

The Experience of Social Pedagogues and Social Workers when Realising the Right of the Child to Participate in Children's Day Care Centres

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Abstract. The objective of the study is to reveal the realities of the realisation of the right of the child to participate in children's day care centres based on the experience of social pedagogues and social workers. Qualitative research was chosen for the study by using the method of semi-structured interview. 11 professionals, who work in children's day care centres in different Lithuanian regions, participated in the study. The study identified the expression of the realisation of the right of the child to participate in children's day care centres. The expression of the right of the child to participate in children's day care centres is associated with a positive position of the professionals in the practice of the child's right to participation, their cooperation with the child, their mutual cooperation, their cooperation with the child's parents/guardians and other institutions when realising the right of the child to participation. The positive position of the professionals is expressed through the understanding of the importance of this right and inclination to realise it, the acknowledgement of the child as an active participant in decision-making, openness to the opinion of the child and nonsuppression of their opinion. The cooperation of the professionals with the child is expressed through the creation of the relationships, which are based on mutual trust, the informing of the child that his opinion is important, that he can express it and be heard, the provision of information to the child in a way that is understandable to him while empowering him to participate in decision-making, the listening to the child and his support, the taking into account the child's opinion while responding to his best interests, the analysis of situations and the discussion of various solutions with the child in a way understandable to him, assistance when taking decisions related to him, the involvement of the child and the taking into account his needs and interests when planning and organising socio-educational activities, the encouragement of the child to assume his obligations and responsibilities. The cooperation of children's day care centres professionals is expressed through their favourable and unified approach towards this right, their involvement in the realisation of this right and the sharing of the experience when realising this right. The cooperation with the child's parents/guardians is expressed through the assistance to them in understanding the importance and expression of this right, their consulting and assistance while creating conditions for this right to be expressed at home. The cooperation with other institutions is expressed

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through the sharing of information and insights on the positive aspects of the realisation of this right and the discussion of arising difficulties and possibilities to overcome them.

Keywords: child, day care centres, the right of the child to participate, social pedagogues, social workers.

Socialinių pedagogų ir socialinių darbuotojų patirtis realizuojant vaiko dalyvavimo teisę vaikų dienos centruose

Santrauka. Tyrimo tikslas atskleisti vaiko dalyvavimo teisės realizavimo realijas vaikų dienos centruose remiantis socialinių pedagogų ir socialinių darbuotojų patirtimi. Tyrimui pasirinktas kokybinis tyrimas, taikant pusiau struktūruotą interviu metodą. Tyrime dalyvavo 11 socialinių pedagogų ir socialinių darbuotojų, dirbančių vaikų dienos centruose skirtinguose Lietuvos regionuose. Tyrimu identifikuota vaiko dalyvavimo teisės realizavimo raiška vaikų dienos centruose. Vaiko dalyvavimo teisės raiška vaikų dienos centruose sietina su pozityvia darbuotojų pozicija vaiko dalyvavimo teisės realizavimui praktikoje, jų bendradarbiavimu su vaiku, jų tarpusavio bendradarbiavimu, jų bendradarbiavimu su vaiko tėvais/globėjais bei kitomis institucijomis įgyvendinant vaiko dalyvavimo teisę. Pozityvi darbuotojų pozicija vaiko dalyvavimo teisės realizavimui praktikoje reiškiasi šios teisės svarbos suvokimu ir nusiteikimu ją realizuoti, vaiko kaip aktyvaus sprendimų priėmimo dalyvio pripažinimu, atvirumu vaiko nuomonei, jo nuomonės neužgožimu. Darbuotojų bendradarbiavimas su vaiku reiškiasi abipusiu pasitikėjimu grįsto ryšio sukūrimu, vaiko informavimu, kad jo nuomonė svarbi, jis ją gali išsakyti ir bus išklaustas, informacijos suteikimu vaikui suprantamu būdu, įgalinant jį dalyvauti priimančias sprendimus, vaiko išklausymu ir jo palaikymu, atsižvelgimu į vaiko nuomonę atliepiančio geriausio intereso, situacijų analizavimu ir įvairių sprendinių aptarimu su vaiku jam suprantamu būdu, pagalba jam priimančias su juo susijusias sprendimus, vaiko įtraukimu ir atsižvelgimu į jo poreikius, interesus planuojant ir organizuojant socioedukacines veiklas, vaiko skatinimu prisiimti įsipareigojimus ir atsakomybes. Vaikų dienos centrų darbuotojų bendradarbiavimas reiškiasi jų palankiu ir vieningu požiūriu į šią teisę, jų įsitraukimu į šios teisės realizavimą ir dalijimusi patirtimi realizuojant šią teisę. Bendradarbiavimas su vaiko tėvais/globėjais reiškiasi padedant jiems suprasti šios teisės svarbą ir raišką, jų konsultavimu ir pagalba sudarant sąlygas šiai teisei reikštis namuose. Bendradarbiavimas su kitomis institucijomis reiškiasi dalijimusi informacija ir įžvalgomis apie šios teisės realizavimo teigiamus aspektus ir aptariant kylančius sunkumus ir jų įveikos galimybes.

Pagrindiniai žodžiai: vaikas, dienos centras, vaiko dalyvavimo teisė, socialinis darbuotojas, socialinis pedagogas.

Introduction

Children are one of the most vulnerable groups in society the ensuring of the rights of which requires special attention. It is therefore no coincidence that Lithuania, like the rest of the European Union, places great emphasis on the protection of children's rights. The protection of children's rights is considered to be an integral element of the human rights system; therefore, the way in which children's rights are implemented and developed in a State, and the attitude of the public towards the implementation of the rights of the child and his or her protection, are also indicative of the process of ensuring and developing human rights (Dudaitė & Kairienė, 2017).

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which was adopted in 1989, is the main international document regulating the rights of children. Lithuania joined the Convention in 1992 (it was ratified in 1995) and obliged herself to guarantee the rights provided by the Convention for every child. One of the rights of the child is to participate in decision-making, which is enshrined in Article 12 of the Convention. The essence of the right to participate is that every child has his or her own opinion and is able to express it on the issues related to him or her. It is important that their opinion be

duly taken into account according to the age and maturity of the child (Melton, 2006). It is necessary that children would be provided with an opportunity to be heard in any process affecting them (Henaghan, 2017). Skaugė et al. (2021) notes that the purpose of participation is not the fact that children would always participate fully, but that every child would have an opportunity to choose the greatest possible level of his or her participation, which corresponds to his or her abilities. The children's right to participation is unique, because it recognises that, although children depend on their parents and other adults, however, they have a right to be respected as humans, who have also right to participate in the decision-making which affects them (Lansdown et al., 2014). Attention should be drawn to the fact that the participation of the child is not a momentary act, but a continuous process, therefore, it is important that the adults provide opportunities for the realisation of the right of the child to participate (O'Hare et al., 2016). Johnson (2011) maintains that the realisation of the right of the child to participate could lead to positive, long-term changes in the area of the welfare of the child and involve changes on individual, institutional and societal level. Therefore, it is very important that children be listened to and their experience be seriously taken into account, because children can provide information, which contributes to the achievement of more positive results (Pölkki et al., 2012).

While implementing means meant for the welfare of the child, which assist in ensuring the rights of the child and his or her rightful interests, particular focus should be drawn to the most vulnerable children, in order to enhance the accessibility of socio-educational service to children and their families, to increase the consciousness and awareness of society on the rights of the child, to create conditions for the comprehensive and harmonious development of children to the end that children would be prepared for independent living in society (Order of the Minister of Social Security and Labour of the Republic of Lithuania No. A1-52 of 24 January 2022 on the Action Plan regarding the Welfare of the Child for 2022–2026). The most socially vulnerable children are provided with socio-educational service in children's day care centres (further on – CDCs). CDCs are most often attended by children from families, which are at social risk and in which the children's rights are infringed. CDCs are regarded as a prerequisite to guarantee the welfare of the child and to safeguard the rights of the child and the possibility to lead his life to the full. These institutions have been given the task to organise a proper involvement of children after their school, to detract children from their negative social environment and to develop their resilience to social risk factors, to meet essential needs of the child and to provide the family with an opportunity to receive socio-educational services in order to strengthen the functioning of the family, its empowerment, to ensure the well-being of the child, (self-)development and to implement the children's rights (Gudžinskienė et al., 2016).

One of the functions of the social pedagogues and social workers, who work in CDCs, is the implementation of the children's right to participate. The participation of the child must be safeguarded in the micro-environment, which is favourable to the child, while providing the child with the information to take a decision in the language, which is

comprehensible to him, and creating conditions for the child to express his or her opinion through the means, which are acceptable to him, and to participate in decision-making. When children feel attention and a relationship, which is based on trust, privacy and conscientiousness they will desire to get involved in the process of participation (Cossar et al., 2014).

In Lithuania, CDCs operate since 1996. Having conducted studies, which analyse the operation of CDCs in Lithuania, their analysis established that there is a lack of studies, which reveal the realisation of the right of the child to participate in CDCs. Therefore, it is reasonable to research practical experiences of the realisation of children's right to participate in CDCs.

The research problem of the study is the following: How is the right of the child to participate implemented in child day care centres?

The aim of the study is to reveal the realities of the realisation of the right of the child to participate in children's day care centres based on the experience of social pedagogues and social workers. The analysis of the experiences of professionals working with children is important in highlighting the realities of the implementation of the right of the child to participate in children's day care centres and improving the effectiveness of the implementation of the right of the child to participate based on the knowledge obtained through scientific research.

Research methodology

Method of data collection

In order to reveal the realities of the realisation of children's right of participation at CDCs a qualitative study was chosen. The study was conducted by using the method of a semi-structured interview, which enables to move closer to the perception of human experiences, the identification of meanings, the definition of situations and the interpretation of reality (Creswell, 2014). The research was much broader, covering several topics of questions. This article deals with only one topic of questions related to the realisation of the child's right to participate in day care centers. In order to reveal the realities of the realisation of children's right of participation at CDCs, during the interview, the social pedagogues and social workers were given the following questions: What conditions do social pedagogues and social workers create for children, who attend CDCs, to realise their right to participate? How is the right of the child to participate expressed in CDCs?

The sample of the research

Targeted selection of the study participants was used in the study. The study employed criterion sampling of the study participants. The method of criterion sampling is effective, because it assists in collecting high-quality data (Rupšienė, 2007). The participants of the study were selected according to the following criteria: 1) social pedagogues and

social workers who work at CDCs, 2) at least 3 years of work experience at CDC. The study was conducted in the February–March of 2023. All the interviews were conducted face-to-face while recording interviews at the same time. 11 social pedagogues and social workers, who work in CDCs in different Lithuanian regions, participated in the study. Collection of the research data was stopped in compliance with the data saturation principle. When it was noticed that the answers obtained during interviews started repeating the earlier received data, the new research participants were not included in the research.

Method of data analysis

The obtained data were analysed by using the content analysis method. According to Creswell (2014), a content analysis is a technique, which, having examined the specificity of a text, allows to draw reliable conclusions objectively and systematically. When performing a qualitative content analysis this consistency was adhered to multiple reading of the transcribed interview texts and reflection on them, data encoding while singling out semantic units in the text, grouping codes into subcategories, formation of categories from subcategories, integration of categories/subcategories into the context of the phenomenon under analysis, the interpretation of study data (Creswell, 2014). Creswell (2014) emphasises that content analysis is a valid method for making specific inferences from the analysed text.

The study data were analysed by the two researchers. According to Žydžiūnaitė and Sabaliauskas (2017), if only one researcher analyses the findings, it is difficult to ensure the validity and reliability of the results. Before beginning to analyse the data, the researchers agreed regarding the data analysis. Zhang and Wildemuth (2017) note that when study data is analysed by a few researchers it is necessary to discuss data encoding rules and to practically verify that all the researchers uniformly understand them. Primary data analysis was performed by every researcher individually by encoding data and uniting them into primary subcategories and categories. After that, the researchers compared initial subcategories and categories, discussed and completed their formation by consensus.

Ethics of the research

The study was based on the respect for personal privacy, benevolence and attitude not to harm a researchee, confidentiality (Aluwihare-Samaranayake, 2012). The participants of the study participated voluntarily. They were briefed on the purpose and the use of the study, the method of study data collection and the procedure of the study, confidentiality was ensured. When analysing the results of the study, the characteristics of study participants are presented generally while ensuring that personal information, which would allow to recognise a particular participant of the study, will not be presented, the confidentiality of the participants and nondisclosure of personal identity information had been guaranteed, the names of the study participants were encoded by using a letter ‘A,

B, C ' and so on. The encoded data of all the study participants are available only to the researcher.

Results of the research and discussion

The expression of the realisation of the right of the child to participate in children's day care centres

Having performed the analysis, it was established that, in CDCs, children are allowed to realise their right to participate. The findings of the study show that the realisation of the right of the child to participate in CDCs should be associated with the positive position of the professionals regarding the realisation of the right of the child to participate, the cooperation of the professionals with the child, their own cooperation among themselves and with parents/guardians of the child and other institutions when implementing the right of the child to participate (Table 1).

Table 1. **The expression of the realisation of the right of the child to participate in children's day care centres**

Categories	Subcategories
Positive position of the professionals regarding the realisation of the right of the child to participate	The perception of the importance of the right of the child to participate and disposition to realise it
	The recognition of the child as an active participant in decision-making
	Openness to the opinion of the child
	Nonsuppression of the opinion of the child
The cooperation of the professionals with the child while implementing the right of the child to participate	The creation of the relationship with the child based on mutual trust
	The informing of the child that his or her opinion is important, that it can be expressed and that he or she can be heard
	The provision of information in the way which is understandable to the child when empowering his or her participation in decision-making
	Listening to the child and his or her support
	Taking into account the opinion of the child in line with the best interests of the child
	The analysis of situations and the discussion of various decisions with children in the way which is understandable to them
	Assistance to children when taking decisions related to them
	The involvement of children and taking into account their needs and interests when planning leisure activities
	The involvement of children in the organisation of leisure activities
	The encouragement of children to realise their right to participate while assuming obligations and responsibilities

Categories	Subcategories
The cooperation of the professionals in CDCs when realising the right of the child to participate	Favourable and unanimous approach of the professionals regarding the right of the child to participation
	The involvement of the professionals of CDCs in realising the right of the child to participation
	Experience sharing by the professionals when realising the right of the child to participate
Cooperation with the parents/guardians of the child while implementing the right of the child to participation	Assistance for parents in understanding the importance of the right of the child to participate
	Assistance for parents in understanding the expression of the right of the child to participate
	Parental consulting and assistance while creating conditions for the expression of the right of the child to participation at home
The cooperation with other institutions when ensuring the right of the child to participate	Sharing information and insights on positive aspects of the realisation of the right to participation
	The discussion of the difficulties arising to the realisation of the right to participation and possibilities to overcome them

The study identified that, in order to realise the right of the child to participation in CDCs, the positive position of the professionals towards the realisation of this right is important. The positive position of the professionals towards the realisation of the right of the child to participation should be associated with the perception of the importance of the right of the child to participation and disposition to realise it in practice. According to the participants of the study, “we as professionals firstly need to perceive the importance of the right to participate to the child, his well-being and try to implement it in daily life” (D), “the positive approach of the professional towards this right, his positive attitude creates prerequisites for the practical implementation of this right” (A). This shows that the implementation of the right of the child to participate is possible when the professionals perceive the importance of this right and endeavour to implement it. The studies of other scientists also show that positive attitudes of specialists assist in facilitating the realisation of the right to participation (Leviner, 2019).

The study shows that the positive position of the professional towards the implementation of the right of the child to participate should also be associated with the recognition of the child as an active participant in decision-making and the openness to the opinion of the child and non-suppression of his opinion. The participants of the study noted, “it is important to understand that a decision cannot be taken without the participation of the child himself or herself” (G), “for an professional, it is important he or she takes an approach which focuses on the child while recognising the importance of the opinion of the child and being open to the opinion of the child” (B), “to try to take an open position towards the opinion of the child, to allow the child to give it out... not to suppress him or her” (K). Bessell (2011) also points out that the attitude of the adults towards the participation of children in decision-making leads to the realisation of the right of the child to participation. If the attitude of the adults towards the right of the child to participate is

positive, then children are provided with favourable conditions to realise the aforementioned right. The negative attitude of the adults becomes a significant barrier to realise the right of the child to participate. That means that the lack of a favourable approach of the professionals of CDCs towards the participation of children in decision-making not only aggravates the involvement of children in socio-educational activities itself but can also become a sufficient obstacle to ensure the quality of these activities and the well-being of the child.

The findings of the study highlighted the importance of the cooperation of the professionals with the child when implementing the right of the child to participate. The study revealed that the cooperation of the professionals with the child should be associated with the creation of the relationship between the professional and the child which is based on trust. According to the participants of the study: "in order that the child would speak, would open up, it is important that he trusts you" (C), "the child, who trusts a professional, will be more willing to communicate with him, he or she will give his or her opinion out on the talked over issue, will discuss with him" (A). This shows that a close relationship, which is based on trust, between the professional and the child creates preconditions for the child to get involved in the participation process. The importance of the relationship with specialists which is based on trust has been underlined by Wolfson et al. (2010). When children feel limited relationships with the professionals it impedes the implementation of the right of the child to participate effectively (Franklin and Sloper, 2009).

The study shows that the informing of the child that his or her opinion is important, that he or she can express it and he or she will be heard is an important condition for the realisation of the right of the child to participation. This is illustrated by the following statements of the study participants: "we talk with children about the importance of their opinion, we encourage them to give it out by saying that it's important for us to hear them" (E), "it's important that the child knows that his or her opinion is important for us, the adults, that we are ready to listen to them, to talk together on various issues which are relevant to them" (J), "when the child knows that he or she will be listened to, his or her opinion will be heard, that his or her opinion is valuable to us, then he or she speaks bolder and is more open" (F). Similar tendencies have also been revealed by other studies. Križ and Roundtree-Swan (2017) maintain that the informing of children is a necessary condition in order to involve children in meaningful participation. The adults must inform the children and show that their utterances can provide with valuable information when taking decisions. Individual conversations with children, openness and friendliness when creating the dialogue with them show to children that they are listened to. Children always appreciate such things and become more open and express their opinion when the adults show that the opinion of children is important to them and take decisions flexibly while cooperating with children (Pölkki et al., 2012; Van Bijleveld et al. 2015).

The study revealed that, when empowering the child to participate in decision-making, it is important he or she be provided with information in the way which is unders-

tandable. According to the participant of the study, “if the child doesn’t understand the information provided by an adult, it will be difficult for him or her to get involved in the participation process, therefore, it should be adhered to the age of the child, his or her communicational abilities, understanding and to provide the information in an understandable way” (I). The study shows that it is important not only to inform the child that the child can express his or her opinion, but it is also important to listen to the child when he or she give an opinion out and to support him or her. According to the participant of the study, “it is not sufficient for the child to know that his or her opinion is important, but the child also needs to be encouraged to give it out, he or she should be listened to attentively and be heard” (G). This shows that listening to the child is an important component of the realisation of the right of the child to participate, the importance of which has been emphasised by other authors as well. According to Merkel-Holguin et al. (2019), in order that the participation of the child in processes would be meaningful, children should be listened to, they should be given an opportunity to boldly express their views and opinion. Specialists should hear and notice both verbal and nonverbal languages of the child: facial expressions, silence pauses, to clarify doubts or anxiety.

When realising the right of the child to participate it is important to take into account the opinion of the child in line with his best interests, to discuss decisions with children in the way understandable to them, if need be, to assist the child in taking decisions related to him or her. According to the participants of the study, “it is important to take into account the opinion of the child, but also not to forget his or her best interests” (H), “it is difficult for some children to identify what they want, what decision to take, therefore, they need to be encouraged, it should be explained to them understandably, to help them, but while respecting their will” (J). That shows the importance of an individual approach to the child and, if need be, the provision of the assistance to the child when taking decisions, but not deciding instead of them. Strömpla and Luhamaab (2020) also note that when difficulties arise children should be provided with assistance which can help them to express their view, opinion when taking decisions. The authors maintain that every child possesses different abilities, therefore, the adults must have appropriate methods and means to reveal them, to provide auxiliary assistance, but not to decide instead of him or her. It is noteworthy that auxiliary assistance, when taking decisions, is focused on the encouragement of the independence of the child, and not depowerment when taking decisions instead of him or her.

The study established that the right of the child to participate is realised in CDCs through various socio-educational activities. Children are involved in the planning and organisation of leisure activities while taking into account the needs and interests of children, children are also encouraged to assume obligations and responsibilities. According to the study participants, “in day care centre, we endeavour to ensure meaningful leisure for children by consulting them and taking into consideration their opinion, suggestions, needs, interests” (B), “we plan together with children and organise various activities, we discuss what they like, what they would like, how we might implement” (D), “I can say that children assume obligations when organising their leisure, and that

is very good, because the child participates in his or her activities not only passively, but also expresses himself or herself, learns to take decisions, develops” (K). This shows that it is important to create conditions for children to get involved in various activities and take various decisions during them when realising the right of the child to participate. The ability of children to take decisions increases with the increase of the opportunities provided for them.

The findings of the study show that the cooperation of the professionals of CDCs is important when realising the right of the child to participate. An indistinguishable component of the cooperation of the professionals, when realising the right of the child to participate, is a favourable and unanimous approach of the professionals towards the right of the child to participate. The participants of the study noted that “all the professionals must recognise the right of the child to participate, be favourably inclined towards its realisation” (F), “it will be difficult to implement the right of the child to participate, if one or another professionals disparage the abilities of the child to take decisions, their view, opinion...” (I), “it is important that all the professionals not only know about this right, but also be disposed and feel a duty to implement it at their work” (A). The study shows that in order that the cooperation of the professionals would be smooth, they all must get involved in the realisation of the right of the child to participation and the sharing of their experience when realising the right of the child to participate. That is witnessed by the following statements of the study participants, “we’re most successful when we all ask the children to express their opinion, try to take it into account, encourage to take decisions” (C), “we discuss and express our experience how to involve children in decision-making in a better way, how to make more reserved children talk...” (G), “the sharing of experience helps us learn from each other, find more diverse methods to get the child involved, know the child and meet his or her needs” (B). The importance of the cooperation of the professionals for the implementation of the right of the child to participate has also been emphasised by other scientists. Manful and McCrystal (2010) maintain that all the people, who participate when implementing the rights of the child, including the right to participate, have also the duty to empower the child to participate actively, while recognising the child as an equal participant of interaction, who has the right to express his or her opinion, views, and to take into account his or her views, which would underline the status of the child as an active subject of the law to actively participate in the taking of decision, which would be related to him or her and issues encompassing their life.

The study highlighted the significance of the cooperation of professionals of CDCs with parents/guardians of the child when implementing the right of the child to participate. The study identified that, in CDCs, the professionals assist parents in understanding the importance of the right of the child to participate, its expression and consult parents and provide assistance to them while creating conditions for the expression of the right of the child to participate at home. The participants of the study pointed out, “there are parents who don’t understand the essence, importance and significance of the right of the child to participate for the child, therefore, we talk with parents, we discuss that it

is important to their child” (E), “some parents are inclined neither to listen nor to hear the opinion of the child, his needs, they think that the child is not able to take decisions, according to the parents, “when he grows up he will be responsible for himself, then he’ll be able to take decisions, whereas now this is my responsibility and it’s me who decides,” so we talk with parents that the child must learn to take decisions, because otherwise he’ll not be able to take them” (H), “we assist parents in understanding what that the right of the child to participate is, because some of them understand it narrowly and emphasise only listening to the child” (J), “we talk with parents that it is important they encourage the child to express his or her opinion, it is vital they listen to him or her, support him or her, take into account the opinion of the child, involve the child in decision-making” (F). Hence, the professionals of CDCs understand the importance of the family for the realisation of the right of the child to participation and focus on the cooperation with parents by discussing the significance of the right of the child to participate for the well-being of the child, showing the means of the expression of this right that parents would be able to empower their children to take decisions, and not to depower them. The importance of the family, when realising the right of the child to participate, has also been emphasised by other authors (Olsen, 2022) who maintain that the realisation of the right of the child to participation depends on the opportunities with which the child is provided in the family to participate in decision-making. If the family creates favourable conditions for the expression of the right of the child to participate, then he or she acquires the positive experience of participation.

The study revealed the importance of the cooperation of the professionals of CDCs with other institutions while ensuring the right of the child to participate. The professionals of CDCs share information and insights on positive aspects of the realisation of the right to participation, arising difficulties and possibilities to overcome them. The participants of the study noted, “we maintain relationships and cooperate with the social pedagogues of schools, organise discussions related to the implementation the rights of the child, including the right to participate, arising challenges, we look for the options to address them” (K), “we most often cooperate with schools by sharing our experience, we also invite the experts in various fields (psychologists, children’s rights protection specialists) who are able to provide with useful information about the empowerment of the child to participate” (C). This shows that the cooperation of the professionals of CDCs with the specialists of other institutions, when sharing insights on the opportunities to implement the right of the child to participate, contributes to the development of their competence to implement the right of the child to participate.

Conclusions

The study revealed that, in CDCs, children have an opportunity to realise the right to participate. The realisation of the right of the child to participation in CDCs is expressed in a few aspects. On the one hand, it is related to the positive position of the professionals towards the implementation of the right of the child to participate and their cooperation

with the child. On the other hand, in order to implement the right of the child to participate, the cooperation of the professionals of CDCs among themselves, with the parents/guardians of the child and other institutions is important.

The positive position of the professional towards the implementation of the right of the child to participate in practice is inseparable from their perception of the importance of this right for the well-being of the child and disposition to realise it openly receiving the opinion of the child and recognising the child as an active participant in decision-making. When implementing the right of the child to participate it is important to cooperate with the child, to create a relationship with him or her which is based on trust, to inform the child that his or her opinion is important, that he or she can express it and be heard. It is no less important to involve the child in decision-making by providing him or her with information understandably that he or she would be able to get involved in decision-making. It is also important to discuss with the child while assisting him or her in understanding the consequences of the decisions both to the child and his or her environment. In addition, if the taken decision does not meet the expectations of the child, it is important to explain the motives behind the decision, which has been made, in the way he or she understands in line with his or her best interests. On the other hand, if it is difficult for the child to take decisions, he or she needs assistance in decision-making by providing an auxiliary, but not substitutionary assistance. The right of the child to participate is realised in CDCs in daily socio-educational activities through the involvement of them in the planning and organisation of these activities by empowering them to assume obligations and responsibilities, to influence the content and quality of organised activities in line with their needs and interests, while creating conditions for them to realise themselves. The study shows that the professionals of CDCs take into consideration not only the result of the participation of the child, but also the involvement in the participation process.

The study revealed that the cooperation of the professionals of CDCs is important when realising the right of the child to participate. The cooperation of the professionals, when realising the right of the child to participate, expresses itself through their favourable and unanimous view towards the right of the child to participate, to get involved in the realisation of this right and the sharing of their experience when realising the right of the child to participate. When realising the right of the child to participate in CDCs the professionals cooperate with parents/guardians of the child while assisting them in understanding the importance of the right of the child to participate, its expression, they consult them and provide assistance in creating conditions for the implementation of the right of the child to participate. The professionals of CDCs also cooperate with other institutions by sharing their information and insights on positive aspects of the realisation of the right to participation, arising difficulties and possibilities to overcome them in order to improve the quality of the realisation of the right to participation.

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