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## PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF PRESCHOOL TEACHERS AT ENTERING THE CAREER

**Abstract.** In the paper we discuss one of the most important periods in the career of a preschool teacher, namely the time of facing the everyday challenges of education. In literature this period is discussed as one of the most stressful in a professional career; some authors describe it as the survival stage, the shock of reality, the painful beginning, and similar. In the first, theoretical part, the basic characteristics of preschool teacher's professional development are presented. In the second, empirical part, we present the results achieved on the sample of 102 future preschool teachers. With the assistance of a survey we gathered data on their assessment of the entrance to the profession, the difficulties they will supposedly be faced with, and what tasks they expect to cause them the most problems. We found that in spite of some difficulties, which – as expected – appear at entering any career, major difficulties in the professional career development of preschool teachers are not expected. What is the most important is the presence of a desire for professional development and for professional growth, as only thus newcomers with beginning difficulties can gradually develop into successful preschool teachers.

*Key words:* professional development, preschool teacher, professional career, beginning, development.

### INTRODUCTION

The role of a teacher in modern school and preschool has been increasingly becoming complex, ever again exposing teacher educators to new challenges. Questions have been raised in relation to internship, professional exam, mentors, their training and competences, partnership relations between schools and teacher training faculties, and the like (Valenčič Zuljan, Vogrinc, Brank, et al., 2007).

In the process of their professional development all school and preschool teachers go through certain stages, all of which have certain characteristics, roles and consequences. One of the most stressful periods in their professional career is probably exactly the time when school or pre-

school teachers make their professional debut. In a very picturesque way these first years of teachers' professional development are portrayed by the names given to its first stage. F. Fuller calls this first phase survival stage and speaks about a shock of reality. This starting phase has similarly been named by Huberman the stage of survival and discovery, and described with expressions such as a painful beginning, progress, uncertain commitment, entrance to the world of work. Also R. Zuzovsky, who calls the first phase entrance and exploration (Javornik Krečič, 2008; Valenčič Zuljan, 2008) speaks about the shock of reality, concern, and dilemmas.

Cvetek (2002) cites a number of definitions of the term career. "Career are all the jobs individuals perform in the course of their professional lives" (ibid. 258). "Career is a pattern of all the experiences gained in relation with work which guide and link the course of individual's life" (ibid. 12). Career is "a planned or unplanned sequence of jobs or activities that include elements of progress (according to subjective feeling), self-realisation, and personal development in a certain defined period of time" (Lipičnik, 1998, 179-180). The development of individual's career, inter alia, depends on general social change. The latter has immediate impact on the preschool as organisation and thus also on the development of the staff and their perception of their own personal and professional growth. Lipičnik (2002) distinguishes among 7 general factors that influence the shaping of a career. They are: demographic trends, social trends, evolving technology, new employment policies, new organisational structures, economic pressure, and political change. Among other things, demographic and social trends are reflected in the decrease or increase in the number of children, which can significantly influence teacher's career. The development of computer and multimedia technologies can be treated as the factors of evolving technologies. A large number of continuing professional development programmes are dedicated exactly to informing preschool teachers about new technologies. By employing new staff, such as computer specialists, evolving technologies can also result in new employment policies both in schools and in preschools. Teaching in tandem in the first grade of nine-year basic school can be counted anew organisational structure, which again has consequences for entirely new career development of both primary as well as of preschool teachers. Economic pressure can show as decrease of economic power in an area, which can have negative impact on the quality of life and work in the preschool. We can state the entrance of Slovenia to European Union as a factor of political change, which has allowed preschools increased participation in international projects. Social change in the external environment of the preschool causes constant change in the tasks of the preschool

as organisation, thus also influencing teacher's personal and professional development.

Professional development of a preschool teacher is not a uniform process. In her professional career a preschool teacher passes through different stages. Especially in planning the professional development of individual teachers as well as the development of a preschool as a whole, the current stage of the teacher's professional development must be identified. It is not the same whether a teacher at the beginning of her professional career or an experienced teacher who has performed the job for thirty years is included in the development process. Taking account of the current stage of teacher's career also allows managing the general climate in the preschool, shaping appropriate interpersonal relationships, and leads towards motivating the teacher more easily.

Experts define the stages in the professional development of a preschool teacher in different ways. Vontaquotes (2005) Jalong and Isenberg (2000), who distinguish four stages of the professional development of a preschool teacher: beginner, advanced beginner, professional expert, and expert specialist. Peček (2003) quotes Hargreaves and Fullan (1992), who based on a study carried out o a population of teachers defined seven stages in the development of teacher's career:<sup>1</sup>

#### 1. *The beginning of the career* (from the first to the third year of teaching)

The period of the beginning of a career is divided into two sub-stages, namely the survival sub-stage and the discovery sub-stage. In the survival sub-stage the teacher is faced with the reality, entering the job for the first time, which can represent a rather strong shock. A gap can appear between her or his ideals and everyday work in the classroom. Teachers who are excessively concerned with themselves can start doubting in themselves and in their own capabilities. They start doubting whether they will be up to all the challenges in the classroom and in the school. The sub-stage helps them to overcome all this, as gradually they find each is part of a wider community of teachers who have their pupils, their classes and their programme. Both sub-stages run in parallel to each other; in Slovenia they coincide with the internship phase, which is discussed more in detail in the next sub-chapter.

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<sup>1</sup> Based on practice and a great number of interviews with preschool teachers, the author (ibid.) believes the model can also be applied to preschool teachers.

2. *Stabilisation stage* (from the fourth to the sixth year of teaching)

The stabilisation stage represents commitment to the profession and means the teacher accepts obligations and responsibilities in her or his professional life. The teacher becomes increasingly professional, has gains certain experience and feels more and more “free” and spontaneous in the classroom. All teachers reach this stage.

The next two stages run in parallel to each other. The development of teacher’s career follows either one or the other stage.

3. *Experimentation and activism phase* (from the seventh to the eighteenth year of teaching)

In the experimentation stage teachers wish change in their professional life. They are ready for new challenges and new circumstances in work. Desire can appear for work with other groups of pupils (such as a different age group) or desire for general change in school. At this stage teachers can start doubting the appropriateness of their career choice.

4. *Self-evaluation or self-doubt stage* (from the seventh to the eighteenth year of teaching)

At this stage a kind of “mid-career crisis” appears. A whole series of feelings appears in the teacher, ranging from the feeling of monotony to the desire for a radical change in professional and personal lives. Based on some analyses the author (ibid.) argues nearly 40 % of teachers find themselves at the stage of self-evaluation and self-doubt.

Also the next two stages run in parallel to each other and the teacher can either follow the path of one or the other.

5. *Serenity and distance stage* (from the nineteenth to the thirtieth year of teaching)

A turnaround from teacher’s enthusiasm to serenity is characteristic for this phase. Gradual loss of teacher’s energy is replaced by greater self-trust and self-acceptance. The teacher has realistic expectation about his or her abilities. They do no longer get excited about every detail and are reassured about their competences.

## 6. *Conservatism stage* (from the nineteenth to the thirtieth year of teaching)

The author (*ibid.*) points out conservatism stage is the least explored. With the teachers who find themselves at this stage aversion to innovation and nostalgia for the past can appear. Usually they complain about the younger generation, as they believe, they are increasingly less disciplined and motivated for work. In interpersonal relations teachers are more prudent, tactful and watchful.

## 7. *Retreat stage* (from the thirty-first to the fortieth year of teaching)

At this stage two trends of teacher's conduct can appear. A teacher who approaches retirement age can start retreating from the profession. They orient their energy into other areas of their lives and long for quieter years. Yet another teacher can become more active and creative in this period, so she or he can become a successful mentor to younger colleagues, beginning teachers and interns.

The author (*ibid.*) argues that the most harmonious and quality passage through the professional career follows the following stages: from the beginning of the career to stabilisation and then through the experimentation stage to serene distance, and finally peaceful retreat. In relation to this Slunjski (2015) highlights the new paradigm of educating preschool teachers, which—in addition to training in the narrow didactic field—emphasises the significance of encouraging reflective thinking, creativity and comprehensive approach to professional development.

For every individual the choice of the first job is an important decision. To a large extent it depends on the organisation as the provider of employment. According to Lipičnik (1994) employment is namely the process in which an organisation satisfies its needs for human competences.<sup>2</sup> The process of hiring human resources includes the selection procedure, in which from among the candidates for the job the employer selects the most appropriate applicant. The process of selecting a new employee is completed by concluding legally formal employment, which in practice means the signing of the employment contract. To be able to be included in the work process, the new co-worker must first be introduced into work. Induction into work is one of the prerequisites of successful integration of new co-workers, as it helps them to become familiar with the organisation, the job itself and the working environment, as well as with

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<sup>2</sup> The author (*ibid.*) counts abilities, knowledge, skills, and personal features to human competences.

the organisational culture, more easily and more appropriately. Through adequate induction new employees get acquainted with their workplace, their work obligations, staff, conditions of performing the job and thus get integrated into the work environment faster and more successfully. Efficient induction into work reduces the probability of misunderstanding and problems related to work, co-workers, work environment, and the expectations of the new employee and of the organisation. Massari (2013) estimates eliminating the possibility of any difficulties at the beginning of individual's career is precisely why internship is an extremely important phase in individual's professional development and adds this is why it requires special attention in the development of the professionalism of preschool teachers.

Vonta (2005) defines ten basic conditions or requirements that determine the success of a preschool teacher's professional development:

### *1. Taking account of the phases of professional development*

We have said the professional development of a preschool teacher is not a uniform process; it progresses through individual phases. The planning of education and professional training, acquiring knowledge and skills, cooperation and motivating the preschool teacher depend on the phase in which she currently is. So the knowledge and taking account of the phases of a preschool teacher's career is a precondition for attaining the said activities and qualities.

### *2. Individualisation and differentiation of approaches*

This requirement is based on the awareness not all approaches to professional development are suitable for every preschool teacher. Individual characteristics of each teacher must be considered starting from the acquired level of her development. To achieve a balance between the interests of an individual and the interests of the community, teachers' professional development must be in consistency with the vision of the preschool.

### *3. Reflection of one's practice*

The requirement for critical reflection of one's own practice represents the core of professional development. It means the preschool teacher systematically and critically reflects her experience and the context in which her practice takes place. A condition for reflection is the ability to analyse the consequences of one's decisions and the capability of observing chil-

dren's reactions and feelings. So e.g. preschool teachers analyse the consequences of applying certain education procedures and materials taking account also of the feedback received from the children.

#### *4. Cooperation*

Professional development of a preschool teacher is the most successfully implemented in cooperation with the staff. In dialogue preschool teachers learn from each other and share their knowledge and experiences. If a preschool teacher closes herself from others behind the four walls of her classroom, this cuts her off from opportunities for more complete interpretation and analysis of her practice.

#### *5. Self-evaluation and self-training*

Self-evaluation allows the selection of the area to which a preschool teacher will direct her professional development. They are usually aware in which areas of their professional activity they are strong and in which they need additional training, but they do not show this if they feel threatened. Preschool teachers must feel safe, so the staff must build respectful relations and quality communication.

#### *6. Subjective concepts and implicit theories or mental models must become visible.*

Every teacher has subjective concepts of and beliefs about childhood and children's development, education, and about the mission and the vision of their preschool. Experts define these views of teachers as implicit pedagogy or teachers' subjective theories. Batistič Zorec (2004, 137) says preschool teachers' subjective theories include "both their implicit and explicit attitudes and values that show in their behaviour and in relationships with children." They are at the same time a product of cultural and historic circumstances in the society in which a preschool teacher lives and works and of her personal history, her life and professional experiences, and of her knowledge. The preschool teacher's subjective concepts must become visible and be integrated into her professional development."

#### *7. The contents and typologies of professional knowledge are varied*

Individual authors define the contents and the typologies of professional development in different ways. Vonta (ibid.) quotes Marentič Požarnik

(2000), who includes content knowledge, general educational, psychological, special didactical, curricular, and practical, experiential or explicit knowledge to professional knowledge.

#### *8. Invitation paradigm of leadership, teamwork, the culture of collegiality and democracy*

Implementation of this requirement shows in the cooperation of staff members, in offering mutual assistance, and in respect of persons' individuality. Only such leadership can contribute to shaping the culture of collegiality that performs tracing and assessing progress in the function of development, not of control. Cultural collegiality shows in common goals, distributed responsibility for success, permanent endeavour for improvement, orientation towards lifelong learning and in the wellbeing of all employees. The staff emphasise the strengths of each member and openness in functioning. They build upon mutual support, trust, and respect. The culture of collegiality can only be developed in the culture of democracy, which in shaping, implementing, and evaluation of ideas encourages the participation of each individual.

#### *9. Insight into how adults learn*

In adult education account must be taken of individual's learning style and of general findings about the learning process of adults. The latter must be based upon cooperative culture, i.e. on adult learners' active participation. In addition to achieving a certain level of general and specialist knowledge professional development of a preschool teacher namely includes also plenty of personal experiences in the field of work. When a preschool teacher shares them with other professional staff in the preschool she thus contributes to the development of the whole staff. In this adequate support from leadership and from different external institutions – that can provide the staff with professional support – is crucial.

#### *10. Evaluation in the function of recognition and professional development*

Undoubtedly also evaluation of teacher's work and of the progress she achieves contributes immensely to her successful professional development. Evaluation namely facilitates the implementation of personal and institutional goals, increases preschool teacher's professionalism and autonomy, and contributes to recognition of good practice. It highlights preschool teacher's strengths and weaknesses, on the basis of which

the teacher can plan further steps and makes adequate decisions about changing her work.

Based on what has been explained above, we were primarily interested in what potential difficulties the students expect in their first employment.

## METHODOLOGY

The descriptive and causal non-experimental method of educational research was applied in our study. We performed the research on a non-random purposive sample of 102 students of preschool education. Quantitative data processing was applied. In the first phase one survey questionnaire was eliminated from the sample, as it was not adequately filled in. The data obtained with the survey were electronically processed with the assistance of the SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) computer software. The data obtained with the questionnaire were presented in a table stating the absolute (f) and percentage frequencies (f %). The existence of mutual correlations between variables was tested with the  $\chi^2$ -test.

## RESULTS WITH DISCUSSION

### *Analysis of the potential problems expected by students at entering their future professional career*

In the framework of the analysis of the problems students expect at the beginning of their professional career, we first focussed our attention on the level of their worries about some of the potential difficulties. What the students are the most worried about is that at the beginning of their career they might not have enough practical experience. Nearly half of them (49.0%) think so. The result comes as no surprise, as a correlation was found with students' opinion the study programme Preschool Education should contain more experiential learning. Internship, the intention of which is gradual induction into independent work, is offered as a solution of this problem. A high percentage of students who express their worries has also been recorded with the next potential difficulties: poor interpersonal relations (47.1 % of students), inadequate acceptance by co-workers (45.1 % of students), insufficient assistance and support by co-workers

(44.1 % of students), underestimation from the part of co-workers (41.2 % of students) and inappropriate interpersonal communication (42.2 % of students). The results are understandable as the stated difficulties can strongly hinder future preschool teachers in their integration into the working environment. Successful induction of novice preschool teachers depends namely to a large extent on quality cooperation among the employees, mutual respect, encouraging, providing assistance and support, and on the feeling of belonging to the working community. What the students are the least worried about is whether their professional education will be too low (only 18.6 % of students are worried), which we are not surprised about, as they are being educated in a three-year higher education professional study programme the main objective of which is to educate professionally competent preschool teachers with a broad range of knowledge.

Further, we investigated to what extent the students expect difficulties in performing individual tasks at their first employment. The data have shown the students expect the most difficulties in planning the goals in individual areas of activities, as even 82.4 % (72.5 % of students occasionally and 9.8 % of students frequently) of them expect problems in this area. Another task, for which the students have also expressed a high level of expected difficulties, is the planning of activities for the implementation of objectives, where difficulties are expected by 77.5 % of students (67.6 % of students occasionally and 9.8 % frequently). The planning of educational goals is the area where preschool teacher's autonomy strongly comes to expression. The preschool teacher namely independently designs operational education objectives and the activities that will be applied to meet these objectives. We assume the students are aware such planning requires thorough deliberation and good professional training. On the other hand this is also a very responsible task, because the development of children's potential depends on it. The students also expect difficulties in their cooperation with parents (78.4 % of students expect problems, namely 56.9 % of students occasionally, and 21.6 % of students frequently) and in leading PT meetings (76.5 % of students expect difficulties – 50.0 % of students occasionally and 26.5 % of students frequently). On the one hand the results are understandable, on the other hand, however, they are a cause of concern, as cooperation between parents and teachers is a basic condition for adequate complementarity of family and institutional child education and care. As many as 72.5 % of students also expect difficulties in cooperation with the leadership of the preschool (60.8 % of students occasionally and 11.8 % of students frequently). We believe this happens because of head-teacher's superiority and because

of students' concern related with this they will not be up to their expectations. Otherwise, preschool teachers and senior management should strive for development and maintenance of good relations, as these are of the utmost importance for professional growth of preschool teachers and indirectly also for the development of the preschool as an organisation.

## CONCLUSION

The main aim of the study programme Preschool Education is to educate professionally competent preschool teachers with a broad range of knowledge. Due to the fast obsolescence of knowledge caused by numerous aspects of scientific and technological progress it is, however, not realistic to expect all the knowledge and the skills a preschool teacher needs in order to be able to successfully perform her tasks could be obtained during pre-service studies. Judging from the results, the students, too, are aware of this, as they have rather realistic expectations about the acquisition of individual kinds of knowledge and skills in the course of study. A majority of them feel after the conclusion of studies they will indeed be qualified for the job of a preschool teacher, but only partially. We suppose this is the real reason why they do not manifest excessive concern at entering the job their education level would be too low. They worry to a much larger degree they would not be accepted well by their colleagues, that they would underestimate them, that they would not offer them adequate assistance and support, and that generally unhealthy relationships and inadequate communication would rule among the staff. The students' concern is understandable, as all novice preschool teachers desire to assert themselves and win their co-workers' respect and trust. The above difficulties can certainly badly obstruct their integration into the new working environment. Successful induction of novice preschool teachers depends to a large degree on the so-called culture of collegiality that is demonstrated as cooperation among the staff members, providing mutual assistance and support, exchange of experience, as acceptance and respect, encouraging each other, orientation into lifelong learning, as well as in the ability to compromise and in the feeling of psychological safety and belonging to the staff.

Nearly half of the students are worried at entering their first job they would not have sufficient practical experience. In comparison to other potential difficulties this is the item with the highest percentage of students who express concern. We link this problem to two results. First, when we asked the students what kind of professional training they would prefer

to choose as preschool teachers, a majority of them replied it would be a course in which good solutions from practice are presented. We assume primarily those students decided to respond in this way that express concern over having insufficient practical experience. And second, the students are generally not satisfied with the proportion of experiential learning in the study programme Preschool Education. Did the programme include more of it, they would of course gain more practical experience and the level of their concern over the problem would thus decrease. There is probably never enough experiential learning, as each experience an individual wins with her or his own activity is extremely precious. In this case more emphasis is therefore put on quality than on quantity: students must strive to exploit the provided hours of experiential learning to the maximum. We believe the quality of the acquired experience depends to a large extent on the students themselves, on their activity, curiosity, and interests. Crucial in this is their intrinsic motivation, when they learn for the sake of their own development and to satisfy the need to acquire additional experience and knowledge.

We also determined the assuredness of students about their own professional competence with the level of acceptance of problems in performing individual tasks of a preschool teacher at the beginning of their careers. The students expect the largest number of difficulties in designing educational objectives and the related activities, in cooperation with the leadership of the preschool and in chairing parent-teacher meetings. We believe the students will improve their competences in individual area in the course of their future professional development. Within the latter two main processes take place: personal growth on the one side and professional growth on the other. Professional growth in the sense of further or lifelong education is a continuing process that takes place with the purpose for the individual to enhance and update her or his knowledge, skills, and competences. The purpose of the numerous programmes of continuing professional education and training is exactly strengthening preschool teachers' professional competences, enhancing and updating their knowledge and improving their work. Preschool teachers can thus get informed about new and alternative methods of work, new contents, new views at child's development, various ways of stimulating child's development, with new technologies, etc. Preschool teachers' professional development depends to a large extent on the conditions in the working environment, on the ways of employees' thinking, and primarily on the ways of leading the preschool. As an organisation the preschool must provide its employees adequate opportunities and conditions for learn-

ing; the fact must, however, not be forgotten each preschool teacher is primarily responsible for her development and progress herself.

It would be advisable for students to also think whether they have appropriate personality properties for quality performance of the job, when they decide they wish to work with preschool children. The personality and self-image of a preschool teacher are namely strongly reflected in her immediate work with children and also affect the quality of early childhood education in preschool. With their sensitivity and sensibility children perceive the teacher as a complete personality with all her characteristics, so her personality structure is an important element of the hidden curriculum. In consistence with the result about the reasons why the students have chosen the occupation it was natural to expect even 93.1 % of the students believe as future preschool teachers they will feel love towards children and the profession. A majority of the students otherwise expect as future preschool teachers they will also be communicative, optimistic, persistent, determined, self-assured, empathic, patient, objective, innovative, tolerant, and adaptable. The results are extremely encouraging; perhaps they even point to somewhat idealised expectations. We must be aware the maturing of personality is a process in which the preschool teacher acquires and develops in the course of time.

Through the entire analysis statistically significant differences show mainly in greater assuredness of the first year students in their abilities, and in third year students' greater expression of self-doubts. At a first glance the results come as a surprise, as could be expected third year students would express more confidence in themselves. They have more theoretical knowledge in individual areas of preschool education and also more experience acquired in teaching practice. A more detailed interpretation of data, however, leads to the conclusion it was in practical training exactly – in the framework of which they developed a more realistic insight into the complexity of performing individual tasks – that they became aware of their weaknesses and based on this began doubting about their competences more than first year students. In this way students become familiar with their abilities, competences, and interests, determine how they feel in their work, how skilful they are in leading and guiding a group or in establishing contacts, which areas of education they manage better, how they adapt to working conditions, identify what causes them the most problems, and in which areas they will need to deepen their knowledge. The awareness the first job is approaching quickly even makes the self-doubt deeper, as the students ask themselves increasingly more frequently whether they will be entirely up to the requirements of the profession.

First year students express higher expectations regarding the appropriateness of the study of preschool education as preparation for the job of a preschool teacher. At the time of the survey they had only been enrolled in the study programme for a little less than a semester, so we conclude in comparison to third year students their expectations are more idealised. They also exhibit a greater assuredness in their ability, which we think is the consequence of a lesser amount of experiences from working directly with preschool children.

Also control of the role of certainty in the appropriateness of occupational choice has pointed to a number of statistically significant differences. Summing them up, we can say the students who are sure about their occupational choice demonstrate higher self-consciousness. The results have been perfectly expected. These students namely feel joy and desire for the teaching profession, they are intrinsically motivated; in our opinion this is why they are also more ambitious. We suppose in the role of a preschool teacher they will show more working enthusiasm, they will be ready to invest more energy into shaping good interpersonal relations, they will collaborate more intensely with other staff, talk about their work and thus exchange their experiences and attitudes. As they have built a higher image of themselves as preschool teachers, they are also better able to identify themselves with the features the latter ought to possess.

Based on the differences identified between students in relation with the year of study, we have detected a shift from high and more or less idealised expectations towards more realistic ones, namely from two perspectives – both concerning the study in the sense of preparation for the job of a preschool and concerning future professional development. In our view the shift from greater assuredness to doubt into one's own competence is primarily a consequence of study experience, especially of the experience obtained during teaching practice. It would be extremely interesting to carry out a longitudinal study that would be able to uncover to what extent students' expectations about their future professional career have actually been made a reality. In this way we could determine the influence of working experience on any changes in the opinions and perception of occupational reality.

It would be worthwhile to dedicate more attention to the expectations, the needs and the interests of students. By identifying their concerns, doubts and uncertainties about themselves the areas could be highlighted that need more emphasis in the framework of lectures and in various forms of experiential learning. This would be an important contribution to raising the levels of self-consciousness, self-confidence, and – last but not least – to better professional competences of future preschool teachers.

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## PROFESIONALNI RAZVOJ PREDŠKOLSKIH VASPITAČA NA POČETKU KARIJERE

**Apstrakt.** U radu se razmatra jedan od najvažnijih perioda u karijeri predškolskog vaspitača, naime to je period kada se on suočava sa svakodnevnom izazovima na polju obrazovanja. U stručnoj literaturi se o ovom periodu piše kao o najstresnijem za profesionalnu karijeru; neki autori ga nazivaju periodom pre-

življavanja, šokom stvarnosti, bolnom početku i slično. U prvom, teorijskom delu rada, biće prikazane osnovne karakteristike profesionalnog razvoja predškolskih vaspitača. U drugom, empirijskom delu, biće predstavljeni rezultati dobijeni na uzorku od 102 buduća vaspitača. Pomoću ankete prikupili smo podatke o njihovom mišljenju i proceni na početku karijere o teškoćama sa kojima će se sretati i o tome šta misle koji će im zadaci predstavljati najviše problema. Saznali smo da uprkos nekim poteškoćama koje se, kako je i očekivano, pojavljuju na početku svake karijere, velike poteškoće se ne očekuju od strane budućih predškolskih vaspitača. Ono što je najvažnije je to da je kod mladih vaspitača evidentirano prisustvo želje za profesionalnim usavršavanjem i napredovanjem, koje po njihovom mišljenju, može da se uspešno realizuje samo kroz rešavanje prvih poteškoća.

*Ključne reči:* profesionalni razvoj, predškolski vaspitač, profesionalno usavršavanje, početak, razvoj.