

## **The impact of the TRICK method in the formation of preschoolers vocational identity**

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### **Abstract**

The future of young people is in their hands from an early but difficult age, in which the parent has no other role than to support. The old remark "You do it because I know it's better" is extremely dangerous these days because children are very curious and won't settle for ambiguous answers. This remark will only succeed in driving them away from subjugating them.

The desire that both teachers and parents have in common is to raise successful people, capable of solving the problems that arise in everyday life. This desire requires continuous work from an early age. To succeed in forming successful future adults we must start from preschool age, discover their personality and help them shape it into the best form they are capable of.

Finding a vocation is a complex process that takes the young person through various contexts and situations in order to realize their passions, personal talents, mission and those professional activities that can become a constant source of income.

The aim of this research consisted in the development and implementation of an educational intervention program based on the Trick method aimed at forming the vocational identity of preschoolers.

The results demonstrated the fact that the approach of the Trick method by both teachers and parents brings improvements in the sphere of skills necessary for the formation of preschoolers vocational identity.

**Keywords:** *Educational intervention program, Preschoolers, TRICK method, Vocational identity formation*

## 1. Introduction

The preschool age is associated with major changes in children's social skills, they form a stable personality until the end of the preschool cycle. Children gain greater independence from their parents, beginning the transformation into a fully functional and independent person in society.

At the age of 4-6, the actual development of identity begins. Self-evaluation is formed, experiences are manifested, concern for what is happening, for how one looks in the eyes of others. The child begins to set small goals, motivating himself to achieve them.

Identity represents "the clear consciousness of a person's individuality, formed by the integration into a unique construct of self-perception and the perception of the expectations of others towards one's own person" (Băban, 2011, p. 225). Identity is formed progressively, according to the organization and structuring of information about oneself, being in the permanent phase of construction and reconstruction. It includes aspects related to: innate and acquired personality characteristics (temperament, introversion, passivity); personal talents and skills (knowledge and skills); identification with models (parents, colleagues or other significant figures); ways of interaction; the method of resolving conflicts; ways of regulating behavior; the social, vocational, or adopted roles of the individual at a given time.

Vocational identity combines aspects related to "knowing one's own interests, values, skills and competences, on the one hand, with the preference for a certain type of activity, interaction styles and work environments, on the other hand" (Băban, 2011, p. 226).

From an early age, children imagine themselves in certain roles for their future. Cahill and Furey (2017) argue that these aspirations change quite frequently and are influenced by the following personal and contextual factors:

- Relationships with family, teacher, friends, peers and other reference persons for them;
- Self-knowledge that includes self-esteem and self-efficacy;
- Interests, experiences, values, attitudes, hopes and dreams;
- Learning, knowledge and skills/competencies/skills;
- Culture or other contextual influences such as gender, race, ethnicity, etc.

Career development, like other areas of development (such as: intellectual, physical, social and emotional), is a lifelong process involving constant development, change and adaptation. Career development is not just about information about professions, jobs and employment, but rather about life stories. Preschoolers actively explore their world and begin to construct certain opportunities and possibilities for their present and future. These life stories include a self-identity, life roles,

skills, and knowledge, and are shaped by everyday life events and experiences, as well as interests, attitudes, beliefs/beliefs, and life patterns (Cahill & Furey, 2017).

## **2. Summary of Literature**

Childhood has been identified as an important period of life development. Certain researchers have also recognized childhood as a threshold period for vocational development (Jiang et al., 2018; Hartung et al., 2008), and childhood career education has been identified as being a foundation of lifelong career development (Liu et al., 2014; Watson & McMahon, 2007). During this period, preschoolers are engaged in various learning processes and can show great curiosity and exploratory behavior. Career education during childhood will awaken children's curiosity and exploratory behavior about the world of work (Hartung et al., 2008). Later, children will begin to search and gather more information about the career. Information about the world of work gathered at this age would span the lifespan and have a significant impact on career development throughout life (Porfeli & Lee 2012).

Through play, preschoolers explore their environment as they move through different life roles (child, student, teenager, employee, parent, and others) and adapt their skill sets to cope with academic, career, and personal tasks. The foundations of adaptability are strengthened from the pre-school stage and play an important role in the process of adjustment to life and career planning, respectively they are the basic ingredients for: risk-taking, problem-solving, decision-making, planning, transitions and overcoming of both obstacles and failures (Cahill & Furey, 2017).

Flum and Blustein (2000) see the process of career development in preschool period as a process of helping a child discover who he is. They argue that, "the primary outcome is self-construction (...) the process of developing a coherent and meaningful identity and implementing that identity into a life plan" (Herr et al., 2004, p.335 ).

Preschoolers have an increased level of awareness of the work roles of their parents and other people relevant to them; this awareness grows and broadens as children grow. Children are exposed to careers, work and workplaces in many ways, including media, TV, books, games and other activities and experiences in everyday life. They are aware that adults are working and can also discuss their own work for which they are responsible (e.g. arranging toys, looking after clothes, cleaning, helping with gardening and taking care by pets) (Cahill & Furey, 2017).

Career-related learning at an early age is not intended to cause children to make premature choices about future careers; "rather it is a process that encourages children to broadly consider a

multitude of available options and not limit them or limit the possibilities for their future aspirations" (Herr et al., 2004, p.332).

As children develop their self-identity, interests, and abilities, they begin to imagine themselves in different career roles. Age-appropriate experiences and reinforcement from loving and caring adults (parents, teachers) help foster a positive self-identity, often manifested through the development of confidence and risk-taking skills. When adults encourage and support them daily, they are strengthened and supported in their love of learning, natural curiosity and self-belief.

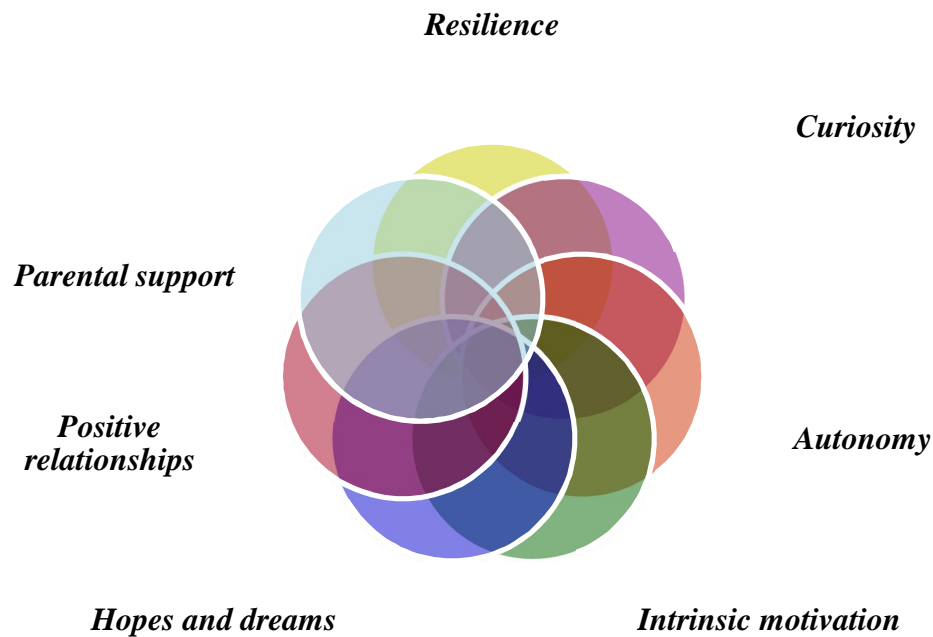


Figure 1. *Ingredients for children's career development (Cahill & Furey, 2017)*

Childhood has been identified as an essential time for career development (Celik, 2019; Oliveira et al., 2015) and has also been considered an extremely important variable for socio-emotional development (Mohamed & Toran, 2018). Research has found that there is a strong association between childhood career development and social-emotional development among infants and preschoolers. Any activity related to career exploration will stimulate positive impact on socio-emotional development. After children were exposed to career exploration activities, their assertiveness, empathy, and emotional regulation were typically enhanced (Santrok, 2010).

The TRICK method is not only about raising successful and happy children, it is also about how we can bring out the maximum human potential. The acronym TRICK comes from:

- *Trust*: Once parents have confidence in their decisions, then they can give children the confidence to take important and necessary steps in gaining strength and independence.

- *Respect*: The main form of respect we can show children concerns their autonomy and individuality. "Every child has a gift and is a gift to the world. This means the exact opposite of telling children who to be, what profession to follow and what their lives should look like: it means to support them as they discover and follow their own goals" (Wojcicki, 2019, p. 26).

- *Independence*: Independence is based on a strong foundation of trust and respect.

Children who gain self-control and responsibility early in life are better prepared to face the challenges of adulthood and also develop the skills to innovate and think creatively. Truly independent children are able to cope with difficulties, obstacles and boredom, all of which cannot be avoided in life. They feel in control even though things around them are chaotic (Wojcicki, 2019, p. 26).

- *Collaboration*: Collaboration means working together in the family, at school or at work. For parents this means encouraging children to participate in discussions, decision-making and even setting discipline rules.

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when following the rules was one of the most important skills, parents were in total control. In the 21st century, the dictatorial style no longer works. We should no longer tell children what to do, but ask their opinion and work together to find solutions (Wojcicki, 2019, p. 26).

- *Kindness*: The tendency to treat those closest to us with less kindness and consideration than we do with strangers is a strange but true thing. "Parents love their children, but they are so used to them that they often take for granted a certain basic kindness. True generosity involves gratitude and forgiveness, service to others, and attention to the outside world" (Wojcicki, 2019, p. 27).

According to Wojcicki (2019) a strong child who knows what he wants will have a positive influence on his family, parents, community and the whole world. This is a chain reaction that has its origins in the homes where the little ones grow up. We all need trust, respect, independence, collaboration and generosity as well as awareness of these values before we practice them. Values that we have to instill in children since preschool age, values that are instilled by parents during the years when the little ones are at home and developed by teachers from the time they enter kindergarten.

The aim of this research consisted in the development and implementation of an educational intervention program in order to form the preschoolers vocational identity, focusing on the following objectives:

- Evaluation and identification of the skills related to the vocational identity of the participants included in the study;
- The development and implementation of an educational intervention program based on the TRICK method for the preschoolers vocational identity formation;
- Analyzing the effectiveness of the proposed educational intervention program on the formation of the preschoolers vocational identity.

### **3. Methods**

#### **3.1. Participants**

The participants in this research were 24 preschoolers aged between 5 years and 3 months and 6 years and 4 months, preschoolers from a kindergarten from Vişeu de Sus, Romania of which 10 were girls and 14 were boys, respectively their parents.

#### **3.2. Measures**

*The Behavior Rating Scale of Presented Self-Esteem for Young Children (Haltiwanger & Harter, 2019)*

It is a questionnaire that helps the teacher to assess the self-esteem of children based on their behavior. The questionnaire contains 15 questions evaluated on a Likert scale from 1 to 5 and divided into two subscales: the first subscale contains 9 items and reflects active manifestations of confidence, curiosity, exploration, initiative and independent goal setting that defined a high self-esteem, and the second subscale, which contains 6 items, evaluates reactions to change or stress, often in social contexts.

Regarding the validity of this questionnaire, findings revealed a correlation of 0.65 for behaviorally presented self-esteem ratings and the child's summary self-esteem rating. In contrast, the correlation of behaviorally presented ratings with the summary rating of child intelligence was only .39. These findings support the statement, based on the Q-sort results, that behaviorally presented self-esteem does not manifest itself in cognitive abilities at this age level (Haltiwanger & Harter, 2019).

*Social-Emotional Development Assessment: Scale Development for Kindergarten (Brenchley, 2017)*

This tool was developed with the aim of evaluating the socio-emotional skills of children from kindergarten to second grade. The questionnaire includes 30 items divided into the following seven scales: self-regulation, emotional regulation, social skills, self-concept, school connectedness, social responsibility and optimism.

After calculating the reliability of the 7 subscales, Brenchley (2017) reported a high Cronbach's alpha coefficient, ranging from .78 to .82, and the CFA results showed that the instrument had a good fit to the data.

For this research, the following three subscales were used: Self-Regulation, Emotional Regulation and Self-Concept.

The two instruments of the study were restructured on the Likert scale from 1 to 5, being completed by the teaching staff through direct systematic observation, as well as through the semi-structured interview with the parents of the preschoolers.

### 3.3. Procedure

The current research has an experimental design, it being carried out during 7 months of the 2021-2022 school year (the period October 2021-April 2022).

In the pre-test phase, the preschoolers participating in this research were evaluated in order to collect reference data regarding the level of development of the skills necessary to form their vocational identity.

In the experimental phase, starting from the identified difficulties, the educational intervention program based on the TRICK method "Today's children, tomorrow's successful people" was developed and implemented. The program contains ten activities, seven of which were carried out only with preschoolers, and the rest were carried out in the form of lectures for parents whose main purpose was to familiarize parents with the values promoted by the TRICK method. The experiential domain that we chose in the course of the activities is "Man and society" focusing on the following dimensions of development: curiosity, interest and initiative in the learning process: the self-concept where they exercise, with support, their positive self-esteem, in different educational situations; promotes his self-image, by presenting himself as a unique person with specific characteristics; self-control and emotional expressiveness where he recognizes and expresses his basic emotions and demonstrates his emotional self-control skills. Among the methods and strategies used during the activities are: debate, conversation, exercise, role play, exposition, explanation, problematization and painting.

In the last phase, the post-experimental one, the re-evaluation of the preschoolers took place at the time of completion of the intervention program by re-applying the chosen instruments.

#### 4. Analysis of results

Table 1. Descriptive analysis of the results obtained in the pre-test phase

Variables	N	M	SD	Minimum	Maximum
<b>Self-esteem</b>	24	1,94	.16	1,5	2,3
<b>Self-regulation</b>	24	2,14	.30	1,5	3
<b>Emotion regulation</b>	24	2,13	.21	2	2,6
<b>Self-concept</b>	24	2,41	.42	1,9	3

Following the evaluation of the preschoolers, I noted the following: at the level of self-esteem, they do not prefer stimulating activities that develop certain skills and/or train them in certain competencies, they face difficulties in making decisions, respectively in making choices on their own, most of the time, most preschoolers prefer to adopt the role of observer and not to be actively involved in the activities carried out within the group. Also, preschoolers obtained a low average (M=2.14) at the level of self-regulation, they often fail to be orderly, to wait their turn, if an activity is delayed most of them get upset and get distracted very easily by certain disturbing factors. In addition to these aspects, the preschoolers participating in this research also face difficulties at the level of emotional regulation (M=2.13), but also at the level of self-concept (M=2.41), which means that the more often they are unable to adequately communicate their emotions, especially negative ones such as sadness or anger, they are dependent on receiving help from an adult to achieve certain things and they have not acquired certain effective strategies to regulate themselves the emotions.

Table 2. Paired Samples t test Results for measured variables

Variables	Pre-test		Post-test		N	95% CI for Mean Difference	t	df
	M	SD	M	SD				
<b>Self-esteem</b>	1,94	.16	3	.29	24	-1.12; -.98	30*	23
<b>Self-regulation</b>	2,14	.30	3,33	.31	24	-1.30; -1.07	21,48*	23
<b>Emotion regulation</b>	2,13	.21	3,38	.25	24	-1.35; -1.12	22,8*	23
<b>Self-concept</b>	2,41	.42	3,5	.43	24	-1.18; -.98	22,5*	23

\* p<.01

After the completion of the activities carried out within the proposed educational intervention program, we re-evaluated the preschoolers to observe if there are improvements in the skills measured in the pre-test phase. Thus, improvements can be noted regarding (see table 2): *self-esteem* (preschoolers have started to describe themselves in a positive manner, they are able to take



initiatives and make choices on their own and are proactively involved in the activities chosen by the teacher), *self-regulation* (preschoolers manage to stay focused on the task, no matter if any disturbing factor appears, they started to become more organized, wait their turn and raise their hand when they want to ask a question), *emotions regulation* (the participants included in the research manage to communicate their feelings and emotions both to the teacher and their peers, as well as to their parents) and their *self-concept* (thanks to the parents who started to give them more independence, communicating more openly with them, the preschoolers started to carry out certain activities without asking the adult's help, they increased their confidence in their own strength and their level of generosity increased). After calculating the effect size to see to what extent the educational intervention program based on the Trick method contributes to the preschoolers vocational identity formation, we obtained a  $d=.23$ , which means that the proposed intervention program has a medium effect.

## 5. Conclusion and Discussion

The desire of parents and teachers is to help the preschoolers to discover their own identity, to acquire autonomy and a positive self-image. Today's children are tomorrow's future leaders. To create tomorrow's future leaders we must help them find their vocation.

In the family and in the kindergarten, the child's social interests are cultivated, manifested by the attention given to those around him, by the tendency to imitate and communicate with them. Artistic interests are also cultivated, manifested by sensitivity and receptivity to beauty, as well as the interest in learning, reflected first by the pleasure of playing school, but also by the pleasure of participating in kindergarten lessons.

Preschoolers need someone to believe in them and they need to be respected for who they are. Without it they cannot develop the independence that is essential to their success as adults in a dynamic, unpredictable world. According to Wojcicki (2019), a strong child who knows what he wants will have a positive influence on his family, parents, community and the whole world. This is a chain reaction that has its origins in the homes where the little ones grow up. We all need trust, respect, independence, collaboration and generosity as well as awareness of these values before we practice them. Values that we have to instill in children since preschool age, values that are instilled by parents during the years when the little ones are at home and developed by teachers from the time they enter kindergarten.

The aim of this research was to develop and implement an educational intervention program for the preschoolers vocational identity formation. If in the pre-test phase, following the evaluation of

the preschoolers, we noticed difficulties regarding the development of some skills necessary for the formation of the vocational identity, after applying the proposed intervention program, the results of the preschoolers increased significantly. In the literature, there is a relatively small number of studies that focused on career exploration during the preschool period, but some research has suggested that career exploration at an early age has a positive impact on the development of the self-concept, of the internal locus of control, career planning, career decision-making self-efficacy and preschoolers' academic achievement. For example, Mohamed et al. (2020) conducted a study which aimed to investigate the impact of educators' activities on career exploration among preschoolers in Malaysia and to identify the steps educators take to introduce a career to children. The results demonstrated the following: the most effective career exploration activities implemented by educators are those that begin with identifying children's existing career knowledge. Then, the second step that educators need to implement is to encourage preschoolers to find and obtain more information about their careers. This step involves the implementation of activities such as: role playing, choosing a model, watching videos, interviewing parents, making a brochure and a career sheet. And the last aspect highlighted by the researchers was related to the involvement of parents. Parental involvement in career exploration activities is important because parents are the primary role models children look up to; a conclusion also reached by Oliveira et al., 2020; Celik, 2019; Chifamba, 2019 and Mahbib et al., 2017 in their research.

The first limitation of this research consists in the data collection tools chosen, as they are not validated and adapted for the Romanian population, their psychometric properties remain unchanged. The second limitation is represented by the small number of participants, having a low number of participants, i.e. only from countryside, the proposed educational intervention program did not demonstrate its full effectiveness, which is why we obtained a medium effect.

A first future direction of research consists in the continuation of this research on a sample larger in number, respectively from varied backgrounds. Another future direction of research would consist in the development of a longitudinal study on the role of the TRICK method on the choice of the occupational path, respectively the career.

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