

The Child and World Around Through the “Lens” of the Adult

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Abstract

This scholarly article examines the nature-social unity as perceived by the child through their interaction with the surrounding world. The primary aim is to compare existing pedagogical theories on the child’s connection with their environment with the perspectives of adults involved in the child’s life. To achieve this, a comprehensive analysis of pedagogical texts was conducted alongside a survey involving parents, teachers, and pedagogy students whose daily interactions closely align with children’s experiences. Data collection employed an adapted photovoice method, allowing participants to express their views through photographs accompanied by explanatory narratives. This methodological approach highlights the significance of the environment in human development, particularly during early childhood. The findings aim to validate the hypothesis that if nature and the social environment are formative factors in early childhood development, a correlation should exist between the perspectives of these adults and the claims presented in pedagogical theory.

Keywords: interaction, influence, child, preschool age, natural world, development, social world, environment, family, photovoice.

„Man will not become master of nature until he becomes master of himself.”

Georg Hegel

1. Introduction

The relationship between nature and human beings, the understanding of the world and the “self,” and particularly the early childhood perception of the nature-social unity, is explored not only within the framework of Hegelian philosophy but also through the findings of numerous pedagogical researchers. These scholars investigate both the interaction between the child and their surrounding world and the influence this interaction exerts on the child’s development, education, and socialisation.

Human beings react to everything they see, touch, sense, hear, smell, perceive, or taste through contact with their environment. The environment consists of various factors, beyond genetic inheritance, that influence the physiological, social, and psychological growth of the individual. It is defined as “the sum of all external conditions and influences affecting the life and development of an organism,” exerting its impact throughout the human lifespan (Menkiti, 2008: 75). The environment can be both physical and abstract, encompassing the womb, home,

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community, church, school, weather conditions, and broader economic and political factors that shape learning experiences.

The impact of the environment on the child is indisputable. As B. Menkiti argues, an individual’s behaviour is shaped by both human nature (inherited traits) and upbringing (environmental influences). Expanding on this thesis, Menkiti emphasises that the environment’s impact can be either positive or negative, even altering genetic predispositions. An unfavourable or unhealthy environment—whether social or physical—can hinder growth and development, whereas a rich and supportive environment can foster the child’s potential. This aligns with J. B. Watson’s assertion that an individual is fundamentally a product of environmental influence (Menkiti, 2008: 75).

The importance of the environment in a child's development is closely tied to the interactions the child experiences within it. These interactions do not merely serve as sources of information but contribute to the cultivation of essential skills, the nurturing of personal qualities, and the enrichment of lived experience. This principle is central to M. Montessori’s pedagogical approach, which views the environment as fundamental to development. Montessori posits that the environment should foster the child’s growth by minimising obstacles, providing autonomy, and offering the necessary resources for self-initiated activities. She emphasises that the adult, as part of the child’s environment, must adapt to the child’s needs rather than hinder or substitute the child’s actions in ways that may impede growth (Montessori, 1936).

Montessori further asserts that “when the child is placed in favourable conditions, they display extraordinary activity. Their intelligence surprises us because all their faculties work together in harmony, as is natural for a human being.”

The examination of the adult’s perception of the child’s natural and social environment, and its influence on the child, aligns with the principles of preschool pedagogy. This exploration pertains to pedagogical strategies aimed at facilitating the preschool child’s understanding of their surrounding world, with a primary focus on fostering development, education, and socialisation through meaningful interactions within the environment.

2. Theoretical framework of the study

2.1 *The natural world in the child’s life*

Time spent in nature stimulates the child’s curiosity and creativity. The child demonstrates engagement “when something interests them, when they are amazed by the unexpected and the exciting. Their attention is directed towards seeking evidence to support a given hypothesis, uncovering cause-and-effect relationships between phenomena, and formulating conclusions” (Ivanova, 2018: 979-980). Through such engagement, the child explores their environment, gaining knowledge about plants, animals, and ecological systems, thereby enriching their cognitive and practical skills. “It is precisely during the preschool years that the first emotional impressions of nature and society are formed, concepts of different forms of life are developed, and the foundations of ecological thinking, awareness, and culture are laid” (Konakchieva, 2012: 178).

Nature fosters physical health and emotional well-being in the child. Outdoor games and physical activities in the fresh air significantly enhance the child’s physical health, contributing to improved coordination, strength, and endurance (Dokova, 2017: 59-62). Movement serves as an essential resource for both the sensorimotor and psychomotor development of the child. Such activities are often accompanied by strong emotional responses and positively impact mental health, alleviating anxiety and reducing negative moods (Ivanova & Kamenova, 2023: 60).

According to Kamenova, a variety of indoor and outdoor games and physical activities provide not only opportunities for diverse movements and the development of physical abilities but also foster emotional resilience (Kamenova, 2023: 216). Nature, as a source of emotions, experiences, and sensations, plays a crucial role in shaping the child's emotional development. While these experiences may not always be positive, their influence on emotional growth is undeniable.

Nature stimulates social skills. A child's presence in the natural environment is often accompanied by outdoor games, activities, and events that involve interactions with others—both peers and adults. These interactions shape the child's experiences and contribute to the development of essential social skills, including communication, cooperation, sharing, empathy, and negotiation.

Nature serves as a natural foundation for the development of aesthetic appreciation and ecological awareness. Familiarity with the natural environment influences the aesthetic education of the child from an early age, offering a rich source of diverse experiences and opportunities to observe objects that differ in type, size, colour, and characteristics, as well as natural phenomena that evoke a range of emotions (Koleva & Dzhorova, 2022: 25).

Early contact with nature shapes pro-ecological values and behaviours in children. They learn to respect and care for the environment, as E. Yanakieva notes: “some ecological knowledge about nature is accessible to preschool-aged children” (Yanakieva, 2019: Part One, 10).

The concept of ecological awareness encompasses knowledge, activities, and attitudes—ecological knowledge, an understanding of the place and role of humans within nature, actions aimed at the responsible use, transformation, and preservation of nature, as well as attitudes that reflect respect and responsibility toward it (Yanakieva, 2019: Part One, 58).

3. The social world in the child's life

The place of the social world in the child's life is discussed in pedagogical theory from various perspectives. Some of these can be summarised as follows.

The influence of the family. The family, as the smallest unit of society where the child is born, grows, and undergoes primary socialisation, serves as the first source of information, values, and social skills. A supportive family environment, characterised by love, understanding, and mutual respect, fosters the child's well-being and promotes healthy emotional and social development.

According to Menkiti, social development begins around the third month of life, when the infant starts to distinguish between people and responds to them through behaviour. At this stage, the senses develop sufficiently to enable communication and facilitate social integration into the community (Menkiti, 2008: 152).

As the primary arena for social development, the home plays a decisive role in shaping the child's life. Depending on the nature of the family environment, this influence can be either beneficial or detrimental. Personal relationships within the home—including interactions between parents, among siblings, between children and parents, and with other significant individuals, such as grandparents—are crucial for the child's social adaptation.

The family thus serves as the “training ground” for social skills. Children who experience positive social interactions within the family are more likely to build and maintain satisfying social relationships outside the home (Menkiti, 2008: 167-68).

The influence of peers and the peer group on the child's behaviour, interests, social status, and social skills is also significant. According to Menkiti, the peer group comprises

children of approximately the same age who frequently meet, play, interact, and influence one another. Socialised relationships within peer groups teach children to cultivate positive qualities, such as democratic behaviour, the ability to align their actions and desires with those of the group, and cooperative engagement. These interactions help children integrate into the social life of the peer community, overcome selfish tendencies, and seek recognition through self-improvement. However, peer groups can also foster antisocial behaviours, such as dishonesty, discrimination, exclusion, mischief, and disregard for rules (Menkiti, 2008: 169-170).

Early childhood is the critical period during which children learn to establish social contacts, communicate effectively, and understand others. They develop the ability to adapt to peers and engage in cooperative play. Studies by Allport (1954) and Jones (1965) indicate that social attitudes and behaviours formed during this period tend to persist throughout life with minimal change.

Menkiti (2008: 159) emphasises that children who engage in social interactions within peer groups, rather than exclusively within the family, are better socially equipped than those whose social experiences are limited to family members. Of particular relevance to pedagogical science is Marshal's (1958) assertion that as children grow older, they become increasingly sociable, exhibiting behaviours such as cooperation, generosity, empathy, imitation, attachment, and a desire for social approval (Menkiti, 2008: 160).

The influence of educational institutions—particularly kindergartens, where organised and purposeful cognitive interaction takes place and where the cognitive, emotional, physical, and overall development of the child is fostered—is significant. “Kindergartens are the first place where children spend a substantial amount of time outside their family or relatives” and are “pedagogically safe and purposefully designed public spaces where children can develop their potential and build social prosperity” (Stoyanova, 2023: 135). The educational environment in kindergartens provides opportunities for forming social connections, engaging in social interactions, and acquiring social skills. According to M. Stoyanova (2023: 132), “experiences in the institution’s physical environment through interactive activities, cultural events, and community practices provide young children with rich opportunities to perceive the world, experience it, and be a positive part of it.”

The teacher’s role in planning, organising, and managing not only activities but also the learning environment and social interactions among participants serves as a “primary driving force” in the educational institution. According to Menkiti, teachers must address each child's social, psychological, and emotional needs by employing diverse approaches and adapting to the dynamics of the child group and the institution. The institutional environment should be favourable and supportive to facilitate social interaction and adaptation. Educational programmes, pedagogical methods, and teachers’ conduct should aim to support and ease children’s social development and adjustment (Menkiti, 2008: 169).

A primary goal of educational interaction in kindergartens is to cultivate a social outlook and prepare children for life. This process involves the acquisition of life competencies, the ability to navigate life situations, readiness to adhere to social rules and expectations, and the development of communication skills and the capacity to engage constructively with their environment (Doncheva, 2018: 11).

The influence of culture and society is reflected in the cultural norms and values that shape children’s beliefs, understandings, attitudes, and behaviours. Media and technology also play a significant role in the socialisation and development of children. M. Stoyanova (2023: 133) emphasises that every cultural society imposes expectations on children and families through its institutions, laws, standards, experiences, and collective ideals of communal living.

Menkiti's perspective further supports this notion by framing social development as "the acquisition of the ability to behave or act in accordance with society's expectations." Socialisation represents the initial stage, during which children are introduced to the values, standards, and knowledge of their society. Social development follows as the second stage, closely tied to personality formation and characterised by the acquisition of distinct patterns of thinking, behaviour, and emotional expression (Menkiti, 2008: 152). Thus, teaching children how to live harmoniously with others and develop a sense of belonging within a broader societal context—not just within the family—is integral to their overall development.

4. Methodological framework of the study

4.1 *Objective, hypothesis, and instrumentarium*

The present study aims to explore the interconnection between the child and their surrounding world, as well as the role of nature and society in their development, based on the perspectives of adults. Data collection was conducted using an adapted application of the photovoice method involving students, teachers, and parents. Originating in the United States, this interactive technique is commonly applied in social work, community development, healthcare, and education (Wang & Burris, 1997: 369). It is regarded as a practical and accessible tool for identifying community issues and priorities (Boncheva, 2020: 16) and for fostering beneficial changes through the involvement of policymakers.

The term "*Photovoice*" is derived from the word "PHOTO" (image/photograph) and the acronym "VOICE"—*Voicing Our Individual and Collective Experience*, meaning "expressing our individual and collective experience" or simply "voice" (Boncheva, 2020: 17). According to its creators, this method enables individuals to define and represent their community through photographs and contribute to its improvement. Participants' photographs convey narratives, allow "the other" to see the world from the photographer's perspective, and draw public attention to significant aspects of human life. In certain contexts, the use of this method, particularly photographs accompanied by written captions, is recognized as a key tool for engaging decision-makers and influencing policies, thereby fostering social change within communities.

The research procedure followed the steps formulated by Wang (1999) (cited in Boncheva, 2020: 18). First, the target audience was identified, and participants were informed of the study's aim and methodology. Informed consent was obtained, and topics for the photographs were assigned. Participants were given time to select an image from their personal archive or capture a new photograph based on the assigned topic. Discussions of the submitted photographs were conducted, during which participants highlighted their preferred images (not all participants took part in these discussions, which were held in person, although photographs could also be submitted electronically).

This publication is directly linked to the final step of the photovoice process—presenting the photographs to the community. This step defines the adapted application of the photovoice method used in this study, as it allowed for both in-person and remote participation without specifically aiming to reach policymakers or effect large-scale social change.

To achieve the research objective, an electronic survey form was created using the Jotform platform and structured into three components. The first component introduced participants to the purpose of the study, obtained their consent for participation and data use, and identified their role as either student, parent, or teacher.

The second component comprised two sections. In the first section, participants were asked to upload an original photograph that illustrated the connection between the child and the natural world or depicted nature as a factor in the development of preschool-aged children. In the

second section, they were asked to upload a photograph illustrating the connection between the child and the social world or depicting the social world as a developmental factor. Participants were informed that the photographs could depict landscapes, family-related scenes, celebrations, animals, or abstract themes, and that their rationale and justification for their choice of image were of particular importance in both sections.

The third component of the survey required participants to confirm that the uploaded photographs were their own and to specify how the images could be used in the study—either in their original form or with facial features obscured. The first and third components were mandatory, while the second component was optional.

The choice of research method was also driven by the desire to achieve the following sub-objectives:

1. To provide adults who are close to the child and directly involved in their upbringing and education with the opportunity to view the world around the child with “wide-open eyes,” allowing them to identify and present it to “the other”—in particular, the researcher, and on a broader scale, to the readership interested in pedagogical research.
2. To stimulate an analytical and even critical perspective among students, parents, and teachers regarding the child’s surrounding environment.

The study aims to ensure that participants—who maintain both personal and professional relationships with the child—are co-participants and co-authors in the creation of a text focused on the child and their development.

The data analysis is based on responses collected in September and October 2024. In the first section of the second component, 29 forms were completed (13 by students, 11 by parents, and 5 by teachers). In the second section, 23 forms were submitted (11 by students, 9 by parents, and 3 by teachers), indicating that some participants did not share their perspectives on the social world in the child's life.

This adapted version of the photovoice method relies on participants’ subjective perceptions and imaginative interpretations while providing a platform to establish connections between the assigned task and the selected photograph. The analysis considers both the photographs—focusing on elements such as images, colours, and narrative—and the accompanying textual explanations, as well as preferences expressed during the discussions held in October.

The scientific premise underlying this research is that the perspectives shared by adults who interact with the child daily and/or have a direct connection to them align with current pedagogical theories regarding the role of the surrounding environment in the overall and, specifically, the social development of preschool-aged children.

If this premise is not confirmed, the methodology’s inherent flexibility allows for the identification of new trends in pedagogical theory and/or within the community.

4.2 Results

Table 1. Comparison of the adult’s understanding of the interconnection between the child and the natural world and existing pedagogical theory

Photography	Participant’s justification for the choice of photograph	Shared in pedagogical theory
	<p>„I chose the photograph because nature makes the child and all people happy.” Student</p>	<p>Interaction with nature “enriches the spiritual world of the individual, makes them kinder, and broadens their horizons.” (Konakchieva, 2012: 180).</p>
	<p>„I chose this particular photograph because it embodies the child’s connection with nature, showing how they care for plants, which also influences the child’s development during the preschool period.” Student</p>	<p>„The thoughtful visit to the small garden on the windowsill or to the potted plants already becomes a source of moral enrichment for the child. In this way, nature exerts its educational influence, impacting those who, early on, open their hearts and minds to its beneficial effects (according to Fröbel, 1913)</p>
	<p>„The photograph illustrates the children’s attitude towards outdoor play. They connect with nature—observing, playing with sand, listening to the sounds of nature. They feel the wind, the sun, the cold, the warmth, and the humidity. They explore leaves, twigs, and small creatures—like ants. They enjoy themselves freely in the fresh air. It builds resilience!” Student</p>	<p>According to Piaget, “the individual actively explores their environment and, based on their actions, creates their own internal structures, which enable them to perceive the world each time more objectively and accurately” (cited in Koleva & Dzhorova, 2022: 67).</p>
	<p>"I chose this photograph because it represents a preschool-aged child exploring nature. Through touch, sight, and sensation, the child learns about their surroundings. Nature teaches children, helping them develop qualities and skills. Nature brings calm!" Student</p>	<p>Prerequisites for a child’s active exploratory activity in nature include the indicators of children’s creativity outlined by Heinelt, such as: “children’s interests develop spontaneously; the child discovers the surrounding world as something new, and a critical attitude begins to form” (cited in Ivanova, 2016: 350).</p>

	<p>“Children’s contact with nature is very important for the development of ecological values and the behaviour of every growing child. Many studies show the positive connections between experiences in nature and children’s mental, emotional, and physical health and well-being. Children will develop their love for nature, which will serve as a foundation for fostering responsible behaviour towards the environment.” Student</p>	<p>“The formation of a certain level of ecological awareness during the preschool years would fulfil its purpose by guiding the preschool child towards understanding the two main positive qualities of nature—its usefulness and beauty—and the two main human responsibilities towards nature—preservation and development” (Doncheva, 2018: 46).</p>
	<p>“My children love going to the forest both in winter and summer; they adore discovering new things while staying active rather than sitting on their phones!” Student</p>	<p>“The richness and diversity of the plant and animal world evoke a keen interest in nature among children and contribute to the development of their curiosity and observant nature” (Doncheva, 2018: 48).</p>
	<p>“I was impressed by the fact that the child in the photograph I chose visibly shows interest, respect, attention, love, and care for nature. Fostering these wonderful qualities in every child is of utmost importance for their overall upbringing and future development.” Student</p>	<p>“Every, even the most insignificant, perception of an object from the surrounding reality is associated with active mental activity. Even children in the youngest age group rarely limit themselves to merely registering phenomena, facts, and features. They compare and contrast, identify similarities and differences, and note the causes of various phenomena” (Makedonska, 1979).</p>
	<p>“The photograph symbolises how children in the preschool group welcome autumn through dances and games in nature.” Student</p>	<p>“Vittorino da Feltre founded the school ‘House of Joy,’ a magnificent palace set within a beautifully landscaped park—where children live and learn in the embrace of nature: fresh air, light, open spaces, friendly games, songs, and joy” (Koleva & Dzhorova, 2022: 14).</p>
	<p>“The photograph depicts the children’s love for the environment and the sun.” Student</p>	<p>“Love and caring attitudes towards nature are defined as a moral quality of the individual, which can only be formed on the basis of realistic perceptions of nature by children” (Yanakieva, 2019: Part One, 8).</p>

	<p>“The photograph shows how children celebrate in the kindergarten surrounded by nature!” Student</p>	<p>“Nature is an inexhaustible source of beauty and joy, a universally recognised source for the spiritual enrichment of children. From an early age, by entering into close, direct contact with it, nature provides them with some of their first impressions, experiences, and emotions about the surrounding reality” (Doncheva, 2018: 48).</p>
	<p>“The photograph is a wonderful example of the connection between children and the natural world because it shows how they spend their time outdoors, surrounded by nature. The children sit on a mat in the middle of a meadow, surrounded by greenery and flowers, which allows them to connect with the environment in a calm and harmonious way.” Student</p>	<p>“Every object, phenomenon, or relationship in the environment, through its visual and specific nature, predisposes the activation of mental processes, children’s curiosity and inquisitiveness, their emotions and experiences, as well as cognitive and social experimentation” (Koleva & Dzhorova, 2022: 24).</p>
	<p>“This photograph shows the beauty of our nature and the animals!” Student</p>	<p>“The perception of natural objects and phenomena contributes to the diversity of children’s positive experiences, the emergence and enrichment of their emotions, and the development of an aesthetic attitude towards their surroundings—their own activities and appearance, as well as their perceptions of others, etc.” (Koleva & Dzhorova, 2022: 25).</p>
	<p>“Celebration of 'Welcoming Autumn.'” Student</p>	<p>According to E. Yanakieva, “celebrations in kindergartens are observed in a specific way. Due to the age-specific characteristics of children, equivalent content and organisation are sought to make the ecological meaning of the celebration accessible to them” (Yanakieva, 2019: Part Two, 253).</p>
	<p>“Because it shows me best how happy the child feels in nature! In this photograph, you can sense the calmness that one can experience only in nature.” Parent</p>	<p>“The close relationship of the child with the natural world precedes and determines the development of children’s abilities to identify those ecological effects that have a positive impact on environmental preservation” (Yanakieva, 2019: Part Three, 10).</p>

	<p>“Sea, vacation, family time. All of this strengthens the child and contributes to their well-being.” Parent</p>	<p>“The natural forces of nature are the sun, air, and water. They are the primary means for strengthening the body and can be used independently or in combination with physical exercises. Natural factors not only build resilience but also have a beneficial effect on the nervous system, improve sleep, tone and refresh the body, enhance breathing and circulation, support digestion, and restore appetite, among other benefits” (Stoyanova, 2024: 17).</p>
	<p>“I chose the photograph because it shows how children are free and happy when they are in nature.” Parent</p>	<p>“When we give freedom and independence to the child, we give freedom to a worker who is already ready to act, who cannot live without working and being active” (Montessori, 1949: 69).</p>
	<p>“A favourite photograph showing the children’s love for nature.” Parent</p>	<p>“Teaching the child to perceive emotionally, to love, to experience pleasure, and to strive for beauty... is part of their development and, specifically, their aesthetic education” (cited in Stoyanova, 2024: 39; Fakirska, 2012: 56).</p>
	<p>“The photograph shows the sea—it is important for children and their health.” Parent</p>	<p>According to E. Yanakieva, the sea and playing with sand by the seashore provide opportunities for the development of children’s exploratory activities (Yanakieva, 2019: Part Two, 116).</p>
	<p>“The photograph depicts a fruit, symbolising healthy eating.” Parent</p>	<p>“Nutrition (and excretion) are among the primary ecological connections between humans and their surrounding environment. They are essential conditions for the existence of the human organism and a factor that influences the processes of self-renewal, structural formation, and improvement, as well as growth and development” (Yanakieva, 2019: Part Two, 37).</p>

	<p>“Because nature (both living—plants and animals—and non-living—air, water, rocks) provides the child with the opportunity to act, experiment, express themselves, challenge themselves, and succeed.” Parent</p>	<p>The acquisition of knowledge by the child based on personal experience (<i>learning by doing</i>—as per J. Dewey) is related to resolving uncertainties and contradictions, participating in experiments, working in teams within interactive environments, and developing independent exploratory activities (cited in Ivanova, 2018).</p>
	<p>“I believe that children get to know the world around them better through outdoor play in nature. This way, they can use all their senses, and the memories from the experience remain long-lasting.” Parent</p>	<p>The daily experiences gained by the child through various activities are “the treasure of childhood” (cited in Ivanova, 2016: 350). In their daily interactions with nature and encounters with new and unfamiliar things, the child uses all their senses and their entire capacity to move into the next “zone of development” (Koleva & Dzhorova, 2022: 80).</p>
	<p>“Because here we are surrounded by nature and Baba Vanga's temple, where the spiritual blends with the natural environment around the temple and the mineral springs that surround it.” Parent</p>	<p>“Cultural monuments serve as a means of ecological education depending on whether direct contact with them can be provided for children, i.e., whether they are part of the child’s homeland” (Yanakieva, 2019: Part Three, 93).</p>
	<p>“I chose the photograph because he is happy playing with a cat. Also, he is outdoors, in contact with plants and animals... a beautiful day! :)” Parent</p>	<p>“Becoming familiar with animal species and their characteristic features related to growth, development, and reproduction is of great importance for the moral development of the child, particularly for fostering a positive attitude towards nature and perceiving it as a value” (Koleva & Dzhorova, 2022: 127).</p>
	<p>“Actively involving the child in activities aimed at protecting the environment and allowing direct contact with plants and animals is key to fostering a sense of compassion, interest, and care.” Teacher</p>	<p>“The child gives us a beautiful lesson—that in order to develop and maintain our intelligence, we must use our hands.” (Montessori, <i>The 1946 London Lectures</i>, 153).</p>

	<p>“Children are happy in nature.” Teacher</p>	<p>“Human beings belong to nature, and especially as children, they must draw from it the forces necessary for the development of both body and spirit” (Montessori, 1912: 108).</p>
	<p>“I chose the photo because it shows the children’s care for nature.” Teacher</p>	<p>The work process in which the child participates is a circumstance that creates favorable conditions for realizing the connection between the goal and the result, for mastering actions, for meaning (Stoyanova, 2024: 36).</p>
	<p>“To show that children feel extremely good when they are in nature - they play, have fun and are quite active.” Teacher</p>	<p>“The beginning of the child’s “meetings” with the world around him and the achievement of age-appropriate knowledge and attitude towards the environment is primarily a consequence of the conditions, prerequisites and organization of the environment in which he lives and develops at the age of up to 7 years” (Koleva, Dzhorova, 2022: 24).</p>
	<p>“Because there is nature around children and children in nature.” Teacher</p>	<p>“The natural and social world are inexhaustible sources of information, challenges and contradictions for the young child” (Koleva, Dzhorova, 2022: 24).</p>

*Note: The size of the photos allows you to publish some of them without processing, because the faces are not visible.

Table 2. Comparison of the adult’s understanding of the relationship between the child and the social world and what is available in pedagogical theory

Photography	Participant’s justification for the choice of photograph	Shared in pedagogical theory
 Not applicable	<p>“Because it shows the social world of children through the prism of kindergarten in the form of play, even rules, and in preschool, through play, children learn and socialize in the world around them.” Student</p>	<p>The child exercises in testing his social experience “through interactions with other children, as well as by fulfilling rules and requirements initiated by the pedagogue or the group as a whole” (Koleva, Dzhorova, 2022: 26).</p>

	<p>“I chose this photo because it shows the emotions of the children from the social interactions in the group. By nature, children love to communicate and create together. They are a great children’s collective. We can only learn attitude from them.” Student</p>	<p>Children who attended nurseries, kindergartens, centers tend to make more social contacts with their peers and are more adaptable than those who do not have this experience (Menkiti, 2008: 159).</p>
	<p>“There are educational things here that they do even when they are no longer in kindergarten, and free and happy children play on the street. My children are those without phones.” Student</p>	<p>“The degree to which the child manifests himself as a conscious subject of environmentally friendly relations and a developing personality depends on the freedom that the structure of the environment gives him” (Yanakieva, 2019: 29, Part Two).</p>
	<p>“I chose this photo because I liked the fact that children participate in organized games in nature. I believe that nature provides children with freedom through which they gain social experience. Team games are equally important for the socialization, upbringing and education of children. They serve as a link between the preschool child and the world at large, as they reduce aggression in them, discipline them and teach them tolerance towards each other.” Student</p>	<p>“The active perception of the object and natural environment through the senses, the manifestations of curiosity and inquisitiveness in games and discoveries through touching, hearing, seeing, drawing, testing actions in elementary experiments and experiments, singing, drawing, dancing – these are playful-transformative and artistic strategies for learning through experience and for subjective appropriation of the surrounding world through a personally experienced unique way” (Stoyanova, 2023: 133).</p>
	<p>“The photo presents a one-day excursion of the children from the kindergarten by train to Velingrad, accompanied by teachers and parents.” Student</p>	<p>“Teachers and parents should use every situation in everyday life to strengthen the creative spirit of children and stimulate their creative development” (Ivanova, 2016: 354).</p>
	<p>“A photo shows how the children clean the kindergarten and it is a way for them to be able to socialize and interact with the other children.” Student</p>	<p>“The models of morality and social behavior, the messages of each of the activities related to human labor, the relationships between people, etc., that the child perceives and learns to understand are the “first lessons” that the environment offers him” (Koleva & Dzhorova, 2022: 25-26).</p>

	<p>“The photo shows how well the children in the children’s group are socialized and represent a small social community!” Student</p>	<p>“Children want to help and contribute something to the community through complex meaningful children’s activities with different motivations – they arrange the daycare, ... take care of the plants....” (Stoyanova, 2023: 135-36).</p>
	<p>“The social world is a key factor in a child’s development. Institutions help children develop their social skills. They meet people outside the family environment.” Student</p>	<p>“In contacts with adults and with each other, children begin to understand the good and bad actions in their own behavior and in the behavior of others. The totality of moral ideas, feelings, skills and habits determines the unity of consciousness and behavior” (according to Stoyanova, 2024: 30; Petrova, 2001: 101-102).</p>
	<p>“It is important for every child to be socialized from an early age. Children should attend various events, social activities, playgrounds and parks.” Student</p>	<p>“The growth of a child in a stable, predictable social environment is directly related to a high level of development of social skills” (according to Stoyanova, 2024: 34; Dermendzhieva, 2019: 73).</p>
	<p>“This photo depicts children sitting together, but all focused on their electronic devices, such as tablets and smartphones. It symbolizes the connection of children with their social world through digital technologies. Despite the fact that they are physically together, their attention is focused on the virtual world, which emphasizes the influence of world technologies on socialization and communication, on the younger generation.” Student</p>	<p>The dynamic everyday life, the years of innovation, the era of digitalization confront the child with new things every day - intentional or unintentional. The information flow generated by such interaction provokes the inherent curiosity of the human being and "awakens" in the child the natural desire to learn (Kolev et al., 2013).</p>
	<p>“You are welcome to have a wonderful autumn! The children with great desire and diligence made decorations and crafts from autumn materials and goods on the theme ‘The Riches of Autumn’ and celebrated the arrival of autumn.” Student</p>	<p>“Mastering elementary forms of labor teaches the child to plan and organize his activities. In this way, mental activity is built to evaluate and control the activity. The work task is also mental. It is carried out in a real situation with a certain purposefulness, and accuracy and ingenuity are mandatory in its</p>

		implementation” (Stoyanova, 2024: 28).
	<p>“What better photo for socialization than that of a child in the subway...” Parent</p>	<p>“The degree and content of the social adaptation of 5-year-old children, who show flexible behavioral reactions depending on the stimuli of the social environment, could be determined as the most optimal...” (Kaloyanova et al., 2016).</p>
	<p>“The child is often surrounded by a large circle of people with whom he knows how to communicate according to the situation and their age! Friends, relatives, classmates, peers, older and younger than him.” Parent</p>	<p>“The number of family members, relationships between them, parenting styles, methods, approaches to upbringing and upbringing, the authority of adults in the family affect the child's social adjustment (Menkiti, 2008) and the mastery of social skills.</p>
	<p>“Parents, children and nature in unity.” Parent</p>	<p>Both educators and parents should provide daily conditions for independent active movements, joint games, conditions for experimentation and research (Ivanova and Kamenova, 2023: 67).</p>
	<p>“The child is happy with the children in the kindergarten group.” Parent</p>	<p>In the organised children’s community, which is actually the children’s group, the child begins to realise himself as a subject and to express his cognitive, social and creative potential. Through the activities in the group, the child acquires social experience (Koleva, Dzhorova, 2022: 26).</p>

	<p>“It is important for the child to get to know new places, to learn new things every day.” Parent</p>	<p>“The role of the natural environment is essential for stimulating the development and permanent enrichment of children’s sensations and perceptions, sensory standards and the peculiar cognitive activity of the child at the age of up to 7 years” (Koleva & Dzhorova, 2022: 24).</p>
	<p>“The social environment allows the child to communicate with people of different ages, to accumulate knowledge about different things, to have fun, etc., which can be defined as ‘learning,’ because this is how the child changes and develops.” Parent</p>	<p>“More generally, the social world is a kind of model of relationships and dependencies, of rules and requirements, of objects, phenomena and regularities, which, along with the individual characteristics of a particular child, model his subject-personal development” (Koleva & Dzhorova, 2022: 26).</p>
	<p>“Very often, children grasp techniques and skills more easily when observing, copying and communicating with children than adults.” Parent</p>	<p>“A learning process takes place, which, although with its accompanying imperfections, must be taken into account when clarifying the peculiarity of children’s cognitive activity, its deliberate organization and the successful inclusion of the particular child in it” (Koleva & Dzhorova, 2022: 57-58).</p>
 <p>Not applicable</p>	<p>“A photo from the cherry festival in the city of Kyustendil, which shows that children from an early age learn to respect the holidays, both national - of the state and of the city in which they were born.” Parent</p>	<p>“Children are involved in cultural processes and rituals, they closely observe how the world around them works. In this way, they gradually acquire a fundamental knowledge of what will be obvious to them from now on: what is right – what is wrong; what is beautiful – what is ugly; what is known – what is foreign...” (Stoyanova, 2023: 131) .</p>
	<p>“I love this photo! Niki loves to be around children. You can see the joy in his eyes.” Parent</p>	<p>“The children’s group, as a kind of social society for the child, complements the opportunities for the child's expression, as well as for the creation of the so-called. “positive concept of oneself and other children and adults” (Koleva & Dzhorova, 2022: 26).</p>

	<p>“The realities of the social world - adults and children, the relationships between them, the way of life and cultural characteristics, the work and the result of it are the things that the child gradually gets to know. The expansion of knowledge about natural and social objects and phenomena changes the child. The children’s group as a social society for the child complements the child’s opportunities for expression.” Teacher</p>	<p>“Expanding the range of knowledge about natural and social objects and phenomena is a condition for a change in the attitude and attitude of the 3-7-year-old child towards them. The first questions of the type “What is this? Children’s curiosity grows into inquisitiveness, the so-called. “question-seekers”; begins a process of independent search for answers, based on the available social and cognitive experience...” (Koleva & Dzhorova, 2022: 26-27).</p>
	<p>“The educational environment and the connection of children with the world around them is very important for my child and for me.” Teacher</p>	<p>Common in many European countries are kindergartens in nature and kindergartens for physical activity, which focus on children's physical activity. Through movements and perceptions, children interact with the world around them from an early age and in the role of constructors of their development, they acquire knowledge about the social world and develop their competencies, which are the basis for their education in the following age periods (Ivanova & Kamenova, 2023: 60).</p>
	<p>“The photo is from a wonderful autumn day with children at the fortress of Tsali Mali Grad, filled with many outdoor games and experienced children’s emotions.” Teacher</p>	<p>Emotions are “vital to people’s lives... They are also associated with communication between children and between children and adults. The experience gained by children in different life situations, the formation of competencies and the emotions associated with them are the basis for the implementation of creative activity” (Ivanova, 2016: 353-54).</p>

5. Conclusion

A comparison of empirical findings with the theoretical frameworks of pedagogical researchers confirms an alignment between adults’ perceptions of the role of the natural and social worlds in the child’s daily life and the influence of these environments on the child’s development, as outlined in existing pedagogical theory.

All photographs and their accompanying descriptions reflect a predominantly positive attitude and mood, influenced by the participants’ subjective perceptions and imaginative thinking. While pedagogical theory acknowledges the multifaceted impact of the child’s surrounding world, including some negative aspects, participants’ everyday observations predominantly highlight positive effects. Only one participant referenced a negative “nuance” of influence. Notably, all selected images corresponded fully to the assigned topics.

The child’s active, value-based engagement with their surrounding reality is central to the photographs, demonstrating a strong correlation with pedagogical theory, which emphasises the personal, activity-based, exploratory, and value-oriented approaches to interacting with preschool-aged children within the framework of environmental exploration (Koleva & Dzhorova, 2022: 53-54).

The natural and social worlds interact to form a unified nature-social environment that surrounds and integrates the child, who observes, explores, and learns from it daily. The selected photographs depicted “images” representing the living world (people, plants, animals, fruits), the non-living world (water, sun, sand, rocks), the social world (educational settings, transport, playgrounds), and the material world (resources for play and activities).

Discussions and the ranking of photographs based on participants’ preferences revealed an equal significance of the natural and social worlds as developmental factors, underscoring the concept of nature-social unity. Although photographs from the two sections were presented and discussed separately, participants consistently selected images that demonstrated social interactions between children and adults in natural settings, reinforcing the interconnectedness of the two spheres.

The significance of the natural world in the child’s life is associated with key concepts such as activity, well-being, attention, care, ecology, experimentation, health, fun, interest, concern, play, exploration, expression, love, observation, celebration, challenge, experience, calmness, sport, compassion, freedom, sensation, learning, respect, harmony, value, purity, emotion, and happiness.

Similarly, the social world’s significance in the child’s life is linked to concepts such as aggression, interaction, upbringing, peers, play, group, city, country, playgrounds, discipline, digital technologies, emotions, teamwork, unity, excursions, desire, togetherness, institutions, expression, collective, imitation, cultural characteristics, communication, events, new places, lifestyle, organisation, relationships, education, public activities, socialisation, community, effort, creativity, work, tolerance, participation, respect, teachers, and happiness.

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