

# Cooperation of preschool children

## Changing contexts and perspectives

The monograph reflects on the issue of the cooperation of preschool children from various perspectives: preschool children's dispositions, the possibilities created by their immediate environment, and the cooperation-fostering potential of the environment in which they function on a daily basis.

The multifaceted nature of this discourse manifests itself in the attempt to describe the mutual cooperation of children in mid-childhood, children's cooperation with the guidance and support of the teacher, the cooperation between children and teacher, the cooperation between the teacher and the parents of a preschool child for the benefit of the child and with the active involvement of the child, and finally, cooperation of the wider social environment involving preschool children in group activities.

The discussion starts with an attempt to grasp how the notion of cooperation is understood in the field of pedagogy and related disciplines. The authors also attempt to establish a relationship between the concept of cooperation and the notions of co-action, community, and community of action. They highlight how nowadays, the concept of cooperation is located among the key social, economic and educational goals, and synonyms of the concept that included in both dictionaries and the social consciousness are cooperation and collaboration. It is also perceived as a category of competences necessary for individuals and communities in the 21st century.

The first chapter, entitled 'Cooperation between children. The changing perspective in preschool pedagogy', attempts to encapsulate the changes in the perception of preschool children's potential to engage in joint activities with their peers, from the belief that at this age children are not capable of cooperation, to a presentation of selected studies indicating the competence of children in mid-childhood to engage in common activities with other children, according to the concepts of collectivism and peer tutoring. The authors refer to interesting research conducted at the beginning of the twentieth century by Stefan Baley. They also make reference to later studies, for example, those by Helena Kubińska, Anna

Dzierżanka-Wyszyńska, Grace Walse Shugar, Barbara Bokus, and Wanda Terlecka, as well as selected contemporary studies.

Chapter Two, entitled "The young child cooperating with an adult", introduces the concept of episodes of joint engagement as an early form of cooperation between the adult and child, as well as the concept of scaffolding constructed by the adult, which fosters the development of child competence to cooperate with a more advanced partner. The authors also present Michael Tomasello's concept showing the importance of children's dispositions, for example, child altruism as a basis for children to develop early forms of cooperation. They subsequently turn their attention to the role of the teacher as the one setting up the conditions for cooperation between children. Here they attempt to capture the changes in the way the teacher's role from directing children's interaction to creating a culture of learning. They go on to address the issue of child-teacher cooperation in preschool, the need for which was perceived in the 1930s by Maria Weryho-Radziwiłłowicz, but which was later neglected for many years. It was not until later studies, e.g. conducted in Poland by Grace Wales Shugar, that it was clearly and unambiguously shown that the adult is the person who reinforces the child, but also enables him/her to modify previously adopted actions. Research on tutoring and teachers in the role of tutors for children has also contributed to spreading the idea of cooperation between children and teachers.

Chapter Three is entitled 'The preschool child as a witness and participant in cooperation in his/her immediate environment. From the dominant role of the teacher to a cooperative environment'. Firstly, it attempts to capture changes in thinking about cooperation between preschool staff and the child's parents/guardians from the dominant role of the teacher/carer with regard to shared goals formulated and implemented by teachers/carers and parents. Secondly, it highlights changes in the way of thinking about collaboration between preschool staff and the child's wider social environment: from perceiving the local environment in terms of deficits through developing concepts of a school and preschool open to collaboration to the idea of partnership and an engaged community.

The fourth chapter focuses on the theme: "The university creating a collaborative space involving preschool children". In this chapter, the authors draw attention to the social context of child development in Urie Bronfenbrenner's terms. Then they present the role of the university in the exosystem of the contemporary preschool child and the role of the university oriented to the needs of different groups of recipients in the local environment. In the next part of the study, they draw attention to the fact that interaction in the local social space can trigger the mechanism of modelling joint actions with other people in the youngest children. An example of such activities modelling children's behaviour and subsequently attitudes is the cooperation with preschools in Poznań carried out at the Faculty of Educational Studies within the project: "Kindergartens at the University". The authors refer to two key assumptions of the project, namely joint activities and playing different roles during jointly implemented activities and four blocks of joint activities: "Toddlers at the University", "Students to preschoolers-preschoolers to students", "We learn, we know, we can", and "Broaden your horizons", during which preschool children, students, teachers, kindergarten directors, and university employees could undertake common goals and carry out common activities. The chapter also includes selected reflections from teachers and directors of preschool, which were collected after the third edition of the project.

In Chapter Five, entitled “The concept of cooperation in the opinions of preschool children”, the authors discuss the results of a study involving twenty 5–7-year-old children who, based on their experiences, defined the concept of cooperation in different ways. On the basis of these children’s statements, the authors were able to distinguish several categories of how this social skill is seen by children, including situational nature of cooperation, and the community character of experiences.

The last chapter is entitled “Cooperation of preschool children – inspiration for practice”. In it, the authors propose simple games and activities to develop the cooperative competence of preschool children. The proposals have been grouped into the following categories: thematic games, learning games, outdoor games, games with rules in teams with several members, artistic activities performed together, joint development tasks, gymnastic exercises and movement games.

*Translated by Rob Pagett*