



Blagica M. Zlatković¹,
Milica N. Ristić

University of Niš, Teacher Training Faculty in Vranje, Serbia

**Original
scientific paper**

Paper received: Mar 8 2019
Paper accepted: Sep 15 2019
Article Published: Jan 28 2020

Preschool Teachers' Implicit Beliefs on Children's Nature and the Opportunities for Children's Development

Extended summary

The paper looks at the results of the research conducted with the following aims: to determine preschool teachers' implicit beliefs on children's nature and the opportunities for fostering children's development at preschool level; to examine the correlation between their beliefs on children's nature and their beliefs about the opportunities for fostering children's development at preschool level. The importance of the research stems from the belief that preschool teachers base their conduct and relationship with children on their own belief systems, values, and principles.

Dwek's theory (Dwek, 2000) served as a theoretical starting point for considering the relationship between the preschool teachers' understanding of children's nature and their treatment of children. According to her model, implicit theories are a bipolar construct, with theories of entity and incrementality as extreme poles. On one pole there are implicit beliefs that personal attributes are fixed and immutable, which forms the basis of the entity theory. On the other pole we find implicit beliefs that personal attributes depend on context and that they can change and evolve over time, which forms the basis of the incremental theory. If there is an implicit belief about the invariability of the child's attributes, it is assumed that preschool teachers will act differently, than if there is an implicit belief about their flexibility.

¹ blagicaz@pfvr.ni.ac.rs

Copyright © 2019 by the authors, licensee Teacher Education Faculty University of Belgrade, SERBIA.

This is an open access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (CC BY 4.0) (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original paper is accurately cited.

The research was conducted on a convenience sample of preschool teachers (N = 38). The obtained results were analysed using both quantitative and qualitative procedures. The authors designed a Questionnaire on Preschool Teachers' Beliefs which was used as the research instrument. The quantitative analysis was carried out on the data collected from the entire sample, while the qualitative analysis was conducted by means of two separate questionnaires, on the basis of the predominating adherence to either incremental or entity theoretical orientation.

The research was conducted by using an open-ended questionnaire created specifically for this purpose.

The respondents' orientation towards the entity or incremental orientation, as well as their lack of orientation, are indicated in the answers to all the questions in the questionnaire, but they are most evident in the responses to the question "*To what extent can a preschool teacher contribute to the child's development?*". According to the results, the beliefs that are closer to incremental theories (approximately 68%) prevail in a larger number of the preschool teachers in our sample, followed by the beliefs that are a combination of entity and incremental beliefs (approximately 18%), while the entity-oriented beliefs are least represented (approximately 13%). The results obtained in our research and on our sample are similar to the results obtained in other countries (Mickova-Raleva, 2010).

There is no full consistency in the respondents' answers - after giving their opinion about children's nature, the teachers sometimes responded to the questions about the ways of carrying out the activities with children and how these can be encouraged, as well as regarding teachers' personal responsibility in this process, in accordance with their views on children's nature, whereas some teachers were less consistent. We assume that the questions that more directly require the description of teachers' professional activity automatically increase their professional responsibility and direct them to answers that are more in line with the expected behavior, i.e., that are consistent with the concept of the developmentally appropriate practice (Bredekamp & Rosegrant, 1993).

The qualitative analysis of the answers in individual questionnaires allowed us to examine the coherence of the provided answers within the stated implicit beliefs of the preschool teachers. The analysis of the answers in individual questionnaires, presented as a possible model, is justified because of the possibility of identifying the inconsistencies and confronting the preschool teachers with the inconsistencies of their beliefs about children's nature and the possibility of influencing their development.

The process of modifying implicit beliefs is not an easy one, in part because implicit beliefs are deeply rooted in thought process, and in part because once established, implicit beliefs form the frameworks from which new information and experiences are constructed and evaluated. However, it does not mean that the changes of implicit beliefs cannot happen, but the challenge is considerable and requires a lengthy process. The first step in this process requires confronting, reflecting on, and analyzing one's own activities and personal beliefs. As implicit beliefs are evident in the activities that preschool teachers organize, a careful analysis can help the teachers to determine the discrepancy between what they do and what they think they are doing with children when carrying out various activities. The greater the discrepancy between

these beliefs is, the greater the need for a conscious attempt to make changes. The need to confront the preschool teachers with their implicit beliefs begs the question of how their professional preparation, in which they gradually construct their knowledge, using active learning methods, rather than acquiring the ready-made knowledge, might somewhat reconstruct their initial implicit beliefs. It is our expectation that the more the educational system “equips” preschool teachers with specific guidelines on how to act in dealing with children, the less likely it is that their practice will be inconsistent with desirable concepts of child development and encouragement. The process of reconstructing the old beliefs and constructing the new ones that would be more in line with the developmental concept of children’s nature must continue throughout the process of professional practice; in this way, preschool teachers would be systematically introduced to the procedures of self-reflection, self-examination and critical, constructive analysis of the planned activities.

Keywords: implicit theories, preschool teachers, educational practice, children’s nature, child development.

References

- Bennet, N., Wood, L. & Rogers, S. (1997). *Teaching through Play: Teachers’ Thinking and Classroom Practice*. Bristol, PA: Open University Press.
- Bereczki, E. O. & Karpati, A. (2018). Teachers’ beliefs about creativity and its nurture: A systematic review of the recent research literature. *Educational Research Review*. 23, 25-56.
- Bredekamp, S. & Rosegrant, T. (1993). *Reaching potentials: appropriate curriculum and assessment for young children. Volume 1*. Washington D.C.: National Association for the Education of Young Children.
- Brophy, J. & Good, T. L. (1970). Teachers’ communication of different communications for children’s classroom performance. *Journal of Educational Psychology*. 61, 335-374.
- Calderhead, J. (1996). Teachers: Beliefs and knowledge. In: Berliner, D. & Calfee, R. (Eds.). *Handbook of educational psychology*. New York: Macmillan, 709-725.
- Dow, W. (2006). The need to change pedagogies in science and technology subjects: a European perspective. *International Journal of Technology and Design Education*. 16 (3), 307-321.
- Dweck, C., Chiu, C. & Hong, Y. (1995). Implicit Theories and Their Role in Judgments and Reactions: A World From Two Perspectives. *Psychological Inquiry*. 6 (4), 267-285.
- Dweck, C. S. (1999). *Selftheories: Their Role in Motivation, Personality, and Development*. Philadelphia: Psychology Press.
- Dweck, C. (2000). *Self Theories: Their Role in Motivation, Personality and Development*. Columbia: Columbia University Psychology Press.
- Jovanović, O. (2013). Uticaj implicitnih nastavničkih uverenja na učenje i razvoj učenika. *Godišnjak za psihologiju*. 10 (12), 55-68.

-
- Kagan, D. (1992) Implications of Research on Teacher Belief. *Educational psychologist*. 27 (1), 65-90.
 - Kelly, G. A. (1955) *The Psychology of Personal Constructs. Vol. 1: A Theory of Personality*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company Inc.
 - Mickova-Raleva, A. (2010). *Teachers' implicit theories of pupils' intelligence and motivation: a comparative analysis between Macedonian and English teachers*. Skopje: Center for research and policy making.
 - Pajares, M. F. (1992). Teachers' belief and educational research: Cleaning up a messy construct. *Review of Educational Research*. 62 (3), 307-332.
 - Pavlović, J., Maksić, S. (2014). Implicitne teorije kreativnosti nastavnika osnovne škole: studija slučaja. *Psihologija*. 47 (4), 465-483.
 - Rengel, K. (2014). Preschool Teachers' Attitudes towards Play. *Croatian Journal of Education*. 16 (1), 113-125.
 - Romestein, K., Stanković, L. (2017). *Value System, Implicit Pedagogy, and Competencies of a Contemporary Preschool Teacher*. Retrieved May 18, 2018. from www: <https://hrcak.srce.hr/file/271672>.
 - Rutar, S. (2013). *Poti do participacije otrok v vzgoji [Pathways to children's participation in early childhood education]*. Koper: Univerza na Pimorskem, Znanstveno-raziskovalno središče, Univerzitetna založba Annales.
 - Tursnek, N. (2016). Teachers' Implicit Theories on Child Participation in Preschool. *Athens Journal of Education*. 7-18.