L. J. Colker, D. G. Koralek (1995) argue that the turns of children’s brain experience a positive impact, when they are not hungry, feel safe and have stable relationships with family and friends. The challenge to parents is to provide their children with safe environment to accumulate positive experiences during sensitive phases of personality development, when the brain is most receptive to accumulation of certain experiences. During early childhood years, children are most susceptible to development of skills of emotion management, formation of communication with others, language learning skills, but they need to gain proper impulse.
We can say that brain research has proved the scientific truths of A. Maslow (1999), E. Erikson (2004), K. Hornesite (2004), J. Piaget (1954), Л. С. Выготский (200), F. Riemann (2004) and others. Summarizing the insights of these authors, we can say that the stages of personal development offered by various researchers and investigated from various aspects, is implementation of opportunities for adaptation, i.e., result of brain development and environmental effects.

According to the study of T. Helbrugge and J. Hermann von Vimppfen (1998), a person uses or activates only 10 percent of their brain mass on average. Activation takes place through experiences in contact with the environment. If a baby or child is isolated or limited in his ability to come into contact with the environment, the ability to adapt its smaller, and vice versa - the more baby or child is open to understanding the environment, the more contacts and experiences s/he goes through, the broader it becomes (see Figure 1). Thus, the main challenge to educators is to provide a child with possibilities and to create favourable conditions to go through experiences that are appropriate to child’s age. They are briefly discussed below:

- During the first three years of life parents meet challenges: to enable a child to experience a high quality sense of attachment to one of the parents (or other educator). High quality sense of experience directly depends on a sensitivity of parents or another individual, who takes care of a child, to needs of a child and on continuous staying together. The main task of the first 9 months of child life is to establish a relationship of affection with his/her mother (or other care-giver), who is the main figure associated with attachment (Bowlby, 1969). During this period, a permanent presence of a human being near the child, to whom s/he could attach and acquire experiences of tenderness, which conditions further consolidation of the position of love to a human being in the personality structure. Therefore, the harm of self-separation-separation from the mother (or any other caregiver) to the child in this age group is more considerable than in other stages of his/her development.

- Sensitive period of child development from 2 to 4 years. At this age an adaptation tool is developed, i.e., an ability to accept, obey and comply with environmental regulations, requirements and prohibitions. A major challenge to educators during this period of child’s development is to introduce children to the existing rules of society. The first prohibition is generally associated with tidiness education. During this period, it is important to give the child time to go step by step instead of breaking child’s stubbornness applying forced schooling and tidiness skills through coercion and punishment (Riemann, 2004;

- Sensitive period of child development from 4 to 6 years. A major challenge to educators during this period of child’s development is to create conditions for children to learn through the experience of reality. During the experiences of facing the reality, a child passes a reality test, while recognizing the reality, accept it and slowly turning into an adult. Parents should be able to induce a desire to become like them. The child must be willing to identify with them. Only then s/he will be ready to abandon the earlier patterns and freedom of child’s behaviour and ways of freedom. To enable a child to enjoy coping with new assignments and do it proudly and with sound self-esteem, a child has to experience that s/he is able to do what a child of his/her age should be able to.

- Sensitive period of child development from 6 to 8 years. A major challenge to educators during this period of child’s development is to allow children to feel self-dependent through experiences, to allow him/her to experience a sense of their own value. At this period parents’ incorrect attitudes (spoon-feeding and non-recognition) play a crucial role. Spoiled children often lack self-confidence and self-dependence, whereas parents, who allow and encourage children’s self-dependence through experiences that comply with the age group of a child, create conditions for a child to learn to make decisions, to carry out their own duties and to gain self-confidence.

Child development at different age groups poses different challenges to parents. Reacting to changes in child development and recognizing them, educators have to change their behaviour with children, creating the conditions for successful development of skills to solve different tasks and the quality of their solution determines the quality of acquisition of adaptation instruments. The child’s pre-school experiences, his/her full maturity influences the initial success of adaptation to the new environment. The main role in these processes of children’s development is played by parents. The child’s preparation and full maturity not only learning at school but also successfully adapting to chances experienced during other stages of development, depend on child’s experiences in the family. The analysis of scientific literature revealed that prior to the start of school children have to gain the widest possible experience in understanding the world (to go through diverse experiences), because it determines successful adaptation to different environmental changes.

According to the research conducted by T. Helbrugge and J. Hermann von Vimppfen (1998), we can state that educators of closed, petty, attention seeking and
dependent children, created conditions only for single-sided realisation of children’s adaptation possibilities during sensitive periods of development and, thus, limited possibilities for developing adaptation instruments in childhood. Children are deprived of possibilities for learning to successfully satisfy own needs employing acceptable behaviour. First, they must identify the reasons for problematic behaviour of a child and search for an individual access to a child applying individual correction of child’s behaviour.

The quality of realisation of child’s opportunities for adaptation during childhood has a significant impact on the expression of adaptation in later stages of development. Disturbances of self-development of child’s personality (they are understood as failure of educators to facilitate a successful self-development of children) during sensitive periods and possible consequences of this, i.e., unacceptable behaviour in the society formed on the basis of developed dominating character traits through expression of aggression, in intimate partnership, and positive and negative range of development of character qualities.

Relationships between children’s and parents as well as the overall atmosphere in the family are important factors in child development. This state was confirmed by many authors (Knock, 1990; Bierman, Stormashak, 2000, Conger, Kagan, need to do in 1969, Christie and others, 1999; Deater-Deckard, 2000 and others) in their research. Parental influence on child development of his personality, social adjustment, the ability to overcome the crisis affect all stages of child development, only at a varying extent. Different authors emphasize different aspects of parental influence on children, as well as different aspects of interaction between parents and children, which can be identified as factors in child development.

As can be seen in the diagram, the smaller the child, the more intense is the influence of the family, which is gradually decreasing until it is replaced by the impact of members of pre-school and primary school communities. Analyzing challenges emerging to childhood educators in order to create a favourable environment for the harmonious emotional, mental, physical and social development of children, a particular importance is ascribed to the quality of family communication, interpersonal relations (parents with children, relatives, neighbours) and common family environment and microclimate. F. Riemann (2004) stresses the importance of immediate environment for development of personal adaptation abilities. Equally important challenges to parents were revealed: their ability to stimulate positive behaviour both of each other (peer relations) and their children and to constantly notice positive things striving for creation of safe home environment.
### Challenges to Childhood Educators

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education (SIS) at the beginning of school</th>
<th>Outcome of educators’ influence on the child</th>
<th>Possible extremes of educators’ behaviour to a child</th>
<th>Challenges to childhood educators</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6–8 years old Independence</td>
<td>Spoon-fed, non-acceptance - self-promotion.</td>
<td>To establish conditions for a child to feel self-dependent through experiences, to feel a sense of self-value.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>4–7 years old Misstatements</td>
<td>Admiration without reason as inducement for achievements.</td>
<td>To enable a child to learn the reality through a collision with the reality.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Pre-primary education (SIS)</td>
<td>Control - autonomy</td>
<td>To create the right conditions to learn through experiences the rules which exist in the society.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2–4 years old Dutifulness</td>
<td></td>
<td>To create opportunities for own child to experience a high-quality (stable, raising pleasant feelings) sense of attachment to one parent or any other individuals, who raise a child.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0–3 years old Attachment</td>
<td>Acceptance - rejection</td>
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**Figure 1. Challenges to childhood educators**

The influence the nearest environment on personality development and self-development is one of the most significant. The main factors affecting self-development of children’s character include educative position of parents and environment created...
by parents to the child (Ralys K. 2011). Another challenge to educators embraces a self-critical approach to their behaviour with the child choosing direction and methods of education, identifying own mistakes and efficient actions, searching for ways of correction.

It is important to notice inappropriate behaviour conditioned by child’s dominant character traits and to timely employ modification of behaviour. On the one hand, parents can observe their children’s adaptation difficulties and seek help to correct them; on the other hand, the parents need help in identifying the problem.

There are a number of studies claiming that faulty upbringing in the family is the most important factor that helps to shape personality characteristics that determine the behaviour of adaptive behaviour. K. Modra, Mandell, W. Gamble, A. Taylor (200) studied the impact of children’s early adaptation to climate, family life and family relationships. The results showed that children’s adaptation at school depends not only on children’s temperament and character traits, gender, but also on the emotional climate of the family, the importance of a child and his/her role in family conflicts and agreement among parents on child’s upbringing. Educators need to create conditions for a harmonious self-development of children in the family.

**Challenge to educators is to create favourable environment for the harmonious development of child’s personality and realization of adaptation possibilities during sensitive periods of development.** One-sided behaviour of parents with children enables them to experience one-sided first experiences, which make it possible to develop a framework of dominant character traits. Dominant character traits should be understood as a general state of our culture or people caused by the effects of trends describing the term. According to R. May (2010), impotence, disregard or excessive care experienced during infancy and childhood derive not only from parents but also from almost every aspect of our culture. Most parents are helpless, unconscious products of culture of their period. Dominant traits of children’s character determine their desadaptive behaviour, which is a major reason for difficulties faced adapting in a new environment other than their family.

Child’s transition from a family environment to that of pre-school and first grade will be smooth, if educators are be able to combine cultural differences of their educational environments, will be tolerant to one another or home environment and that of other educational institutions will not fundamentally differ. During the process of child’s adaptation models of appropriate adaptive behaviour or desadaptive behaviour are formed, which become established in the personality structure. Applying the same pattern of conduct regardless of the situation or failing to flexibly react to situations, a
child may not always meet their needs. Inappropriate behaviour of children, which is conditioned by dominant character traits, becomes a reason for adaptation difficulties (problems) in a new environment. Parents are the main people, who are interested in self-development of children’s harmonious behaviour; however, this process is influenced not only by educators but also by values that prevail in the society, overall condition of public culture and lifestyle of people. (May, 2010, Riemann, 2004)

Educators, who managed to successfully cope with challenges that occur in the process of pre-school children education and who are able to facilitate the harmonious development of the child’s personality, prepared children for a successful process of adaptation in the first class and in future life. Depending on the diverse, high quality and consistent experiences that comply with child’s developmental periods, s/he meeting his/her needs and rising as a harmonious personality, implemented adaptation possibilities accomplished during pre-school period. The children who did not have an opportunity to go through diverse experiences that correspond to child’s developmental age during infancy and early childhood had the, develop the dominant traits of character, which result in such behaviour, which causes major difficulties for adaptation. Thus, these children need such a learning environment where they can adjust their behaviour to their ability to adapt positively and feel good. This causes new challenges to educators, their interest in children is encouraged as well as their abilities to identify the essential reasons for their problems and educators have to search for adjustment options. Some of these children successfully adapt to meet their needs and feel personal comfort, but other children and teachers do not necessarily welcome such behaviour, which helps them to adapt. The reaction of the surrounding people to such behaviour of children often cause adaptation challenges, which are dealt with trying to change the environment in which a child can feel safe and having failed to change their environment, they start changing their behaviour. This is a result of long and consistent work.
### Challenges to childhood educators (parents, educators, pre-school, primary school teachers and social educators)

Parents, educators, pre-school, primary school teachers and social educators need knowledge to create the right conditions for children’s self-development. It is important to ensure that children’s education successfully starts in a family, consistently continues in pre-school institutions and primary school; the transition from one educational institution to another should be a smooth and continuous learning process. This requires the following:

- educators should understand children’s development processes and their expression;
- educators should have an efficient impact on a child at different periods of his/her development;
- educators should be able to identify children’s developmental problems and to find help.

#### Challenges for parents

Due to their job and fast life pace, parents as educators are often replaced by others individuals (babysitters, grandparents, pre-school teacher, television, internet, etc.), who become the main educators of children, setting up an educational environment and conditions. Parents should have the knowledge to be able to create favourable conditions for children’s education, their duty is to be interested in children, to observe and understand children’s behavioural expression (to gain knowledge about child development, in order to notice expressions of developmental disorders), they should strive for creation of favourable conditions for children to learn the environment through experiences and jointly engage in self-development, giving up an approach of “convenient” child. Today the family environment itself does not guarantee children’s self-development of favourable conditions - the parents must find ways and means, they often need help in order to artificially create environment, which is necessary for self-development of children.

It is necessary to gain the pedagogical and psychological knowledge of creation of conditions favourable for children’s development.

#### Challenges for pre-school educators and teachers

It is necessary to gain pedagogical and psychological knowledge of child’s development and environment conditions necessary for child’s development;

It is necessary to apply the acquired knowledge, to give up a concept of “a convenient child” and take on an approach towards development of personality of “a healthy child”.

#### Challenges to social educators

They have to be educators of parents on issues related to educating children in the family.

The challenge to social educators is to be managers of child’s problems.

What a child acquires easily during sensitive periods of his/her development, as if spontaneously, later requires more effort of parents, teachers and other professionals. Scientific literature shows that the social pedagogical work with educators:
firstly, it should be directed to preventative work (education of children’s parents on issues related to education before a child is born);

secondly, it should be directed to the remedial work (education of children educators regarding issues of harmonious development of personality and, where necessary, pedagogical psychological assistance should be provided in order to adjust desadaptive behaviour of children).

Ways of and possibilities for changing the situation:

- To make provision that the most effective personality is developed during the first seven years of his life through positive multi-sided experiences.
- To encourage the society to create the conditions for development of children under 8 years, which would enable them to realize the possibilities of their adaptation through education of parents. Thus, various human activities and self-help centres should be established for socialisation of people of all age groups, where they may involve in various activities and meet their physical and emotional needs. For children under 8 years this would serve as the main school of life, and elder people could perform the mission of knowledge and experience transfer nurturing their descendants in the earliest stages of their life.

Conclusions

1. Although 60 per cent of possibilities for preparation for life are realized by the beginning of the first class, the analysis of works by various authors of reveals that the main reason for the difficulties faced during adaptation period by first formers derives from the prevailing attitude in the society that an individual begins preparation for life at school.

2. Education of children in the family and at school is based on a false approach. Problematic adaptation of children at school is frequently ascribed to their nature rather than to the environment, which shaped them prior to the first form. The traits that influence children’s behaviour are not innate. Instead of being based on development of individual’s ability to reason and on processes of thorough cognition of environment, the education system is grounded on pure knowledge conveyance. If a child is deprived of possibilities for reasoning and for comprehensive learning of environment in infancy and early childhood, it is difficult or hardly possible to obtain such abilities later.

3. The human brain, which is not activated in infancy and early childhood, is less capable of acquiring knowledge provided at school and of using that knowledge
in their life. Half of the children, who failed to realise their possibilities of adaptation, come to schools, where their further education and training are difficult.

4. The family is the basis for a child, which gives him/her a sense of security, implants the real values, enables him/her to develop the ability to assess the situation and choose behaviour patterns that are appropriate in it. Childhood challenges to educators include creation of appropriate environment for the harmonious development of child’s personality to ensure self-development.

Recommendations

It is necessary to initiate the creation of educational centres, which are available to the multiplicity of children’s educational services, counselling parents of children regarding harmonious personality development/education issues, and various educational services to parents and children in order to facilitate harmonious development of their child’s personality. This requires training of specialists in family issues (practitioners), which could help parents gain practical positive parenting skills.

Secondly, it is important to carry out preventive and diagnostic research in child physical, mental, and psychosocial development.

In this country there exists no state system to determine whether preschool age children develop as balanced personalities (if their physical, mental and psychosocial maturity corresponds to the phase of development of particular age group) or whether a child needs help. So far this has been done during preventive visits to the doctor, when most children are diagnosed with physical illnesses. In fact, it remains only a very superficial evaluation because during such a short visit, a doctor is not able to conduct a thorough assessment (the child’s sociability, perception, language comprehension, expression, sound) of a child. Parents themselves have to make decisions and find help. This shows how relevant parents’ education is, since parents need to acquire appropriate pedagogical and psychological knowledge, which would enable them to identify children’s developmental problems and seek for help from professionals. Parents should be able to provide specialists with all the necessary information required to give timely help to the child. To be able to provide this information to the doctor (or other practitioner), the mother/father must know something about harmonious development of their child’s personality. Thus, timely provision of successful help to a child, to big extent depends on the mother or any other closest person, who take care of a child, because they are able to tell the doctor, psychologist, therapist,
family specialist (practitioner), or any other educational professional, what they observed while dealing with the child. Timely education of parents, which facilitates monitoring of child’s development, is the main condition for assurance of successful development of a child.

Literature


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