THE PROBLEM OF PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCE TRANSFORMATION: ASPECT OF INSTITUTIONAL CARE

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Abstract
Transformation of professional competence is relevant in various areas of social work practice, but the disclosure of this problem in the institutional care system is a new and extremely sensitive issue; the problem itself is also rather fresh. The problem is fresh because we talk about the period from 2006 to 2011. The issue is sensitive because the persons, engaged in practicing traditional methods of working with children for many years, keep following the outdated concept of working with children. These are people who needed to adapt to the new requirements, which was extremely challenging or even impossible for a large part of them. Today, the staff of child care homes, who work with children, are social workers. Some of them came to work for the institution with the required qualification, others had to get retrained, still others had to leave the system. This article reveals the nature of professional competence construction in social work, based on accounts by social workers in child care homes about their relation to the profession.

KEY WORDS: social work, institutional care, professional competence.

Introduction
Institutional care is one of the characteristic attributes of the communist system: people with physical and / or mental disabilities, children left without parental care, juvenile delinquents and other individuals, who failed to meet strict standards of the created communist society, were isolated in different types of institutions – boarding-schools, boarding-houses, children’s homes, etc. The residents of such
institutions were subject to a narrow scope of impact resulting from the staff’s emphatically homogeneous professional qualification, depending on the institutional subordination. A similar fragmented approach was shown when handling the problems of the warded (supervised) persons.

A holistic concept of a person’s problem as a social problem occurred in Lithuania along with the rudiments of democratic values in the National Revival Period. After the Restoration of Independence, which inspired a multitude of strategic changes in the economic, political, and social spheres, the number of social problems not only failed to reduce, but rather led to new and more complex problems: starting with the social stratification, social polarization, and impoverishment (Mačiulskytė, 2003), followed by human trafficking, children prostitution, emigration of parents leaving their children behind, etc. (Jonutytė, 2007). The old (social) support practice became incapable of coping with the challenges of the time. Such changes revealed the disability of the inherited communist (social) support when dealing with a rapidly expanding spectrum of social problems. A problem of a person started being perceived as an outcome of many objective and subjective circumstances, and its effective solution is possible when attempts are made not to repair the damages but to eliminate the causes. A problem of professional competence of specialists working in the field of social care becomes acute.

In the context of constant change, rapid development of science and technologies, competence is of major importance to the quality of work performed by a professional as well as to the compliance with the requirements (Autukevičienė, 2007).

After the Restoration of Independence, starting to develop the management institutions’ structure of the Republic of Lithuania, the subordination of the stationary social care institutions was transferred from the Ministry of Education and Science to the Ministry of Social Security and Labour. Nevertheless, the post-communist legacy traditionally associated children as a group of clients exclusively to the educational process. For a long time children care institutions were seen as educational institutions, where educators applied intensive training methods to correct the children’s socialization errors. Meanwhile, educational discourse sends a message that strict educational measures and discipline have to help a child socially reintegrate and ensure his / her positive continued social development. It is believed that education naturally solves other social problems of a child. Commonly, the understanding that the main method of work with a client-child-ward is education means that teachers have sufficient knowledge, skills and values to deal with the socialization issues of the residents of children care institutions.

Meanwhile, children that lost parental care on a temporary or permanent basis are especially vulnerable. C. Sutton (1999, p. 185), following S. Millham,
R. Bullock, K. Hosie and M. Little (1986), describes the children who have entered the welfare and social care system as “drifting”, meanwhile the situation increases the risk of loosing contacts with the family. Therefore, their subsequent psychological and physical development highly depends on the ability of people that provide care to the child to create positive environment and relations, which could ensure the welfare of the child, namely: physical and psychological safety, care and love, possibilities for self-expression, nurture and development of proper social skills and competencies. A modern approach emphasizes the development of child’s abilities to adapt to the environment, renewal of the contacts with the society, comprehensive integration into the society, and complex social and psychosocial functioning, psychological adaptation, through analysis of child’s sexual behaviour, as well as his emotional disorders and addictions, support in managing the effects of traumas by correcting emotional and behavioural disorders. While working with such children, the educational aspect remains of great importance, however, the educational methods cannot ensure the formation of comprehensive social skills.

Generally, it is not easy to demonstrate the professionalism of social work. Professions in modern society identify their professionalism by demonstrating the methods of operation – the more authentic methods there are and the more they are standardized, the higher the value the profession gains. However, the methods of social work are different, unlike the common understanding of the society. The otherness is determined by the specifics of a social worker’s profession and its clients. But at the same time the social worker’s activity has particularly complex requirements – they need to achieve the client’s internal change, because only then it is possible to solve their problems. In addition, a social worker is usually acting in the client’s environment and adapts their methodological operation to each client’s specific case – acts and solves “here and now”, rather than in accordance with a pre-established plan or a method suitable to everyone (Gvalaitė and Švedaitė, 2005, p. 10–16).

Social work research in Lithuania is intensively developing. A number of Lithuanian authors have analysed the issues discussed in this article. The complexity of social work as a profession and the variety of methods were disclosed by L. Gvaldaitė and B. Švedaitė (2005). A. Bagdonas (2001) highlighted the interaction model of social work process as the main factor of the social worker’s performance complexity, and actualized the problem of quality of social work practice organization. P. Jučevičienė (2001) revealed the need for reflective practice in

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developing the relationship between theory and practice in the process of social workers’ training and professional activities in order to empower clients to act individually. The issues of development of the relationship between theory and practice in the process of social workers’ training were analysed by V. Ivanauskienė and T. N. Liobikienė (2005); in addition, T. N. Liobikienė (2006) highlighted the significance of reflected professional experience in a crisis intervention situation, actualizing the links between personal, professional and social experience. I. Dirgėlienė and A. Kiaunytė (2005, 2006) presented the reflective practice and its organization system in training social workers. V. Kvaliauskienė (2005, 2010) analysed the issues of social worker’s professional mission, professional competence structure, complexity of social work profession.

Recently, I have focused my research interests on the processes of Lithuanian social work development. The main theoretical assumption I ground my ideas on is constructivism, what allows me to reveal the creating process of knowledge in social work. The main theoretical assumption in this research is that social work as a profession is socially constructed; social work practice does not exist as a phenomenon, but is created via an interaction process between the parties involved in it. (Due to a limited scope of the article and the need to present other important research-based issues, this article will not expand on the theoretical justification of the research. In my article in 2012 (Mačiulskytė, 2012) I give a rather detailed analysis of social work as a social construct, and since this research is also based on the same theoretical assumption, I invite you to get acquainted with my interpretation of social work as a social construct in the aforementioned article.)

*Former educators of children’s social care home and social workers without necessary education*, who had retraining, also contribute to the development of social work in Lithuania. (Statistical data reveals that in the period from 2006 to 2008, 31 per cent of children’s social care home workers retrained to social workers.) Transformation of professional competence is relevant in various areas of social work practice, but the disclosure of this problem in the institutional care system is a new and extremely sensitive issue; the problem itself is also rather fresh. And although the process of reorganization of social care institutions in the area of children’s institutional care has gained momentum, which will result in reorganisation of institutional children care system by the year 2015. Approaching the situation from the perspective of constructivism, I am interested in the specialists working in children’s care institutions and the contribution they make to the social work development in the country.

The aim of this study is to reveal the nature of professional competence construction in social work, based on accounts by social workers in child care homes about their relation with the profession.
To achieve the purpose, the following two tasks have been addressed:
1) to define the social worker’s professional competence system;
2) to conduct research on professional competence transformation in institutional child care.

Self-questioning is not new to the profession (Chambon and Irving, 1999), especially to the intellectual wing based on Foucauldian approach. M. Foucault’s fundamental suspiciousness to taken-for-granted realities had affected a number of social work scholars in Western countries, who developed a Foucauldian approach in social work research. R. Jurkuvienė (2003), R. Naujanienė (2007), N. P. Večkienė (2007) and others apply the constructivist approach in Lithuanian social work research; however there is not much research.

The object of this article is the transformation of professional competence in institutional care.

Research methods: literature analysis, interview, discourse analysis method is applied to reveal the problem of professional competence transformation in the institutional child care.

1. The system of social workers’ professional competence

It is rather risky to speak about competence in the context of today’s academic and professional discourses. Such concepts used in parallel as “competency”, “competence”, “professional skills”, “qualification” are gathering a number of supporters around themselves, who argue in favour of usage of one or another concept with respect to other concepts. The concept of qualification describes suitability of a person, readiness for a particular job. R. Laužackas, E. Stasiūnaitienė, M. Teresevičienė (2005), analysing the differences between the concepts of competence and qualification, emphasise that the concept of qualification is appropriate when dealing with the understanding of what a person is preparing to acquire or acquires in the learning system (cited in Dirgėlienė, 2010, p. 32). Foreign literature explores the concepts of competence and competency. The content of both of the concepts contains certain differences: competence is associated to the holistic approach to a personal potential and opportunities to apply the variable and purposeful skills based on knowledge, experience, values; competency expresses the ability to perform professional work (Elkin, 1990; Sanghi, 2010). Nevertheless, the article does not aim at analysing the peculiarities of the concept “competence / competency”; I support the observations of R. Laužackas (2008), who assumes that the differences between the concepts are not that significant as to influence their daily usage. I am interested in the capacity of the concept to express the professionalism of a social worker. Social workers are supposed to meet extremely
high professional competence requirements, because their activities have a direct impact on people’s mental, psychological, emotional well-being, development of their personality as well as prevention and correction of its disorders (Kučinskas and Kučinskienė, 2000). V. Kavaliauskienė (2010, p. 161–162), following the views of N. Parton and P. O’Byrne (2000), claims that in the perspective of constructivist philosophy social work is treated not only as a science but also – perhaps even more so – as art, and this is more a practical moral rather than rational technical activity. Meanwhile, the humanistic approach to a social worker reveals him / her not as a representative of a simple profession, not as a person aiming at learning to use the methodology of professional technologies, but as a person, who has chosen social profession before listening attentively to his / her inner voice, and willing to grow, develop and get involved into this process naturally by the whole lifestyle. Therefore, I intuitively rely on the concept of competence used by D. Lepaitė (2003, p. 6), where she highlights an individual’s “ability to act”, determined by the individual’s “knowledge, abilities, skills, attitudes, personality traits and values”. P. Jučiūtė (2007, p. 138) also adds that all the components of competence as listed by D. Lepaitė (2003) “lie inside the individual and manifest in successful results of an individual’s specific area of activity”.

The interaction model describing the process of social work as presented in scientific literature (Bagdonas, 2001), the stages of this process (Sutton, 1999; Johnson, 2001), highlight the main social work components and factors leading to the social worker’s activities and professionalism. The same sources reveal the social worker’s professional competence system which comprises knowledge, values and skills.

Knowledge is one of the elements of the social worker’s professional competence system. L. C. Johnson (2001) assumes that a social worker has to base practice on theoretical knowledge, to be able to assess the gained knowledge, to have a right of choice to apply knowledge in certain specific situations (ibid, p. 54). Knowledge in social work is based on specific methods and theory one can actually grasp and apply in practice. I. Dirgėlienė (2008, p. 94) maintains that the need for general professional knowledge is of particular relevance for social workers who work with addicts, carriers of communicable diseases, victims of human trafficking, the ones engaged in prostitution, those confronting perpetrators or those having returned from prisons, and deal with their problems. The Standard for Social Worker Training (2008) contains the idea that a social worker has to understand how a society functions, what role and how a client acts in it; the necessity of knowledge about a human, their environment, relations and factors that determine a client’s relationship with the environment.
V. Kavaliauskienė (2010) writes that social work is a wide, multidimensional, complex, emotionally intense activity. This profession is associated with dedication, service to another, the essence of life, mission (ibid., p. 164). O.V. Okunišnikova (2007), writing about the importance of social worker’s professional competence, emphasises that probably “social work cannot be handled by people who do not care about the fates of others, who feel uncomfortable analysing other people’s problems” (ibid., p. 158). Since social workers deal with the most vulnerable members of society, V. Ivanauskienė and L. Valžinskienė (2007), I. Dirgėlienė (2010) view values as one of the most important areas of social worker’s professional competence. V. Ivanauskienė and L. Valžinskienė (2007, p. 77) argue that the core values are those that have something in common with a human value and dignity. Moreover, the authors refer to B. R. Compton and B. Galaway (1999) to describe the values; the values for these authors are unproven and, perhaps impossible to prove, beliefs about human nature. These beliefs indicate the direction of social work practitioner’s daily work.

In 2006 V. Ivanauskienė and L. Valžinskienė (2007) conducted a quantitative descriptive study where they examined the peculiarities of professional competence of social work practitioners and social workers’ professional values. The conducted research revealed that social work practitioners’ work is based on values; social work values are adopted and recognized as valuable and important to the social work practice and the client support process. Among the social work professional values the following values were named as the most important ones: confidentiality, acceptance, empowerment, professional responsibility, controlled emotional involvement, social justice, knowledge sharing, client rights, individualization. Among the personal values used in professional activities, the following values were most frequently named: understanding, tolerance, patience, respect, acceptance, empathy, ability to listen and hear, good-will, sincerity, openness; as well as love to a human, humanity; consideration, cooperation, communication, sensitivity, responsibility, activeness, work with all one’s heart, etc. (ibid., p. 79–80).

I. Dirgėlienė (2010), exploring the issue of confidentiality in social work, points out that opening of values and their becoming one’s inseparable part is a long process, which is particularly influenced by a society. The attitudes of a social worker are often far ahead the public attitudes and the prevailing stereotypes. Professional values, however, are not unique. The profession of social work exists in a wider cultural context; meanwhile a social worker is a member and a “cultural product” of this same society. Therefore, social work is always at a risk of operationalization of the attitudes already existing in the society, including stereotypical ones, affecting the social risk groups or individuals. The author is often referring to the world’s practice while speaking about the inborn values and the values acquired by social work practitioners.
workers. As an example – at the University of Manchester (United Kingdom) values are given a particular role – admission to the social work studies is determined not by the average grade, but by a test on values (to analyse a candidate’s values the admission system applies several types of tests) (Dirgelienė, 2010, p. 33). It is likely that a social worker, who has chosen this profession as a mission, will manage to establish and maintain their primary resolution to work in this area, will acquire an opportunity “to live a valuable life”, to fulfil their human mission and to develop their creative skills (Kavaliauskienė, 2010, p. 164).

Why are values so important for a social worker’s professional competence? Because, if your work with people who have social problems is not guided by values, you may cause damage instead of providing help (Ivanauskienė and Valžinskienė, 2007). Therefore, social work is a profession which promotes changes and intervention in the human interaction (Kiaunytė and Puidokienė, 2011). Because the meanings, significance, importance, implications, and values, that a social worker places upon a client and surrounding social circumstances, make a social worker’s own world-view of his (her) role in relationship with a client. In other words, processes of the assessment of client situation are themselves increasingly recognised as constituting an intervention. These processes are essentially socially and personally constructive (Parton and O’Byrne, 2000; Paris and Epting, 2004), and thereby constitute a reality for those involved in construing those realities. It is indicated in the international definition of social work that „the social work profession promotes social change, problem solving in human relationships and the empowerment and liberation of people to enhance well-being. Utilising theories of human behaviour and social systems, social work intervenes at the points where people interact with their environments. Principles of human rights and social justice are fundamental to social work“.

The real social work professional practice is dominated by “difficulties”, “problems”, which raise disturbance, are unpleasant, complicated, which are difficult to learn to live with, to solve or overcome. In order to overcome them a social worker needs good professional preparation, skills, a wide range of knowledge, creativity and imagination (Kavaliauskienė, 2010, p. 164). Skills – an integral part of social worker’s competence. This is a component of practice, connecting knowledge and values, as well as converting them into actions, a response to a concern or need (Johnson, 2001). Skills are analysed in the social work process, which is characterized by the following stages – identification of needs, planning, implementation, monitoring, review of results, assessment, prediction of future prospects. C. Sutton (1999, p. 7) presents the social work process as ASPIRE, i.e. a sequence or cy-

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cle of actions, where all four stages are in constant interaction: AS – Assessment; P – Planning; I – Implementation; RE – Review and Evaluation. Assessment is based on information, collected from the individuals who are participating in the process or are closely related with them. Often people who have control of the information are not particularly inclined to share it; therefore, in this situation a social worker has to demonstrate huge professional skills to extract it. L. Gvaldaitė and B. Švedaitė (2005, p. 25) note that peculiarities of social work clients require that the used intervention methods, which require high level competence, were as close to the dailyround as possible, understandable and non-shocking. The authors use the model of methodological operation, as developed by L. Van Weezel and K. Waaldijk (2004), which incorporates the making of purposeful impact through simple daily activities. This model consists of three activities: (1) being with a client, (2) a purposeful impact, and (3) constant self-reflection.

A change occurs as a result of skills intervention, by applying an appropriate social work method and using it effectively.

The ability to reflect – to link theory and practice, to give meaning to and reconsider the values and skills rooted in practice, which were formed on the basis of acquired knowledge – in everyday working life, is one of the most significant features of social worker’s professionalism (Jucevičienė, 2001; Gvaldaitė, Švedaitė, 2005; Dirgélienė, Kiaunytė, 2005, 2006; Dirgélienė, 2008, 2010; Kavaliauskienė, 2010, etc.). To actualize the role of reflection in the social work professional life means to seek for alternative methods of activity, which help to overcome difficulties and problems, taking into consideration the processes of changes taking place in the contemporary world, unforeseen, unexpected challenges, as faced by people in their life. Reflection helps to form a specialist’s self-knowledge, comprehension, it adds to the professional development (Career Counselling. Constructivist Approaches, 2006; cited in Kavaliauskienė, 2010. p. 160-162). This is especially true in terms of the learning society, when people of all ages and education get retrained so that to gain a social worker’s profession. The strength of adults is their life experience, but therein also lies a danger – the values formed in the course of life do not always respond to the social worker’s ethics, the defensive mechanisms show up under the crisis intervention (Dirgélienė, 2008).

The idea of knowledge application in practice is also highlighted in documents which regulate the social worker’s professional activities (Description of the Social Work Study Field. A Project, 2012).

In addition to reflection, in the process of social care and support provision, a social worker needs a variety of skills: gnostic (search for information, understanding and selection); projecting (setting goals and tasks, forecasting); design (selection and adjustment of content, methods and tools); organization (setting
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conditions, stimulating a purposeful and natural change of clients’ situation); com-

munication (communication skills, socialization, development of relationships); com-

munication (socialization, development of relationships); expertise or evaluation (comprehension and critical process analysis) (Leliūgienė, 2002, p. 389).

P. Jučevičienė (2001), G. Kvieskienė and V. Indrašienė (2008) claim that modern social work aims not only at solving a client’s problem, but also at enabling a person to effectively modify their activities. By participating in the problem-solving process not only a social worker, but also a client acquire problem-solving skills, which help to overcome other obstacles of social functioning.

2. Preconditions for the construction of the research instrument of the professional competence transformation in the institutional child care

While collecting material for the research, I came across the Report on Children’s Rights Situation in the Residential Care and Education Institutions in Lithuania3, carried out in 2005–2006. Along with the other documents and sources, this Report has become a great starting point, allowing the possibility to see and assess the qualitative change in the institutional care system over the period from 2006 until 2013, all the more so because this period allows to observe an extremely intense dynamics of objective conditions (legal regulation, qualification requirements, structural changes), hypothetically having to force the inevitable changes in the above mentioned system, as well as the changes in professional competence. The following are short excerpts form the Report4, which have contributed to the construction of the research presented in this article.

The researchers had observed a number of instances of ill-treatment of children in the actions taken by the workers of child care homes (e.g., severe punishments, etc.). The Report also uses the interview with the Children’s Rights Ombudsman, given in February 2005, to Lithuanian radio coverage, where the facts of physical and psychological abuse used against children in a particular foster home were confirmed. In addition, it has found that the employees take the food home, it is very cold in the inside the foster home, and there is a shortage of the most necessary medicine (Children Wronged in the Foster homes. Lithuanian radio, 02-02-2005; cited in the Report, 2006). Inadequate behaviour of the employees with children is often related to the lack of competency. When staff members do

4 Information provided in this chapter refers to Report on Children’s Rights Situation in the Residential Care and Education Institutions in Lithuania.
not have appropriate skills for the successful management of misbehaviour in children, they use “traditional” disciplinary measures. Night shift staff often has no special education, as lower requirements are set for the candidates.

The Report draws a conclusion that the daily work practice of care homes is still subject to a number of methods applied in the Soviet times. One of the main reasons supporting the old system operation and principles of work, and at the same time slowing down the processes of modernization, – employees working in the child care system for years, who practice traditional methods of work with the child according to obsolete child care approach is one of the main reasons behind the prevalence of operation and work principles of old (soviet) system. The main negative feature of such team of specialists is obsolete and often unacceptable methods of working with children and the disregard of children’s rights. Since staff turnover in the abovementioned institutions is minimal (most of the employees have been working there for 20–30 years), there is an apparent lack of the renewal and dynamism of the staff in these institutions.

Although most of the administration representatives of the foregoing institutions stated that the staff does undergo in-service training and other courses, in practice, staff of some of the institutions seems to lack the knowledge in the field. It occurred that explicitly sexual behavior of youngsters in some of the institutions was interpreted incorrectly and the reaction/actions of staff were inappropriate. There is also a lack of knowledge on managing the aggressive behavior among children, solving conflict situations, etc. Work methods, which were acceptable in the Soviet system are hard to get rid of and can not change on their own.

Additionally to the Report, presented above, the research construction is based on the Part 4 of Article 20 and Part 1 of Article 37 of the Law on Social Services, as of 1 July 2006 (2006-01-19, No. X-493), which lays down that after 1 July 2011, a person can work as a social worker upon acquiring social work or equivalent education. The aforesaid law provides that if within 5 years from the date when the law came into force (1 June 2006), a person does not acquire the required education, he / she loses the right to perform social worker’s duties.

It is written in Social Report 2010–2011 (2011), that in order to facilitate the situation of social workers without proper education and of former children’s social care home educators and to ensure that they are entitled to perform the function of social worker after 1st of July 2011, the retraining process of the workers mentioned started in May 2010.

However, the results of the retraining process of social workers without necessary education and former educators of children’s social care homes are far from what was expected: formally, the retraining was implemented, the employees retained their workplaces, but the level of the professional competences neces-
necessary for social workers, which largely help to achieve the social care quality criteria, was rather low. A Danish journalist Vibeke von Sperling, who returned to Lithuania after 20 years, in August 2011, visited the children’s home in one of the Lithuanian districts, and described her impressions in the interview with a journalist of the Lithuanian daily “Lietuvos rytas”:

“I was shocked by the children’s home I have visited in one of the Lithuanian districts as well as the interviews with the children and educators. <...> there have I felt the heritage of the Soviet system most vividly. <...> This is a truly viable cell of the Soviet system, which has successfully survived and was transplanted into a new European organism. What is shocking there is the mental apathy, coldness, indifference underlying this system. <...> I realized that a lot needs to be reconsidered inside the European Union <...>. It seemed so much had been done, so much funding was provided to reform suchlike institutions; however, it appears that the mentality of people and attitudes are stronger and more durable than any money.”

This section presents the sources that serve as the basis for constructing the research instrument presented in the article, and planning the research itself.

3. Research methodology

The research was carried out in January 2013 in Klaipėda city and district. The research involved 10 employees of children’s homes in the area. These were social workers, social educators and administrative staff, working in the children’s care system from 1 to 30 years. The main criteria for the selection of respondents were as follows:

a) a respondent has to obtain the professional qualification of a social worker inspired by personal motivation;
b) or has to be retrained on the basis of Part 4 of Article 20 and Part 1 of Article 37 of the Law on Social Services, as of 1 July 2006, (19-01-2006, No. X-493), which lays down that after 1 July 2011, a person can work as a social worker upon acquiring social work or equivalent education;
c) or, under the provision of Part 3 of Article 37 of the same Law, which lays down that if from the entry into force of the Law hereof no more than 7 years are remaining to the retirement age, did not get retrained.

Efforts have been made to maintain the proportion of respondents’ line-up under the aforementioned criteria. The research involved only those employees of the children’s homes, who agreed to participate. Prior to the research, the administration of the children’s care institutions in Klaipėda was addressed, asking for per-

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5 Davoliūtė, V. (2011). A Danish journalist V. von Sperling, who has returned to Lithuania 20 years later: “Shocking Stay at Children’s Care Home – Breeze of Soviet Heritage Frost”. Internet access: [viewed: 30-08-2011]
mission to conduct the research in respective care institutions. Making first contact was not very smooth, possibly because the end of the year was approaching and intensive festivities were taking place; moreover, by the end of the calendar year, specific administrative work is typically carried out; furthermore, employees often plan their holidays for that time. Repeated contact with the representatives of the administration of the children’s care homes, the consent to conduct the research was obtained.

The interview process itself went smoothly, but not without minor problems. Respondents were asked for permission for an interview audio recording; two respondents refused to give permission. Two more respondents, who initially refused to make an audio recording, eventually agreed with the recording when the interview had started. Sometimes a few respondents found it difficult to formulate answers to questions related to the results of the respondent and client interaction. A lack of respective professional competence can be seen as the cause; moreover, the interaction with a client is mainly based on intuition; in addition, there is a lack of deeper reflection intervention in the success and failure cases.

Eight interviews were conducted in the workplace of the respondents – children care institutions –, during the working hours and having agreed about the time for the interview in advance. Two of the interviews were conducted outside the workplaces.

Children’s care homes⁶, where the respondents worked, include municipal budgetary institutions, the purpose of which is to provide care (welfare), education and short-term (long-term) social care for Klaipėda city and district children left without parental care, under temporary or permanent care (welfare). Lithuanian practice of creating children’s care homes is rather typical – children’s care homes in the country began to emerge after 1990, reorganizing boarding-schools. The story of Klaipėda city and district children’s care homes is not an exception. Klaipėda city and district institutions currently host from 30 to almost 80 children from 1 to 18 years old; if a child studies according to the general education programme or according to the formal professional training programme, he or she can live in the children’s care home until the age of 21. Children live in families of 8–12 children. Typically brothers and sisters live together in one family. Each family has 1 large room, 5–6 bedrooms, a shower, toilet. Two social workers and 1–2 social worker’s assistants work with a family.

The wards attend Klaipėda city and district pre-school educational institutions, study at general education schools, gymnasiums, as well as in specialized schools.

⁶ Information about children’s care homes, where the research participants work, is based on the material presented on the institutions’ websites. Some of the care homes do not have their websites; therefore, the data obtained through the interview was used.
of Klaipėda city and district, which correspond to their special needs; there are wards who study in vocational training schools.

The children’s care homes allow children to express themselves, practise working activity, develop children’s intellectual abilities. Much attention is paid to the children’s leisure organization. The wards attend different activities and clubs, both organized in the children’s care homes and the city – football, phytodesign, art therapy, boxing, drama, information technologies, dancing, etc.

The research data are analysed by applying the Foucauldian discourse analysis method. As I. Parker (2003) describes, discourse analysis treats the social world as a text, or rather as a system of texts which can be systematically ‘read’ by a researcher to lay open the social process that lie within them. Starting point of discourse analysis method is acknowledgement of the diversity of meaning, the different, sometimes contradictory ways of speaking that govern what we do (and who we can be). Meaning is continually changing (it is dynamic), and language is composed of many ‘languages’ or discourses (ibid., p. 92–93).

Discourse analysis method doesn’t aim to account for every aspect of a phenomenon but purposefully chooses to trace selective patterns and collects only those sets of features associated with them.

The method pays attention to the relationship between discourses and institutions. Here, languages or discourses are not conceptualized simply as ways of speaking or writing, as C. Willig (2004, p. 171) notices. They are bound with institutional practices, i.e. with ways of organising, regulating and administering social life. Discourse analysis method is suitable for detailed practice analyzing; Foucault himself has focused his studies and analysis on the details of practices. He has made no conventional distinctions between the theory and practice of the helping disciplines, as L. Epstein (1999) likes to call all disciplines, which purpose – to help people, including social work, – rolling the two into one. M. Foucault applied the discourse analysis method to examine instead practices and local circumstances: not institutions, but institutional practices; not ideology but statements; not the ‘subject’ but the embodied subject (Chambon, 1999, p. 56). Thus, while discourses legitimate and reinforce existing social and institutional practices, these practices, in turn, also support and validate the discourses. For example, being positioned as ‘the client’ within a social care discourse means that one’s living conditions, and life in general, become objects of legitimate interest to social workers, that they may be studied, tested, and invaded in the process of social services’ provision which forms part of the practice of social work and its institutions (see also Willig, 2004, p. 172).

The decision to use discourse analysis for the data analysis required a significant amount of time and effort in understanding how to perform the analysis tech-

4. Research Data Analysis

The carried out research covered different aspects of professional competence transformation in the institutional child care. This article presents the analysis focusing on the following questions of the research:

a) how the change of qualification requirements was welcomed by the workers themselves?

b) how workers themselves define and explain the competence of a social worker of children’s homes?

The process of data analysis was started by transcribing speech from interviews, and then reading the transcripts and segmenting the texts according to thematic analysis. After several readings of transcripts there were selected all pieces of text that refer to the object of the study; here I refer to R. Naujaniene’s (2007) experience to applying discourse analysis method. I also continued to read the transcripts further and looked for the cases or parts of text which could be best used to demonstrate findings (according Flick, 1998; cited in Naujaniene, 2007, p. 63). My aim was to answer the specific research questions of the study, what U. Flick (1998) had called “presentational sampling” (Naujaniene, 2007, p. 63).

Response to the Change in the Qualification Requirements

In response to the first question of the research, I analyse an excerpt from an interview with Elena, one of the child care home employees participating in the research, who had retrained on the basis of the new requirements. In addition, she works in the administration of the child care home; therefore, the analyses of the excerpts from the interview with Elena help me to present all the three discursive formations, which I was able to identify after reviewing many times the results of all the interviews. I will present the episode, where we discuss with Elena the impact of the Law on Social Services of 2006 on the staff of the child care homes, including her personal professional career, and a response to these changes. Analysing this episode, I have disclosed how the discursive formations describing the changes in the qualification requirements are intertwined with each

7 In order to preserve the confidentiality of respondents, their names have been changed.
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other. I distinguish between the following discursive formations: *change in working conditions, change in the duties, change in the attitude to work.*

I can identify the change in working conditions as one of the discursive formations describing the change in the qualification requirements. In the analysed excerpt, this change in working conditions is identified as “a lower salary” (line 98), “36-days’ holiday has been left out of 56” (line 99), “harder work” (line 101), “earlier we did not ever have children with disabilities, both mental and physical” (line 82–83), “and we have also received such children” (line 82). Such references construct the change in the qualification requirements as the *change in working conditions*: economic criterion (line 98), working conditions criterion (line 77, 99, 101), working with clients criterion (line 82–83).

In the excerpt introduced above, I also associate the change in the qualification requirements with the “loss of qualification” (line 40), “removal of management categories” (line 40-41) and “standing again on the zero” (line 41). This means that “we are no longer pedagogues, but social workers” (line 44), “nannies, see – social workers’ assistants” (line 45), “because, in fact, who were they earlier? Cleaners” (line 46). The change in the duties for the pedagogues, who had a specific career model, meant that the “categories were removed from the educators” (line 98), it was necessary “to start everything from scratch” (lines 102). These references construct the change in the qualification requirements as the *change in the duties*.

In addition, the analysed excerpt from the interview about the change in the qualification requirements also highlights the need “to change attitudes” (line 9) for both the institution itself, because of the given instruction “to quit here writing poems, it was necessary to start providing services, and to work” (line 19–20), and the staff, because “a pedagogue, he still works in a little bit different manner, he plans his time differently, though it seems that the work he performs is the same, but still his thinking is different” (line 21–22), because “step by step different children started coming, including the disabled” (line 24–25), therefore, “to do everything what you have been used to doing was not possible” (line 29–30). Meanwhile, the “nannies” (line 45), who “became a social worker’s assistant from a cleaner – are the ones who needs to get retraining” (line 47), without the change in the attitude to work the adaptation was impossible. All these references present the change in the qualification requirements also as the *change in the attitude to work*.

A closer examination of the discursive contexts containing different discursive formations about the change in the qualification requirements provides additional insights. The text excerpt where the change in the qualification requirements is constructed as the change in working conditions develops from Elena’s story about the response to these changes by the child care home and its staff: the experienced
“shock of the first year” (line 30), accompanied by the feverish search for information – “we read a lot, showed great interest, visited other child care homes a lot, as well as other social care institutions, communicated with the elderly homes” (line 31–32), and even had thoughts “to quit” (line 38). The same discursive formation is repeatedly addressed in the analysed text excerpt when Elena speaks about the arrival of new wards with various disabilities to the care home, which marked the change in the qualification requirements, because “earlier we did not ever have children with disabilities, both mental and physical. We used to have all of them normal, healthy children” (line 82–83). We faced fears “how the team will accept this social work” (line 89–90), “won’t our children be exposed to their anger” (line 90). The anxiety was reasoned, because “all of us, who had been working earlier, all of us, faced the changes for the worse rather than for the better, with respect to the working conditions, work payment, holidays” (line 91–92). Moreover, in both, the first and second instances, this discursive formation was accompanied by another reform which took place at the same time, when the child care homes were transferred from the county-controlled supervision to the municipal control, what is named as an even more compounding circumstance: “the biggest challenge in this our path was” (line 73) “that there was a transition from the county to the municipality” (line 74), “we faced two such transformations at the same moment: our new authority, plus everything was new here inside” (line 75), this is identified as turning a “double somersault” (line 76).

When I put a question to Elena about the effect of the change in the qualification requirements on Elena herself, other employees of the care home and the institution itself, the response first of all started developing from the change in the attitude to work. This discursive formation develops in three levels: personal level – as an employee who herself had to change not only her qualification but also the attitude (“for me, social work was something completely new, because I had been worked as a pedagogue all my life” (line 11)); collective level, presenting the peculiarities of pedagogical work in the care home, which had to be changed: earlier – “we had more festivals, perhaps more of those discussions, more afternoon meetings” (line 23), “like at school” (line 24), and now – “you feel you don’t want to give up on everything” (line 28–29), “but to do everything what you have been used to doing was not possible” (line 29–30), because the wards were changing – more children with various disabilities started arriving to the care home. The third level – institutional, because of Elena’s work in the child care home administration, there was “a need to change the overall attitude of the institution” (line 9). The analysed excerpt features the overlap of all the three levels, often the boundaries among the personal, collective and institutional levels disappear completely.
The discursive formations identified in the analysed text are constructed in the context of Elena’s repetitive questions: “social work – what’s this?” (line 14), “how and what do you have to do?”, “what should be changing in this institution?” (line 15). These questions are followed by the change in the qualification requirements as the discursive formation of the change in the attitude to work. The discursive formation of the change in working conditions is also constructed in the text after a sequence of questions raised by Elena: “how shall we work?”, “what shall we do?” (line 87), “how the team will accept this social work?” (line 89), “won’t everyone flee?”, “won’t our children be exposed to their anger?” (line 90). Discursive contexts of these produced formations suggest that the change in the qualification requirements was seen by the respondent as an extreme breaking-point both professionally and psychologically. In addition, such abundance of questions raised by Elena herself, on the basis of which she constructs both fear and uncertainty, also demonstrate curiosity, willingness to find answers to these questions; perhaps this cannot be taken for optimism, but at least reveals the determination to fight for the workplace, and for the survival of the institution.

Within the discursive formation of change in the qualification requirements as the change in working conditions, the subject constructed as manager is presented serially. This emerged from the interview excerpt. At first the subject is named as the one who “read a lot, showed great interest, visited other child care homes a lot, as well as other social care institutions, communicated with the elderly homes” (line 30–32). Then, the text clearly features the subject – “we as managers” (line 35), who “put a lot of efforts, really put efforts, by, well, convincing ourselves that we can do this, that we will reorient ourselves” (line 42–43), because “it was necessary anyway to manage this whole team” (line 89) and “to figure out how to say that, see, it’s not that bad, we will move forward anyway” (line 96). In the analysed text excerpt, the subject often identifies herself with the whole institution, straightforwardly stating this – “we as the institution” (line 37), which “celebrates this year its twentieth anniversary” (line 100). Later, this same identity unfolds when speaking about “own employees” (line 44), “our nannies” (line 45), “our children” (line 90). These references have positioned the manager as responsible for others.

Furthermore, where the subject is constructed as staff, such people are named as “no longer pedagogues, but social workers” (line 44), “nannies, see – social workers’ assistants” (line 45), “none of our workers fled, though a lot of them, of course, were about to, many things happened” (line 51). The subject is constructed as an active person who can be positioned as a co-worker who works together in the institution. Thus, a co-worker is presented as the other with respect to the manager. Then, speaking about losses associated with the change in the qualification requirements, the manager identifies herself and expresses solidarity with the
co-workers, because “all of us, who had been working earlier, all of us, faced the changes for the worse rather than for the better, with respect to the working conditions, work payment, holidays” (line 91–92). These references suggest that both subjects can be positioned equal to the change in the qualification requirements.

Within the discursive formation of the change in the qualification requirements as the change in the attitude to work, the subject is also constructed as an agency – “social institution” (line 10), which has to provide “services” (line 16, 17) to the “clients” (line 16), which is supposed to quit “writing poems” (line 19–20) and “start providing services, and to work” (line 20). It “was very hard” (line 20) for the agency, “such a shock” (line 27), that there were consideration to “quit” (line 38). These references have positioned the agency as having survived a major crisis.

What discursive practices could be defined (marked) in various positions of the subjects? Positioning a manager as responsible allude to the actions in order to preserve the institution and employees, and assisting the latter to adapt the changed requirements. An employee positioned as a co-worker unfolds the practice applied over many years of work in the child care home, based on educational measures, which, as also confirmed by other respondents of the research, was transferred to the new employees, as self-evident and unquestionable. The discursive context of the discursive formation, the change in the attitude to work, expressed as nostalgia of the past suggest a reluctance to accept the changing situation. And even the system of naming positions so far unchanged in the daily informal use – social workers are further referred to as “educators”, social worker’s assistants – “nannies”, – also expresses the nostalgia of the past days. Elena herself speaks with nostalgia and pride about the “many festivals, many discussions, many afternoon meetings” (line 23) organized as an expression of the “traditions” (line 29), formed in the long run of the care home existence, as about a well understood and obviously meaningful activity. Meanwhile, new social work practice is described with a hint of irony, it seemed “extremely funny at first, then, no longer funny, we have started to analyse how these services will be provided” (line 16–17). Positioning a manager and an employee as equal implies that the change in the qualification requirements had equally affected the staff of all levels of care institutions, and all of them had to make a decision – to respond to the changes or to quit the job. This suggests that namely the situation of “sitting in the same boat” resulted in a rather sensitive evaluation of the situation and empathy to the employees, since the managers themselves did not know “how to require from them, and how much can be required” (line 49). The agency positioned as having survived a major crisis forms the assumption that the transition from an educational institution to a social institution has been completed, however, this transfer was very painful, and
required huge efforts of the entire team and trust in each other. Elena speaks about the transition period with great pain, but at the same time she is proud of the care home staff, because “none of our workers fled, though a lot of them, of course, were about to” (line 51). She assigns a number of merits for retaining the staff to the managers, who “put a lot of efforts, really put efforts” (line 42). And, in fact, in the care home where Elena works, the change in the qualification requirements was not a cause for any of the staff members to leave the job, except for those who refused to get retrained due to the retirement age and retired on a pension. The situation in other care homes, which participated in the research, varies.

In the final stage of the analysis, I present a potentially possible subjective experience of the subject – what could have been felt, thought, experienced -, being in different positions. The subject positioned as a manager had to suffer frustration – tossing between what is usual, understandable, based on traditions, but can no longer be practiced in the usual form, and this what the institution needs to become in response to the contemporary requirements. As a manager, the subject feels responsible for the institution and employees, their fate, therefore, has to make every effort, helping the latter to adapt the changed requirements. The most painful experience, which is named, and felt throughout the entire text of the analysed excerpt is “uncertainty” (line 39, 106, 114, 116) for the future of the individual as well as the whole institution. On the one hand, this experience is understood as the engine of changes, encouraging the subject to adapt and, thus, remain in the institutional care. On the other hand, it is understood as an obstacle which is still an excuse to transfer the elements of experience formed over many years in today’s social work practice, because the future is uncertain “when only the municipality funding is available” (line 115), “neither we nor anyone else knows” (line 124).

The subject positioned as an employee felt a big disappointment, because “all of us, who had been working earlier, all of us, faced the changes for the worse rather than for the better, with respect to the working conditions, work payment, holidays” (line 91–92). A hostile attitude against the new requirements was determined by the unclear procedure of retraining: “visitors from the Ministry arrived, we received letters, which said that educators, who had been working for so many years, really do not need any training, maybe some refresher courses only, we will get a different qualification and that’s it, and we’ll continue working as we’ve done before. And what happened? Like that, that if not the funding from the European Union, we might have lost our jobs. We were told that this was your problem, you have been warned, and you had to study” (line 118–122). The change in qualification requirements, and at the same time the change in the duties, is perceived as the underestimation of hard work and efforts – “the more you tried, worked, the more, it seems, it was on the contrary – the bigger the reduction” (line 110–111) – and
again you have to start everything “from scratch” (line 102). The determination of the subject positioned as an employee to get retrained or to choose to leave the child care system was significantly influenced by the overall institutional strategy: the experience of an open institution allowed the subject to be more open to the changes.

What conclusions can be drawn from the analysis of the interview excerpt? Three discursive formations of the changes in the qualification requirements placed into professional social work discourse display three different discourses. First of all, the discursive formation of the change in the duties highlight the political discourse, reflected in Part 4 of Article 20 and Part 1 of Article 37 of the Law on Social Services, as of 1 July 2006, (2006-01-19, No. X-493).

In addition, the construction of discursive formation as the change in working conditions resonates with the economic discourse. The economic discourse dominates in terms of the changes in salary, working conditions, the scope of work; finally, discussing the staff’s decision whether to get retrained or not, and to leave the institution, as well as discussing the costs of retraining, job loss “during the crisis” (line 112–113).

The psychological discourse is apparent in the construction of discursive formation as a change in the attitude to work. Social work in Lithuania is a young profession, whose image formation is still in process: an attitude to social work as equal to other professions is slow in formation both in the society and among the people who due to political decisions unexpectedly fell into the field of social work. The teaching profession held especially strong social positions in the country during the Soviet period. Teachers are very reluctant to easily give away the professional status positions once held, especially to new “undistinguished” professions, such as social work.

The Competences of a Social Worker of the Child Care Home

In search of an answer to the second question, I analyse the interview excerpt with the child care home worker Jurgita. Jurgita came to work at the care home with the social work educational background, acquired by working in other social support areas, and having planned her career in the field of social work. The most detailed description of social worker’s competences was articulated by the respondents with the social work educational background. The analysis of the interview with Jurgita helps me to present all the four discursive formations, which I was able to identify after reviewing many times the results of all the interviews. I have picked several episodes for the analysis from the interview with Jurgita, which in one or another way help to answer the question. I analyse the episodes where we discuss with Jurgita the qualities needed for a social worker, employed in child care homes, which would respond to the needs of the residents of the homes.
The analysis of these episodes helped me to reveal how the various discursive formations describing social worker’s competences are intertwined with each other. I distinguish between the following discursive formations: personal characteristics, professionalism, intuition-based actions, and institutional boundaries.

One interview episode constructs social worker’s competence by integrating values and abilities. Patience, tolerance, submissiveness (line 40–45), strictness, openness (line 49–51) are identified as qualities which construct the competence of a social worker, employed in child care homes. Moreover, it is very important for a social worker to manage to set certain limits and to prevent trespassing on them (line 11), “manage to forgive” (line 43), to be “more understanding” (line 49), “to show more initiative to act, to do, to travel, to communicate, to speak openly” (line 50–51), as well as “not to be limited” (line 68). All of these qualities construct a social worker as a personality, but also contribute to the formation of a person as a professional: developed personal qualities criterion (line 40–51), working with a client criterion (line 50–51, 68).

I identify one of the discursive formations describing the social worker’s competence as intuition-based actions. This discursive formation is closely related with the discursive formation of social worker’s personal characteristics. In the analysed extract, it is constructed by the model and values of the family, where a social worker was brought up (line 165–174), a hereditary inclination to help people (line 178–180). This is more an irrational criterion, formed by hardly identifiable and measurable qualities, however, it serves as an extremely valuable foundation on top of which social worker’s competences are constructed and strengthened.

All the analysed episodes feature references, linking the social worker’s competence to professional development, by acquiring more and “more knowledge so that to make appropriate decisions” (line 46), studies and “required education” (line 180), confirmed by the “diploma” (line 181) in a respective area. These references express the knowledge criterion in the social worker’s competence, thus constructing the picture of a social worker as a professional. I identify the discursive formation itself as professionalism.

The analysed excerpts highlight the role of a care institution, where a social worker functions, in the formation of the social worker’s competence. The rules used by the institution for a long time, the range of measures taken, the organizational culture (line 23–25) construct the institutional boundaries as the discursive formation in this excerpt. Finally, new workers are acquainted with their duties by the senior colleagues, who are trying to keep to the traditions of the institution, which “perhaps effectively and conveniently ensure a smooth activity of the institution” (line 27–28). Some employees take this for granted, as a norm, meanwhile, others, however, see this as “incompatible with their personal philosophy” (line 30).
A closer examination of the discursive contexts containing different discursive formations about social worker’s competencies provides additional insights. The text excerpt, where the social worker’s competence is constructed as personal characteristics develops after my question, what a social worker needs in order to respond to a child’s, living in the care home, needs. This question caused difficulties for Jurgita (likewise for many other respondents participating in the research), and this was what I didn’t expected to happen when I was preparing the research instrument. During the discussion we had to postpone this question for a later time, because Jurgita saw it as “very difficult to answer” (line 7), and I returned to the same question later at the end of the interview. This discursive formation was developed not only by Jurgita’s description what a social worker should be like, but also what a social worker should not be like. In the analysed text excerpt, it is emphasized that there “are a lot of limitations” (line 152), which “shouldn’t be present” (line 168). “The limitations of educators” (line 168) are revealed by several Jurgita’s examples from the daily care home routine: limitation is avoidance to discuss the topics with a child related to their sexual maturation, the changes taking place in their bodies, and new needs emerging (line 153–156). Another example, illustrating Jurgita’s opinion that the educators are too limited is related to their inability to distinguish between a child as a person and his / h(uncultured) behaviour (line 157–167): instead of trying to figure out the causes of the child’s inclination to publicly “release gas” (line 158) and to repeatedly misbehave, he is instantly identified as an outcast – giving him such titles as “a fool, moron” (line 167).

The discursive formation of personal characteristics is intertwined with the discursive formation of intuition-based actions. The discursive formation identified in the analysed part of the text is constructed by Jurgita’s constantly given example of her colleague, who is characterised as having a mission to work in the child care home even without the social work educational background: children call her “mummy” (line 142–146), she is able to find this mystical balance between “strictness and leniency” (line 191–195). In one of the analysed episodes, Jurgita constructs this discursive formation looking for such personal mission in her family model, parental behaviour, which she observed while growing up, applying this difficult-to-define experience in her work (line 173–180).

The articulation of professionalism as discursive formation is very fragmentary in the analysed part of the text, but it was possible to discern it in Jurgita’s behaviour during the interview: it unfolded in those episodes of the interview, where she spoke about specific cases from her professional daily routine. The efforts to ensure confidentiality, knowledge of professional ethics and the ability to apply it, the ability to timely perceive and professionally select the supportive measures (line 46–51), the ability to identify the “burnout syndrome” and to wilfully take
preventive measures (line 96–102) were obvious both in Jurgita’s speech and her behaviour during the interview.

Institutional boundaries as the discursive formation constructing social worker’s competence is developed in the analyzed excerpt, first of all, from the discursive formation of intuition-based actions, when Jurgita contemplates loudly, why she takes one or another decision in her work (line 23–26). Repeatedly, this discursive formation occurs after my question how Jurgita shows children that they misbehave (line 34). The institutional boundaries for Jurgita — this was “an already developed model, when I came to work here” (line 36), which “is incompatible with my real life philosophy” (line 38), but “perhaps effective, probably it is convenient for them” (line 39) as a set of measures, “facilitating the work” (line 36).

In the context of discursive formations of the social worker’s personal characteristics and intuition-based actions, the subject constructed as a parent is presented serially. This emerged from the interview excerpt. At first the subject is named as the one who has to “find a personal relationship with a child” (line 5–6), has “to be strict, strict as a mother” (line 7), to whom the care home children are “her children, and she does not spare them anything” (line 12). Later in the text it is apparently demonstrated that this subject position is not somewhat exclusive in the social work practice of child care home; speaking about her colleague, she reveals that this subject position is formed not only by the worker of the care home, by imagining their relationship with a child, but the children notice this and reflect upon: “the way children call her “mummy”, you know this, she is mummy all 100 percent” (line 143–144). These references have positioned a parent as emotionally responsible for children.

Within the discursive formations of professionalism and institutional boundaries, the subject is also constructed as a professional, “feeling a great responsibility” (line 6), being “a good organizer” (line 7), managing to “keep a distance” (line 7), for the care home children — their clients, being far more forgiving than for their biological children, but at the same time clearly formulating the boundaries that cannot be trespassed (line 9–11). These references have positioned the professional as professionally responsible to meeting a client’s needs.

What discursive practices could be defined (marked) in various subject positions? Positioning a parent as emotionally responsible presupposes the actions in the efforts to make personal, individual contacts with a child, thus creating a relationship as close and as natural as possible, and, most importantly, as normal as would be a typical relationship with the biological family. In this case, a child care resident is taken as a child, not as a client, for whom most important are the relationships which develop security, stability, trust, mutual respect. A professional positioned as a specialist, able to consciously organize their work, reveals a
conscious, purposeful professional activity, whose performance requires not only universal values and personal traits, but also specific knowledge and skills that help to act purposefully.

The subject positioned as a parent, wishing to respond to the needs of care home residents, first of all, certainly has to simply love children, because it is especially important to compensate for the emotional relationship of these children, which they lacked in their biological family. Therefore, such a Christian value as love of neighbor – becomes the most important value; protective feelings become relevant. In this case, personal maternity / parental experience are useful, meanwhile, developing the relationships close to a family model – of children and parents, the proportion between the age of a social worker and a child serves well. While constructing the emotion-based relationship, the connection is built, which passes across the boundaries of the care home and is capable of lasting for a long time: a social worker, likewise a father or mother, cares about the fate of the child, who has retired from the (care) home.

The subject positioned as a professional, managing to consciously organize their work, by responding to the client’s needs, feels responsible for the work entrusted to him or her, understands that the care home resident is not only a child entrusted to their care, but also a social worker’s client, whose needs have to be responded, but at the same time to respect the child as a social work client, even taking such decisions as “calling the police, writing of service letters” (line 101), “writing of statements to the police” (line 107), because “why to wait until the documents compile” (line 110). All this is done for “the smaller ones to see that something is being done, that some measures are taken” (line 109–110).

What answer could be formulated to the question from the analysis of the interview excerpts? Four social worker’s competence discursive formations placed into professional social work discourse display four different discourses. Let us start with the fact that the discursive formations of professionalism and institutional boundaries highlight the political discourse, reflected in Part 4 of Article 20 and Part 1 of Article 37 of the Law on Social Services (2006-01-19, No. X-493).

The personal competence discourse – social worker’s personal characteristics, their inner resources – dominate the speech of the employer herself. This is completely understandable, after all, as Dirgėlienė (2010) observes, the situation is confusing, the becoming of profession coincides with the intensive changes going on in society, whereupon the person’s inner resources absorb the asynchronous dynamics of the two processes. Speaking with Jurgita and other respondents, I have noticed the regularity: the answers to the question about the social worker’s knowledge, values and abilities typically started with the description of the social worker’s personality, their inner resources.
The professional discourse was not clearly articulated in the analysed excerpt, but it was possible to discern it in Jurgita’s behaviour during the interview, it was revealed in those parts of the interview, where she spoke about specific cases from her professional daily practice. Confidentiality, knowledge and the ability to apply professional ethics, the ability to timely perceive and professionally select the supportive measures, the ability to identify the features of the “burnout syndrome”, and the ability to wilfully take preventive measures dominate the behaviour, reasoning of decision-making of the employees with the basic social work educational background. This discourse very clearly divided respondents into social work professionals and non-professionals.

The institutional discourse emerges as the aspect restricting a full-range unfolding of social worker’s competences, but at the same time as the formative aspect. The institution, where a social worker comes to work has its own rules, the range of working measures, the organizational culture, finally, a new worker is acquainted with their duties by the senior colleagues, who are trying to keep to the traditions of the institution. Some workers take this for granted, as a norm, others see this as a factor restricting their opportunities.

In conclusion, it is worth noting that the latter question was equally challenging for both types of respondents – with and without the social work educational background.

**Conclusion**

Social worker’s competence in all fields of social work involves social worker’s ability to act, determined by his knowledge, abilities, skills, attitudes, personality traits and values. All these components lie inside social worker and manifest in successful results of his professional activity. The social worker’s competence system is clearly depicted in the interaction model by Bagdonas (2001). The model reveals the social worker’s professional competence system which comprises knowledge, values and skills. Knowledge in social work is based on specific methods and theory one can actually grasp and apply in practice. The set of certain values is one of the most important elements constructing social worker’s professional competence. Skills are the third component, constructing social worker’s competence system. This is a component of practice, connecting knowledge and values, as well as converting them into actions, a response to a concern or need. The ability to reflect, i.e. to link theory and practice, to give meaning to and reconsider the values and skills rooted in practice, which were formed on the basis of acquired knowledge, is one of the most significant features constructing social worker’s competence. Today, various reflective techniques are applied; one of them is pro-
fessional counselling (supervision). All these elements construct a coherent system of social worker’s competences.

As far as the aim of this study was to reveal the nature of professional competence construction in social work based on accounts by social workers in child care homes about their relation to the profession, 10 employees of Klaipėda city and district children’s homes were interviewed. These were social workers, social educators and administrative staff, working in the children’s care system from 1 to 30 years. The carried out research covered different aspects of professional competence transformation in the institutional child care, but due to a limited scope of the article only two questions have been addressed. The analysed questions can be summarized as follows: transformation of professional competence is a long and painful process in the Lithuanian institutional child care system. An attitude to social work as equal to other professions is slow in formation both in the society and among the people who due to political decisions unexpectedly fell into the field of social work. The teaching profession held especially strong social positions in the country during the Soviet period. Teachers are very reluctant to easily give away the professional status position once held, especially to new “undistinguished” professions, such as social work. The institution, where a social worker comes to work has its own rules, the range of working measures, the organizational culture, finally, a new worker is acquainted with their duties by the senior colleagues, who are trying to keep to the traditions of the institution. What kind of institutions are child care homes? These are the institutions with a long history of Soviet tradition, where the persons engaged in practicing traditional methods of working with children for many years find it difficult to change them, and keep following the outdated concept of working with children. These are people who needed to adapt to the new requirements, which was extremely challenging or even impossible for the major part of them.

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THE PROBLEM OF PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCE TRANSFORMATION: ASPECT OF...


