

## FACTORS DETERMINING CHILDREN'S DECISION-MAKING IN SLOVENE PRE-SCHOOLS

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**Summary** – *Children's participation – their involvement in creating their life in kindergarten and making decisions about things that concern them – is a key principle of democratic early childhood education. The Slovene early childhood curriculum (Kurikulum za vrtce, 1999), adopted within the context of an independent state and democratic political system, strongly emphasises the 'philosophy' of making choices and respecting differences. The study conducted in Slovene and Finnish kindergartens (Turnšek, 2005) aimed to investigate the level of decision-making among children, and the factors related to it. A total of 422 Slovene and 32 Finnish teachers assessed the level of children's influence on a Likart scale from 'no influence' to 'crucial influence'. The data processing involved descriptive statistics, analyses of variance (t-test, F-test) and a multiple regression analysis. According to the teachers' assessments, the children's participation in decision-making in Slovene kindergartens is mostly low. In three of five areas of decision-making, the percentage of those having no influence or little influence is about 85% or more. The children's decision-making is higher in issues concerning curriculum planning. The size of a particular pre-school setting and the length of teachers' pedagogical practice are the two most important predictors of children's decision-making. The teachers' assessments from the two countries differ significantly.*

**Key words:** *children's participation, decision-making, early childhood institution, Finland, involvement, Slovenia.*

### 1. **Children's participation – the principle of democratic early childhood education**

Children's participation is a key feature of democratic early childhood education. The theoretical and value foundations of contemporary curricula (OECD, 2004) are based on the following three key guiding principles:

- *the principle of plurality* (diversity, alternatives, variety of choices);
- *the principle of equity* (equal opportunities, overcoming discrimination, respect for human/children rights, inclusiveness); and
- *the principle of participation* (ethics of participation and involvement).

On a micro level, democratisation has implications for human relations within pre-schools, especially for changing the role of the children. Democratic pedagogies emphasise the importance of children's 'involvement' in intrinsically motivated learning activities (Leavers, 1994), encouraging children to make their own choices (Hohmann and Weikart, 2002) and create their own meanings of knowledge (Rinaldi, 2005, May & Carr 1996). There is growing recognition that children learn about democracy through reciprocal relationships with adults who encourage their participation (Korpi, 2000). Observing the child's development, 'listening' (Rinaldi, 2005), and empowering children to take responsibility for their own actions are becoming key teacher competences. The 'pedagogy of listening' is becoming an important paradigm in early childhood. According to C. Rinaldi, listening means being open to others and to what they have to say, listening to the hundred (and more) languages, with all our senses.

The Slovene public pre-school system has had a long tradition of state regulation and professionalisation. The 'movement' for the democratisation of the Slovene early childhood system began in the early eighties, and was formalised by the end of the nineties in the new national curricula (*Kurikulumum za vrtce*, 1999). The re-conceptualisation of the curricula has been part of the whole educational system reform (White Paper on Education, Krek 1996) within the context of the independent democratic state. The key underlying curricula principles are democracy and plurality of the value systems, cultures and knowledge. The national curricula is in line with current world trends, and in many points contrasts with the socialist concept of pre-school education and with the didactically oriented programmes prevalent in the seventies, not only in Slovenia, but also elsewhere in the world (Batistič Zorec, 2003). Special attention in the reform is paid to the elements of the institutional 'hidden curricula' (Apple and King, 1977; Jackson, 1990). The recommendations are directed towards overcoming the rigid, overly collectivistic everyday life and learning found in the pre-schools of the time (De Batistič, 1990, Bahovec and Kodolja, 1995). Children are regarded as individuals who make choices and decisions, with the right to retreat from group-oriented rituals, and who enjoy privacy and intimacy inside the institution.

The participation concept consists of two key concepts: *involvement* and *decision-making*.

Participation means being involved in planning every day activities, belonging to the group and feeling included when resolving problems. It also

means being consulted on a daily basis and exerting significant influence on important issues concerning one's well-being within an institution. Kjærholt (2005, p. 167) argues that the space created for children's rights to participate in pre-school institutions is rather limited:

*'It is designed in a particular architectural style, with particular toys and furniture representing values and norms concerning how to behave as a child in the institution. [...] Placing children in this age-related social order clearly imposes many restrictions on the choices that are available to them. For example, they are not able to choose to participate in an intergenerational relationship and interact with age groups other than preschool children; they cannot participate in working activities, or decide to engage in activities together with their parents or older siblings; nor can they choose to go outside the institution. It is important to bear in mind, therefore, that the children's voices that the discourse requires staff to listen to are produced within this particular social and ideological space'.*

The participation concept is part of a 'new sociology of childhood' which considers children as active subjects, citizens with rights, experts in their own lives and active participants in research. It challenges the traditional developmental paradigm which regards children as incomplete, as going through a process of linear progress. It requires a shift from the traditional conceptualisations of childhood as a state of immaturity, incompetence and inability to understand the world. Adults are seen as solely and fully responsible for children since they know best what is good for them; it is generally assumed that they will always act in the best interest of children. The *ethics of participation* (Hoffman, 1994) and the *strength perspective* (Saleebey, 1992) indicate a post-modern shift towards shared responsibility. The ethics of participation obligates professionals to renounce their power over the 'truths' and final answers, i.e. power that does not belong to them. Instead, they should create opportunities for dialogue in order to find joint solutions. The *strength perspective* emphasises that professionals should mobilise people's strengths, talents, abilities and personal resources in pursuing their own personal goals and visions.

Children's rights discourses, and the practices connected with the rights of children to be listened to and to be active participants have been widespread in Nordic countries from the early nineties. Since then, the forming of children as social participants in early childhood centres has also become an important challenge for other countries (Clark, Kjærholt and Moss, 2005). Not much research work has been done on children's participation, especially with children under school age. Pramling Samuelsson (2004, p. 4) claims that 'it seems as though researchers think that children must be close to becoming adults in

order to be allowed to be heard and to express their perspectives'. Sheridan and Pramling Samuelsson (2001) found that participation in decision-making is of vital importance for children in Swedish kindergartens. A comparative survey observing pre-school settings in 17 countries (Weikart, Olmsted and Montie, 2003) offers indirect conclusions on children's institutional participation. It shows that in most pre-school settings not only adult-centred interaction and negative child-management approaches prevail, but also a lack of adult listening behaviour. In this sort of context, it seems unlikely that children's participation will be promoted.

In the 90s, two qualitative studies (De Batistič, 1990, Bahovec and Kodelja, 1995) drew attention to non-democratic elements in the hidden curriculum of kindergartens (see Apple and King, Jackson). By comparing teachers' practices with their explanations and arguments, M. De Batistič (1996) concludes that in Slovene kindergartens children's needs are generally met quite satisfactorily, while the particular needs and expectations of an individual child are rarely taken into account. She found that the learning activities were structured and pre-planned almost entirely by adults. A poor level of individualisation of everyday routines was also indicated. In some kindergartens, the internal ideology of 'everyone doing the same at the same time' was identified (Bahovec and Kodelja, 1995), allowing few opportunities for children to 'escape' from the collective-oriented routines and to express what they really wanted.

At about the same time, a retrospective study was conducted of children's memories and experiences in one early childhood cooperative<sup>1</sup> (Kranjc and Radovan, 1998). The study indicated that 'having the opportunity to decide about things' was a crucial factor in children's evaluation of their kindergarten experiences. The description of children's involvement formed a major part of the memories of their kindergarten experiences. In addition, decision-making was an important part of group identification. Children from the cooperative said they felt 'privileged' compared with other children since they 'had no strict schedule to follow' and 'discussed issues at adult-children assemblies'.

## **2. The method**

### **2.1 The problem and research questions**

Slovene public pre-school institutions (in short: pre-schools, kindergartens) conduct a full-time programme; children spend eight to nine hours per

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<sup>1</sup> The cooperative was founded in 1991 as a welfare-mix organisation serving parents who wanted to participate fully in the children's education within the institution. The parents of pre-school children took the initiative to rent the facilities of a public kindergarten and took turns as 'part-time teachers' of their own and other participants' children. In addition, one professional teacher was employed full time.

day in institutional care. Therefore, it is important for teachers to consider whether children are given enough opportunities to create their institutional life and make decisions about issues that are important for them. The Slovene national curriculum recommends that teachers provide a variety of learning opportunities, contents and materials in order to strengthen the children's right to choose. However, the recommendations imply choices between alternatives suggested by adults rather than giving the children the possibility of real participation. Since previous research (Sheridan and Pramling Samuelsson, 2001) indicate that children's decision-making in kindergarten is limited to the contexts of children's activities, we have focused on more 'demanding' areas of decision-making indicating higher levels of participation.

Langsted (1994) emphasises that it is the cultural climate which shapes the ideas that the adults in a particular society hold about children; the wish to listen to and involve children originates in this cultural climate. The initial assumption of the survey was that there might be differences between Slovene and Finnish teachers in valuing the democratic principles of early childhood education. Namely, there are some crucial differences between the two countries considering indicators of pro-democratic culture (Inglehart, 1997, pp. 102-103).

## **2.2. Research questions**

The study aimed to assess:

- to what extent children exert influence on decisions in particular areas of decision-making;
- whether there are significant differences between the assessments of Slovene and Finnish teachers; and
- the factors related to children's decision-making in Slovene kindergartens (are teachers' professional characteristics, such as level of education and pedagogical experience, important factors in decision-making, what is the role of subjective factors, such as teachers' work satisfaction and satisfaction with the choice of profession, does the size of pre-school setting play an important part, what is the role of local community factors?).

## **2.3 The sample and data gathering**

Questions regarding the level of decision-making were part of the survey on teachers' democratic values, beliefs and preferences (Turnšek, 2005). The study began with a pilot questionnaire aimed at gaining teachers' feedback on the relevance of the questions. We randomly selected 16 kindergartens (from the list of the Ministry of Education and Sport) in all (5) major

Slovene regions. All the respondents employed in the selected settings as 'early childhood teachers' completed the questionnaire.

In the Slovene representative sample, there were 422 early childhood teachers. Half of the teachers worked in urban areas (53.8%), and less than half in semi-urban areas (46.2%). Of the Slovene teachers, 55.9 % had upper secondary qualifications, 31.5 % had completed a two-year higher education early childhood programme at the Faculty of Education, and 7.7% a three-year undergraduate vocational early childhood programme; 1.8% had completed other university programmes. In the Finnish sample, there were 230 teachers mainly from the central and northern regions of Finland. Of the Finnish teachers, 72.6% had a college level qualification, 22% had a university level degree, and 4.4% had other qualifications. Data processing and analysing included descriptive statistics, analyses of variance (t-test, F-test), and a multiple regression analysis.

## 2.4. Variables

Dependent variables are: *children's influence on...*

- *purchasing toys and materials;*
- *furnishing and decorating classrooms;*
- *organisation and content of celebrations and other events;*
- *choosing their 'teacher' or activity; and*
- *planning daily activities.*

The variable *overall level of decision-making* represents the individual sums of the respondents' assessments of all the areas of decision-making. Independent variables are explained in Table 1.

**Table 1:** Independent variable list

<i>Variable name</i>	<i>Range</i>
<i>Teachers' level of education</i>	secondary education – teacher training college 2-year higher education programme for early childhood teachers 3-year undergraduate vocational programme of early childhood education
<i>teachers' pedagogical experience</i>	From 1 year to 35 years working in kindergarten
<i>teachers' age</i>	From 24 to 56 years
<i>Teacher's work satisfaction</i>	From 1 = not at all satisfied to 10 = very satisfied.
<i>Teacher's satisfaction with the occupation</i>	I would choose to be a pre-school teacher again I would probably choose another profession I would definitely choose another profession
<i>Size of kindergarten</i>	From 6 teachers to 55 teachers employed in the setting
<i>National region</i>	N = 5
<i>Type of community</i>	Urban, semi-urban

### 3. Results

#### 3.1 Children's decision-making in Slovene kindergartens

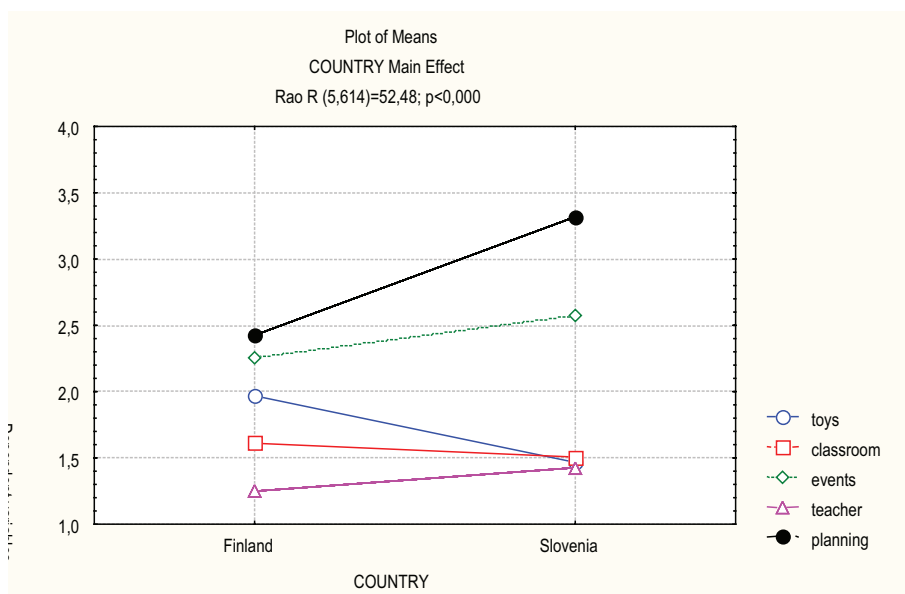
Teachers were asked to *assess to what extent the children exert influence on decisions in kindergarten.*

**Table 2:** Levels of children's decision-making – Slovene kindergartens

Children's influence on:		No influence	Very little influence	Some influence	Strong influence	Crucial influence	n. a.
<i>purchasing toys and didactic materials</i>	n	266	103	31	8	1	13
	%	63.03	24.41	7.35	1.90	0.24	3.08
<i>furnishing and decorating pre-school classrooms</i>	n	259	102	36	10	2	13
	%	61.37	24.17	8.53	2.37	0.47	3.08
<i>organisation and content of celebrations and other events</i>	n	82	104	151	57	20	8
	%	19.43	24.64	35.78	13.51	4.74	1.90
<i>choosing 'their own' teacher/activity</i>	n	275	103	22	3	6	13
	%	65.17	24.41	5.21	0.71	1.42	3.08
<i>planning daily activities.</i>	N	18	49	176	124	44	11
	%	4.27	11.61	41.71	29.38	10.43	2.61

According to the teachers' estimations, the children's participation in decision-making in Slovene kindergartens is mostly low. In three of five areas of decision-making, the percentage of those having *no influence* or *little influence* is about 85% or more. Only about two percent of children exert *strong* or *crucial influence* on deciding which toys and materials should be bought, how their classroom should be furnished or decorated and which activities they will attend. (In kindergartens, various curriculum activities are prepared at a classroom level or at the level of the institution: children can choose among the teachers initiating those activities). The levels of decision-making are higher in areas concerning curriculum planning. About one-fifth of teachers claim that children can contribute ideas regarding ways to conduct celebrations (e.g. birthdays, mother's day) and other important kindergarten events. According to two-fifths of teachers, the children exert strong or crucial influence on the planning of the daily activities (Table 2).

The assessments of the teachers from the two countries differ significantly (Graph 1). In Finnish kindergartens, the children seem to create their immediate classroom environment to a higher extent, while in Slovene kindergartens the children exert a stronger impact on the planning of the 'daily programme' and special events.

**Graph 1:** Children's levels of decision-making in Slovene and Finnish kindergartens

### 3.2 Factors determining children's decision-making – Slovene kindergartens

#### 3.2.1 Teachers' professional characteristics

The children's decision-making is not connected to the teachers' level of formal education. The most educated group of teachers report a higher level of children's participation than the other two groups, but the differences are not significant ( $F = 1.976$ ,  $p = 0.140$ ).

**Table 3:** Children's overall level of decision-making according to years of teachers' working experience

Years of working in kindergarten	Means	N	Std. Dev.
0 – 5 years	9.4	16	2.7
6 – 15 years	9.5	58	2.5
16 – 25 years	10.3	250	2.7
26 or more years	11.2	66	3.6
All	10.3	390	2.9

The children's decision-making increases with the teachers' working experience ( $F = 4.460$ ,  $p = 0.0043$ ) (Table 3). Teachers with more working



experience tend to put children's decision-making at a higher level. (Levene's test of homogeneity of variance is 0.033, which means that the assumption of equal group variances fails. In this case, Brown-Forsythe's test is more accurate; it confirms that the differences are indeed significant.) However, the differences among the teachers' age groups are not significant ( $F = 1.019$ ,  $p = 0.384$ ) which confirms the sole impact of the variable working experience.

### 3. 2.2 Subjective factors

The children's decision-making shows no significant connection with the teachers' work satisfaction. Both the 'extreme groups', the teachers who are extremely satisfied at work and those who are the least satisfied, assess the children's overall level of decision-making higher than those 'in between'. However, the differences are not significant ( $F = 1.228$ ,  $p = 0.2938$ ). Another variable follows a similar pattern: the teachers who are most satisfied with the choice of profession and those that are the most dissatisfied tend to place children's decision-making at a higher level. Again, the differences are not significant ( $F = 0.7584$ ,  $p = 0.4691$ ).

### 3. 2.3 Local community factors

**Table 4:** Children's overall level of the decision-making in five Slovenian regions

Region No.	Means	N	Std. Dev.
Region 1	10.5	85	2.8
Region 2	9.6	90	2.5
Region 3	10.9	112	3.1
Region 4	9.8	49	2.9
Region 5	10.3	63	2.9
All	10.3	399	2.9

In five Slovenian regions, we observed significant variations regarding the children's decision-making ( $F = 2.924$ ,  $p = 0.021$ ) (Table 4). (The assumption of equal group variances is accepted since Levene's test of homogeneity of variance is not significant:  $p = 0.7998$ ). The 'East – West pattern' is recognised. In the eastern regions of the country, the perceived level of children's decision-making is the highest; in extreme western regions, it is the lowest.

There is no difference between kindergartens located in urban areas, i.e. in larger cities, and those in semi-urban communities ( $t$ -value = 1.188  $p = 0.2764$ ).

### 3.2.4 Institutional factors

The study indicates significant variations in children's decision-making among 16 settings ( $F = 2.9426$ ,  $p = 0.0002$ ). (Levene's test of homogeneity of variance is not significant:  $p = 0.2152$ ). The mean value of children's overall level of decision-making varies from 13.4 to 9.4, and the standard deviation values vary from 2.2 to 4.1.

**Table 5:** Children's overall level of the decision-making according to the size of setting

No. of teachers	Means	N	Std. Dev.
1 – 10 teachers	11.3	12	3.3
11 – 20 teachers	11.5	65	3.5
21 – 30 teachers	10.4	122	2.8
31 – 40 teachers	9.6	100	2.6
41 teachers or more	9.1	100	2.6
All	10.3	399	2.9

The children's opportunities for making decisions are also strongly connected with the size of the kindergarten, i.e. with the number of teachers employed ( $F = 4.589$ ,  $p = 0.0012$ ). The teachers who work in smaller kindergartens (up to 20 teachers) report a stronger impact by children on decisions than those in larger institutions (Table 5).

### 3.3 Predictors of children's overall level of decision-making

**Table 6:** Regression summary for the dependent variable of children's overall level of decision-making

	BETA	St. Err. of BETA	B	St. Err. of B	t(369)	p-level
Intercept			4.503	4.735	.95	.342
WORK_SATISF	-.095	.053	-.125	.069	-1.81	.072
PROF_SATISF	.008	.052	.023	.141	.16	.873
AGE_TEACH	.132	.124	.064	.060	1.06	.289
<b>YEARS_IN KINDERG.</b>	<b>.307</b>	<b>.124</b>	<b>.136</b>	<b>.055</b>	<b>2.48</b>	<b>.014</b>
EDUCAT_LEVEL	.094	.055	.367	.215	1.71	.088
KINDERGARTEN	-.089	.057	-.057	.037	-1.55	.121
REGION	.054	.058	.115	.124	.93	.351
URBAN_SEMI URBAN	-.013	.057	-.071	.325	-.22	.827
<b>EMPOYEE_NUMB</b>	<b>-.163</b>	<b>.058</b>	<b>-.034</b>	<b>.012</b>	<b>-2.83</b>	<b>.005</b>

The multiple regression analysis (Table 6) confirmed that the size of a particular pre-school setting and the length of the teachers' pedagogical practice are the two most important predictors of children's decision-making ( $R = 0.2605$ ,  $R_c = 0.0679$ , Adjusted  $R_c = 0.0451$ ,  $F(9,369) = 2.985$ ,  $p < 0.0019$ , std. error of estimate = 2.78).

#### 4. Conclusions with discussion

At the beginning of the discussion, it should be pointed out that the research findings show the subjectively perceived level of decision-making, not the observed one. However, we assume that the teachers' assessments are based on their own experiences and perceptions of children's participatory opportunities in 'their' group of children. The perceived decision-making can, therefore, serve as an indicator of the kindergarten democratic ethos.

The research findings indicate that children's participation in Slovene kindergarten is limited. In addition, participation focuses mainly on issues concerning the planning of the daily curriculum activities and events, while children are mostly excluded from managing the (classroom) environment. It seems they are responsible mainly for 'what they will do'. In most settings, children have at least some voice in planning everyday life; however, they are rarely asked what toys should be bought for the group, how their classroom should look, etc. In other words, the children's impact on the conditions for learning and play is low. The findings are similar to those from Swedish kindergartens, showing that 'children seldom participate in and influence the overall organisation, routines, content and activities that are initiated by the teachers' (Sheridan and Pramling Samuelsson, 2001, p. 188). Finnish children – living in a post-modern democratic culture – do not exert more power over decisions than children in Slovenia. However, they participate more often in matters of an organisational nature.

The size of the pre-school setting is a crucial factor in the children's participation. It is likely that smaller settings offer good conditions for children to feel a sense of belonging and to contribute in meaningful ways. Teaching experiences are another key factor. It seems that with more years of working in kindergartens, teachers feel increasingly confident in creating situations for children to express their ideas, wishes and suggestions, and in accepting them as 'partners'. The initial assumption was that faculty education contributes either to higher assessments by teachers of children's decision-making or perhaps to more critical standpoints. The findings did not confirm the level of teachers' formal education as a reliable predictor. The next assumption, that personal satisfaction (at work and with the profession) plays an important role in providing participatory experiences, was also not confirmed.

The contemporary pre-school in Slovenia has reached high standards of quality provision. In my perception, many kindergartens function as 'hotels' where children are treated as 'guests'. In many ways, the children's institutional life resembles travelling with a tourist agency that strives to schedule every minute of the day. The study indicates that the tradition of 'intentional pedagogy' is still well preserved. A belief still prevails that with efficient planning of the curriculum one can achieve almost all the pre-planned goals. Many teachers perceive their role primarily in relation to the planning *for* children rather than *with* them; in other words, they believe they have to 'make the day' for children. Compared with many European early childhood institutions, Slovene kindergartens are highly accessible, they provide good quality living standards, nutrition and health care. We can say that children tend to be very well 'taken care of', though rarely consulted on the subject of their expectations, ideas and wishes. It seems that the 'provision' and 'protection' aspects of early childhood are guaranteed. At the same time, it is clear that the children's right to express their opinions and to be heard by adults, as defined in Article 12 of *The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child* (1989), is not guaranteed.

What are the reasons for this? To some extent, it can be understood that it is difficult to provide children's participation in kindergarten management and at an organisational level. But why not ask children what sort of games they would like to play, how they want to celebrate birthdays, etc., on a regular basis? It seems likely that offering possibilities to make these kinds of decisions is entirely 'in the hands' of teachers.

One reason might be the lack of teachers' professional competence relevant for the promotion of children's involvement and participation. Many teachers experience a contradiction between perceiving children's participation as a personal priority, and not knowing the appropriate approaches to implement it. Namely, a survey on teachers' democratic beliefs (Turnšek, 2005) showed that for the majority of Slovene teachers increasing children's participation would represent the most important improvement in the quality of pre-schools education.

Therefore, reforms of the university study programmes are required. The training of teachers should focus on 'listening' techniques, for example to children's narratives and stories. According to Bronfenbrenner (1979), for the child's perspective to come through, there is always the question of an adult's attempt to understand and make sense of the thoughts and experiences of the child's life. Pramling Samuelsson (2005) pointed out the need for teachers to allow children to tell their own versions of the meaning of life and talk about different experiences in early childhood education. She emphasises that it is always adults who create opportunities for each child to express himself or herself, and it is the adults who also interpret the child's perspective. Universities should not focus on changing the teachers' beliefs and values;

they should instead provide quality democratic practices and approaches. As we learn from social psychology, in many cases changes in beliefs follow changes in behaviours, not the other way around. For a start, the students' own childhood experiences of involvement and participation can serve as a valuable resource for democratic pre-school practice. To open a dialogue with the students and practitioners, interpretative research approaches are needed.

The teacher's ability to create democratic situations depends on their own position in the kindergarten as well; it should not be seen as a matter of 'good intentions'. The reason for poor participation by children might lie in the lack of their teacher's meaningful impact on issues concerning their own work or professional growth. The obvious question is: are teachers who do not feel they have an important say in kindergarten motivated to share decisions with children? The next research step is to explore the role of the teacher's decision-making at the workplace as a potential factor in determining the children's decision-making.

Finally, reforms of the Slovene national curriculum might also contribute to changes in the general perception of the role of children in society. The existing document mainly emphasises the children's freedom of choice in the context of the variety of learning opportunities, contents, materials, etc., offered by adults. The notion of participation, though, involves opportunities for children to *create* their own choices and alternatives. The (formal) curricula should support children's experiences of making *real* decisions in *real* situations, not minor decisions in situations of 'apparent choice'.

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## FAKTORI KOJI ODREĐUJU DJEČJE DONOŠENJE ODLUKA U SLOVENSKIM PREDŠKOLSKIM USTANOVAMA

Nada Turnšek

**Sažetak** – Dječje sudjelovanje u kreiranju života u vrtićima i donošenje odluka o stvarima koje ih se tiču – ključni je princip ranog demokratskog odgoja. Slovenski kurikulum ranog odgoja (Kurikulum za vrtce, 1999), usvojen je u kontekstu nezavisne države i demokratskog političkog sustava, a naglašava “filozofiju” odabira i poštivanja razlika. Istraživanje provedeno u slovenskim i finskim vrtićima (Turnšek, 2005.) imalo je za cilj istražiti razinu donošenja odluka djece u vrtićima i faktorima koji se uz razinu donošenja odluka vezuju. Ukupno 442 slovenskih i 32 finska odgojitelja procjenjivali su razinu dječjeg utjecaja u donošenju odluka na skali Likertovog tipa od “bez utjecaja” do “potpunog utjecaja”. Podatci su obrađeni deskriptivnom statistikom, analizom varijance (*t*-test, *F*-test) i multiplom regresijskom analizom. Na osnovu odgojiteljskih procjena dječje sudjelovanje u donošenju odluka u slovenskim vrtićima je uglavnom nisko. U tri područja (od njih ukupno pet) postotak odgovora koji procjenjuju razinu dječjeg donošenja odluka kao „bez utjecaja“ ili „malo utjecaja“ je oko 85%. Dječje donošenje odluka nešto je više kada je u pitanju planiranje kurikuluma. Veličina vrtića i godine staža odgojitelja su dva ključna faktora koja određuju dječje donošenje odluka. Značajna je razlika procjene razine dječjeg donošenja odluka između učitelja dvaju zemalja.

**Ključne riječi:** dječje sudjelovanje, donošenje odluka, uključivanje, ustanove ranog odgoja, Finska, Slovenija