

# Traditional Pedagogical Currents in Czech Preprimary Education: Student Reflections and Professional Aspirations

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**Abstract:** Czech preschool education is defined primarily by the principles and foundations enshrined in the Framework Educational Program for Preschool Education (RVP PV), which is based on long-term stable theories of child development and learning. These theoretical foundations have not changed significantly in recent years, but changes in practice are evident in connection with new social demands – digitization, inclusion, and the integration of foreign children and two-year-olds into kindergartens. This paper presents the results of a survey among students of the Preschool Education program, focusing on whether they are determined to enter the profession after graduation and in which areas they feel the need for further education. The results show that most students plan to enter the profession, but emphasize the need for further professional development, particularly in the areas of communication, dealing with problem behavior in children, creating school educational programs, and playing the piano. The stability of the theoretical framework based on the RVP PV is perceived ambivalently by students – as support and certainty, but also as a lack of innovation. The findings may be an impetus for innovation in the university preparation of future kindergarten teachers and for planning their further professional development.

**Keywords:** preschool education, kindergarten teacher training students, professional development

## Introduction

Preschool education in the Czech Republic has been stable for a long time, and its conceptual framework is defined by the curricular reform of the early 21st century. Since 2004, when **the Framework Educational Program for**

**Preschool Education (RVP PV)** was issued as a binding curricular document for kindergartens, this program has become a key starting point for the creation of school educational programs (ŠVP) in individual institutions. The obligation to comply with the RVP PV is enshrined in Section 3 of the Education Act No. 561/2004 Coll., which stipulates that a framework educational program is issued for each field of education, which is binding for the development of ŠVP. This system has ensured a high degree of continuity and uniform direction in preschool education, which can be seen as a factor of stability that has long characterized the Czech education system. However, the question arises as to whether this stability also leads to a certain stagnation, as there have been no fundamental changes to the theoretical framework since the introduction of the RVP PV.

We are currently in a period of revision of curricular documents. A revised RVP PV has been prepared for kindergartens, with mandatory implementation planned for 2026. This document brings minor changes rather than radical innovations, but an important shift is the inclusion of digital competences as part of the educational objectives. It is clear that the digital environment has long been a natural part of the social and educational context. At the European level, we can mention, for example, the Digital Education Action Plan 2021–2027 (European Commission, 2020), which emphasizes the development of digital skills in children and pupils from an early age and the need for their systematic integration into the education systems of member states. The Czech framework is thus responding with a delay to a trend that has been developing in Europe for several years. Since the introduction of the RVP PV into practice, a number of fundamental legislative changes have also been adopted that have significantly affected the practice of kindergartens. These include, in particular, the introduction **of compulsory preschool education from 2017** (Section 34a of the Education Act), the possibility of educating **two-year-old children in kindergartens from 2016**, and the extension of the principles **of inclusive education based on the 2016 amendment to the Education Act**. Inclusion in this concept includes not only children with special educational needs, but also foreign children and children from socially disadvantaged backgrounds.

All of these factors bring new challenges to practice, while the curriculum framework itself remains relatively stable. It is precisely in this context that it is appropriate to examine the expectations and preparedness of **female students** entering the profession **of kindergarten teaching**. Do they have the ambition to participate in change and innovation, or do

they focus on development in areas where they do not feel sufficiently confident to practice? This is a question that can significantly influence their future career direction. University students have the opportunity to reflect on theory and practice in a broader context than is usually the case for graduates of secondary pedagogical schools or higher vocational schools. It can therefore be assumed that their ideas about professional development are more complex and can provide valuable input for modifying the training of kindergarten teachers and for the concept of their further education.

## Stability and innovation in Czech preschools

The Czech preschool education system can be described as stable, mainly thanks to **the Framework Educational Program for Preschool Education (RVP PV)**, which has been a binding curricular framework since 2004. This defines not only the content and objectives of education through five educational areas (The Child and Their Body, The Child and Their Psyche, The Child and Others, The Child and Society, The Child and the World), but also the key competencies that children should achieve by the end of the preschool period. As Syslová (2014) points out, the objectives of preschool education reflect several important pedagogical theories and approaches – personalistic, sociocognitive, and cognitive-psychological. This represents a shift from the earlier focus on the needs of society and predominantly cognitive goals towards an approach that places the child and their comprehensive personal development at the centre of attention (Methodology of Preschool Education Focused on the Didactic Aspects of Working with Children, 2019). In line with these goals, the OECD (2012) also emphasizes that one of the main criteria for quality education is the balanced development of cognitive and socio-emotional competencies. It is precisely this balance that is systematically supported, for example, by the Swedish model of early education, which is rated very highly in international comparisons. An analysis of the Czech RVP PV shows that in many respects it has similar features to the Swedish curriculum, as it also aims at the harmonious and holistic development of the child (Syslová, Borkovcová & Průcha, 2014, p. 94, cited in In Methodology of Preschool Education Focused on Didactic Aspects of Working with Children, 2019.).

The stability of the system is further supported by the **continuing education system for teaching staff (DVPP)**, which is mandatory for kindergarten teachers under Act No. 563/2004 Coll. on teaching staff. According to

Fodorová and Solich (2023), kindergarten teachers' satisfaction with the DVPP offering is not uniform. In their research, they found that teachers with less experience tend to be more satisfied with the content of the courses, while those with more than fifteen years of experience tend to be dissatisfied. More experienced teachers often state that the training offers them information and skills that they already have a good command of and have been implementing in practice for a long time. It should be emphasized that teachers with more than twenty years of experience make up a significant part of the professional population and often have secondary education obtained at secondary pedagogical schools. These schools were, and to a certain extent still are, significantly oriented towards educational components rather than professional and diagnostic competencies. More experienced teachers therefore declare less confidence in areas that are currently essential for practice – especially in working with children with special educational needs and in pedagogical diagnostics, which is now also emphasized in the revised Framework Educational Program for Pre-school Education (Fodorová & Solich, 2023).

Foreign research points out that effective professional education for teachers cannot be reduced to one-off participation in courses or workshops. Fleming and Kleinhenz (2007) emphasize that effective professional learning consists of creating a context and methods that support the frequency and quality of professional reflection on the deeper aspects of pedagogical practice. This approach to education enables teachers to collectively address real problems related to the difference between expected and achieved educational outcomes (Hawley & Valli, 1999, as cited in Fleming & Kleinhenz, 2007). In contrast to so-called "front-end" (superficial) professional learning, which is based primarily on participation in formal courses, Fleming and Kleinhenz (2007) describe "back-end" (deep) professional learning. This provides teachers with the space and support to test new approaches directly in their classrooms (Fullan, 1982, as cited in Fleming & Kleinhenz, 2007). In line with this concept, Soltis (1993, as cited in Collinson et al., 2009) adds that the role of the teacher is no longer seen as static, but as an active process of change in which learning becomes an adventure in meaning-making. Similar aspects are also highlighted by Vujičić and Čamber Tambolaš (2017), who consider the professional development of early childhood teachers to be a key tool for transforming the culture of the entire institution. They point out that professional learning is not only a process of acquiring new skills, but also

a mechanism that changes the way institutions share values, collaborate, and reflect on their own pedagogical practice. This approach leads to the creation of a learning community in which educators become active co-creators of the school culture. This framework is consistent with modern theories of professional learning based on self-reflection, collaboration, and experience sharing, which support teachers as autonomous and reflective professionals.

When it comes to innovation and alternative approaches, more experienced teachers express an increased need for further training in educational programs such as Montessori, Waldorf, and *Začít spolu* (Fodorová, 2024). These programs are perceived as inspiring because they offer new perspectives on the individualization of education, a partnership approach to children, and the development of creativity and self-regulation. This trend shows that while the curricular framework and its conceptual foundations remain stable, innovation in Czech preschool education is mainly driven by alternative methods and approaches. Innovation thus often comes from the bottom up—that is, from the initiative of teachers themselves, who are looking for new ways to connect traditional pedagogical principles with the current needs of children and society.

An interesting question for our research remains how students in the bachelor's program in Preschool Education view the current situation. One may ask whether they also feel the need for fundamental changes and innovations, or whether they focus primarily on developing practical skills in which they are not yet confident. The need for innovation is also reflected in the OECD report (2021), which points out that in the European context, the emphasis in early education is shifting towards diversification of methods, inclusive and individualized approaches, and systematic support for the professional growth of educators.

## **Sustainability in kindergarten: students' perspectives and international inspiration**

In the Czech environment, the issue of sustainability in kindergarten is gradually beginning to be reflected in the training of future teachers. Research shows that students of preschool education perceive environmental development and responsibility towards nature as an important part of their future professional role, but often lack systematic education in ESD (Education for Sustainable Development). In undergraduate training, it is therefore desirable to strengthen students' competencies not only in environmental

behavior, but also in the social and economic dimensions of sustainability, as recommended by OMEP.

To monitor and support sustainable development in preschool education, an evaluation tool for assessing sustainable development in kindergartens was created, based on the international Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) Rating Scale and adapted to the Czech environment as "Preschool Education for Sustainable Development" (2019). This tool allows teachers and students to reflect on the conditions, processes, and educational strategies leading to sustainability ( ) and serves as a means of self-evaluation for kindergartens. Its aim is not to compare schools with each other, but to encourage self-reflection and develop the quality of the educational process in relation to the principles of sustainable development (OMEP, 2019). For Czech universities that train teachers for preschool education, the key challenge is to transfer the principles of sustainability into teaching and student practice—that is, to teach them how to help children understand the world through active discovery, participation, and responsible decision-making (Syslová & Najvarová, 2021; MŠMT, 2021). Experience from OMEP ESD projects and the results of Czech bachelor's and master's theses (e.g., Koptišová, 2021; Véllová, 2022) confirm that the topic of sustainability in kindergartens is gaining increasing attention among students and contributing to their professional maturation.

The importance of this approach is also highlighted by an international study from Greece (Papavasileiou et al., 2017), which shows that preschool education students perceive sustainability as a broader educational framework that goes beyond mere environmental education. They emphasize experiential learning, values of responsibility, empathy, and solidarity, while they have a weaker understanding of systems thinking and the importance of local knowledge in a globalized world. The study also points to the importance of children's participation in decision-making and rule-making in kindergarten, which promotes the development of responsibility and civic competencies. These findings suggest a need to strengthen the environmental and sustainability dimension of future teacher training as a cross-cutting value permeating all areas of education (Papavasileiou et al., 2017).

Studies from Finland (Härkönen, 2003) also provide inspiring ideas for discussion about sustainable kindergartens. For more than three decades, theoretical frameworks for early and preschool education have been in place there, which also serve as a starting point for education

for sustainability. These include Bronfenbrenner's ecological approach emphasizing the relationships between the child, family, and environment; Vygotsky's sociocultural theory of development emphasizing interaction and cooperation; and constructivist learning theories focused on the active formation of knowledge. These approaches show that sustainability cannot be understood merely as a thematic area, but as a systemic principle permeating all education. The Finnish reflection further points out that each of these theoretical frameworks has its benefits and limitations, and therefore it is desirable to create a comprehensive model that links ecological, psychological, and sociocultural aspects. Such a framework allows us to understand children as active participants in education, whose development is closely linked to the environment, community, and global challenges (Härkönen, 2003).

Another European inspiration that strongly emphasizes the environmental dimension of preschool education is the Swedish model. The first curriculum document from 1998 already established environmental education as an integral part of preschool education (Halldén, 2011). The new Lpfö 18 curriculum (Skolverket, 2018a) subsequently explicitly incorporated the concept of education for sustainable development (ESD) (Borg, 2019). Swedish kindergartens can obtain "Green Flag" certification or the designation "Preschool for Sustainable Development." Both programs are based on the principle of a whole-school approach, in which sustainability permeates not only the educational content, but also school management and cooperation with families and the wider community (Henderson & Tilbury, 2004; UNESCO, 2017; Borg, 2019). Research shows that educators link environmental, social, and economic dimensions through thematic units, such as "Human and Planetary Health." However, the most difficult aspect seems to be incorporating the economic dimension, which is often reduced to energy conservation and recycling (Ärlemalm-Hagsér, 2013; Davis, 2008). Nevertheless, children around the age of six are already able to understand basic social and economic relationships (Borg, 2017b), suggesting that kindergarten can be a place where these issues are raised and developed naturally (Borg, 2019). A key element of the Swedish model is child participation—their active involvement in planning activities and deciding on the form of educational projects, for example, as part of the Earth Hour event. This approach promotes responsibility, empathy, and meaningful learning and shows that even young children can be active co-creators of the environment in which they live (Borg, 2019).

From the approaches presented, it is clear that a sustainable kindergarten is not just a pedagogical ideal, but a concrete framework that combines tradition with innovation and also has an impact on the professional training of future teachers. In the case of our students, it can be assumed that they do not perceive sustainability issues in isolation, but in the context of their own professional development and their vision of what kind of teachers they want to be. Although their attention is often focused on acquiring the basic didactic and practical skills necessary to enter the profession, their attitudes also reveal an effort to think about education in a broader social context. Sustainability becomes both a challenge and an opportunity for them to connect the traditional methodological foundations of Czech preschool education with the new priorities of the present. In this regard, their responsibility is key – their desire to be high-quality and professionally competent teachers motivates them to pursue further education. The following chapter therefore presents the results of an analysis focused on the professional needs of our students, specifically what they are unsure about when entering the profession and in which areas they want to develop further.

## Analysis

The aim of the research was to find out how students of the Preschool Education study program reflect on traditional pedagogical approaches embedded in Czech preschool education and what their professional aspirations are in the context of current social demands, especially in relation to innovations and the sustainability of the preschool teacher profession. The research focused on the subjectively perceived readiness to perform the profession, the degree of professional motivation, concerns associated with entering the profession, and areas in which students identify the need for further education.

The research was conducted in the form of a quantitative questionnaire survey. A self-designed questionnaire was used, which contained mainly closed items with the option of one or more answers, or the addition of a free response. The content of the items was designed to capture the students' attitudes towards traditional pedagogical approaches in Czech preschool education, professional readiness and aspirations, while also responding to current trends emphasized in the RVP PV (e.g., inclusion, working with a heterogeneous group of children, communication with parents, use of digital technologies).

The research survey was conducted among 29 third-year students of the bachelor's program. The data were processed using descriptive statistics. The absolute frequencies and percentage representations of individual responses were calculated, which made it possible to identify the prevailing trends in the attitudes and planned professional direction of future teachers. The results were interpreted in relation to the current state and development trends in Czech and international preschool education, with a specific emphasis on the relationship between traditional pedagogical approaches and current innovations in kindergarten practice. The research was conducted in accordance with the ethical principles of pedagogical research. Participation was voluntary and anonymous, and participants were informed about the purpose of the survey and given the option to withdraw at any time. The data obtained was used exclusively for the purposes of this study.

The results showed that the most significant motivating factor for entering the study was clearly an interest in working with children, which was mentioned by 21 students (72%). Other motives mentioned were the opportunity for creative and meaningful work (7 respondents; 24%) and the influence of family and surroundings (4 students; 14%). None of the respondents mentioned motivation based on job security in the public sector. It can therefore be concluded that students in this field enter undergraduate training with predominantly value-oriented expectations.

In terms of subjective perceptions of readiness to practice the profession, 18 students (62%) feel somewhat or definitely prepared, while 4 respondents (13%) reported a neutral attitude and only one student (3%) feels somewhat unprepared. Although the results show a predominantly positive assessment, there are areas of uncertainty that may negatively affect entry into practice.

In terms of career plans after graduation, 18 students (62%) plan to start working in a kindergarten, with 11 of them declaring their decision to be firm. Two students (7%) state that they do not plan to start working in a kindergarten, and the same number are undecided. This data is significant in terms of the risk of possible departure from the profession at an early stage of their careers. Similarly, 15 students (52%) report expectations related to long-term career prospects, while 6 (21%) are uncertain about their future careers in the field and one student considers working in a kindergarten to be only temporary.

A very important finding is that 18 students (62%) are concerned about starting their practical training, with 10 of them describing their concerns as significant. The specific sources of concern are most often related to communication with parents (11; 38%) and insufficient support from colleagues during the adaptation period (10; 34%). These results reflect insufficient preparation for the social and communication skills necessary for high-quality teaching practice. Other factors mentioned were the risk of burnout (7; 24%), working with larger groups of children (6; 21%), and low financial remuneration (6; 21%).

The assessment of preparation for practice within the study program is predominantly positive – 14 students (48%) rate it as rather good and 4 (14%) as very good. However, 4 respondents (14%) rate it as neutral and two (7%) as rather insufficient, which corresponds to the identified areas in which students feel the need to strengthen their competencies. These areas are again dominated by communication with parents (16; 55%) and dealing with children's problem behavior (15; 52%), followed by the creation of curricular documents (11; 38%) and playing a musical instrument (6; 21%). Special educational preparedness and working with digital technologies were mentioned less frequently (3 students each; 10%), but this should not be interpreted as meaning that they are unimportant, especially in view of current trends.

The need for further education is expressed very strongly – 12 respondents (41%) plan to continue their education and 7 (24%) are considering this option, which means that up to 65% of students expect to continue their professional growth. As for the focus of this development, 14 (48%) students declare an interest in remaining in preschool education, while 10 (34%) plan to continue with master's studies or professional specialization. Only a small percentage are considering changing the education sector or transitioning to special education.

## Discussion

The results confirm that the traditional concept of Czech preschool education—based on the principles of children's play, holistic development, and a humanistic approach—is perceived by students as a stable pillar of professional identity and certainty when entering practice. This stability is closely linked to the Czech pedagogical heritage, from the inspiration of Fröbel and Comenius to the current form of the RVP PV. The research

shows that students appreciate the continuity of pedagogical values and their applicability to the education of preschool children.

At the same time, however, students are sensitive to aspects in which traditional approaches may not fully meet the current requirements of practice. In particular, communication with parents, working with children with diverse needs, digital technology skills, and the ability to preventively address children's problem behavior are topics that are not sufficiently emphasized in traditional teaching frameworks.

It is precisely this discrepancy between the stability of theory and the dynamics of practice that creates professional tension, which is reflected in students' concerns when entering employment (62%).

The research also provides important findings on the sustainability of the profession. Low prestige and financial remuneration can undermine the long-term motivation of graduates to remain in the field. In some countries (e.g., Finland, Germany), the position of preschool teacher is valued significantly higher in terms of social trust, systematic supervisory support, and career advancement opportunities. This foreign inspiration can help in the search for strategies to strengthen the attractiveness and long-term stability of the profession in the Czech environment.

However, there is great potential in the high level of interest among students in further education (65%), which can be a source of pedagogical innovation in kindergarten practice. If undergraduate and subsequent support for professional learning is set up correctly, future teachers can become active agents of change – and at the same time continue the high-quality Czech pedagogical tradition.

## Conclusion

Czech kindergartens are based on both a strong tradition and a growing need for innovation. Research results show that students are aware of this dual role of the institution and understand it as part of their own professional identity. A stable theoretical foundation based on the RVP PV (Framework Educational Program for Preschool Education) is an important support for them, but its full implementation in practice requires expanding professional support for beginning teachers and updating training with an emphasis on the actual operation of a kindergarten: communication with parents, working with a heterogeneous group of children, specifically with children with special educational needs, and the use of digital technologies as a means of learning.

If the profession of kindergarten teacher is to be sustainable, it is necessary not only to strengthen the mentoring and supervision system, but also to improve material and social conditions to meet the high demands of the profession. Increasing professional prestige and long-term motivation of graduates are closely linked to the quality of kindergarten services. International experience suggests that a combination of clear professional standards and systematic professional support can ensure the stability and innovative development of preschool education. The results of this study can serve as inspiration for interventions that would make it easier for future teachers to enter the profession and enable them to actively develop Czech preschool education in line with current social challenges.

In conclusion, it can be said that the future of kindergartens in the Czech Republic lies largely in the hands of young teachers who combine respect for tradition with a desire for innovation. If their professional growth is purposefully supported, this combination can be a powerful factor in the sustainable development of the entire system.

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**Abstrakt:** České předškolní vzdělávání je definováno především principy a základy zakotvenými v Rámcovém vzdělávacím programu pro předškolní vzdělávání (RVP PV), který vychází z dlouhodobě stabilních teorií vývoje a učení dětí. Tyto teoretické základy se v posledních letech výrazně nezměnily, ale změny v praxi jsou patrné v souvislosti s novými společenskými požadavky – digitalizací, inkluzí a integrací cizinců a dvouletých dětí do

mateřských škol. Tento článek představuje výsledky průzkumu mezi studenty programu Předškolní vzdělávání, který se zaměřuje na to, zda jsou odhodláni po absolvování studia nastoupit do profese a v jakých oblastech pocítují potřebu dalšího vzdělávání. Výsledky ukazují, že většina studentů plánuje nastoupit do profese, ale zdůrazňuje potřebu dalšího profesního rozvoje, zejména v oblastech komunikace, řešení problémového chování dětí, tvorby školních vzdělávacích programů a hry na klavír. Stabilita teoretického rámce založeného na RVP PV je studenty vnímána ambivalentně – jako podpora a jistota, ale také jako nedostatek inovací. Zjištění mohou být podnětem k inovacím v univerzitní přípravě budoucích učitelů mateřských škol a k plánování jejich dalšího profesního rozvoje.

**Klíčová slova:** předškolní vzdělávání, studenti učitelství mateřských škol, profesní rozvoj

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