

FROM COOPERATION OF PARENTS AND EDUCATORS TOWARDS EMPOWERING PARTNERSHIP

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ABSTRACT

Background. Partnership in this thesis is interpreted as the responsibility of children education which is taken by the members and their activity. The main role of the partners is to organize the environment of preschool education for children to use their prior knowledge and experience to understand new information and meaningful context.

Methods. Two questionnaires were included in this research, 191 parents and 199 educators were questioned.

Results. Educators and parents generally see the purpose of preschool education institution to stimulate the child's social and cognitive development (88.9%) and considerably rarely the purpose is related to meeting the natural needs of a child (32.2%). Educators more often than parents thought that it was necessary to strengthen the education of parents in partnership with their children's education ($p < .001$). Mutual ambition to collaborate (67.3%), better education of parents (49.2%), the maintenance of permanent connection (41.7%), information exchange (49.7%) and better confidence in each other (45.7%) would be helpful in seeking for more effective cooperation.

Conclusions. Only a small percentage of parents understand that preschool education is most important to meet the natural needs of children, create healthy situations for the development of children's inborn inclinations. Educators are not reoriented enough to the tendencies of nowadays and only one third of them believe in its importance to meet the natural needs of a child.

In most cases parents and educators indicated the same factors which might influence empowering of parents and educators for the education cooperation which would develop into to partnership, but the importance of the factors was often different.

Keywords: empowering, cooperation, communication, preschool education, partnership.

INTRODUCTION

After the decentralization of preschool education content and considering tendencies of the most advanced development of science and the society, preschool education institutions are trying to create conditions which help children satisfy their natural, cultural as well as ethnic, social and cognitive needs. The development of these conditions requires partnership in managing educational institutions, teachers of preschool education and parents. The partnership in this article is considered as participants' activities and taking responsibility for the education of children. Children are the central figure of partnership ensuring holistic education of children.

According to constructivist point of view, the main role of the partners is to organize preschool education environment so that children would accept and assimilate new information with authentic and meaningful context using their prior knowledge and experience.

According to Epstein et al. (2002), when educators and parents are partners in children education, parents trust themselves more supporting education in educational institution and at home, they become helpers solving various problems. According to the research, when parents are included in children education their children show better academic achievements (Christenson, 2004).

Epstein et al. (2002) identified six features of parents' educational involvement: parents' skills, voluntary assistance for teachers (further volunteering), education at home, decision-making, cooperation with community and communication. This research confined to the partnership aspects of parents and teachers of preschool education institutions.

Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995) believe that parents can decide whether to cooperate with educators after they realize that it is part of their participation in children education and when parents believe that, their activity will be helpful to children and also they will realize that both children and school wants them to be involved in cooperation.

Researchers (Christenson, 2004) indicate that partnership between parents and educators is significant to children education and their holistic development.

According to Epstein et al. (2002), their theory of education institution, family and community partnership, this partnership is perceived as responsibility of educators, parents and community for children education and the roles that should be performed by every partner. Epstein et al. (2002) believe that education institution should be responsible for the strategy creation of partnership with parents. The roles of parents and educators are seen in the interaction of partnership.

Christenson (2004) distinguished several factors which influence the partnership of parents and educators: socio-economic status, parents' education, family dynamics, cultural differences, the lack of knowledge about family involvement, insufficiency of time and resources. Ashby (2006) indicates that the lack of parents' education and skills can strongly influence their intentions to participate in partnership of family and educational institution.

As research results show (Fantuzo, Mcwayn, Perry, & Childs, 2004), good relationship between parents and employees of preschool education institution is also useful to employees, children and parents. Bailey (2006) emphasises cooperation as a priority of preschool education institutions. With reference to the research of Ihmeideh, Khasawneh, Mahfouz, and Khawaldeh (2008), Tlougan (2011), Anupama (2010), it is possible to maintain that parents' participation in cooperation with preschool institutions has a positive influence for children's academic achievements, improvement and rapid development of social skills.

The purpose of this thesis was to reveal empowering of parents and educators of preschool education institution for education cooperation developing into partnership.

Research object was empowering partnership for educational cooperation of parents and educators of preschool education institutions.

Hypothesis: neither parents, nor educators of preschool education institutions alone are properly ready for the comprehensive revelation of the natural needs of a child.

Background. This research holds the attitude that empowered parents and educators of preschool institutions are those who have power to act as it is necessary for the education of children. They are also capable of creating external environment which could be beneficial for children's education and taking responsibility for it.

Anupama (2010) emphasizes that the support of parents is always critical in child's life but there are some particular moments in life when parents should be active choosing an institution for the child's education pursuing the child's welfare. While meeting the child needs in preschool education institution, the relation is formed which creates strong environment for children's education. Amini (2011) highlights specific and definite roles between parents and educators as the condition to pursue cooperation. He also proposes that parents and educators would request a bigger parent involvement in educational activity and related cooperation.

Parents are the partners of educational institution, and their duty and responsibility, according to Schiller and Bryant (2004), are directed towards the implementation of the general objective of education and cooperation enables them to accelerate and facilitate this process.

Ihmeideh et al. (2008) suggest that often parents would like to be involved in cooperation and do everything they can but they simply do not know how to do this. Amini (2011) indicates that it is necessary to take such activity into consideration in preschool environment which stimulates parents' involvement and requires insignificant resources of time and finances and also is easily integrated into daily activity and meetings with parents.

The empowering of parents proceeds through their pedagogical education (Sealender, 1997), involving into home and school education and participating in school activity (Smit, Driessen, Sluiter, & Slegers, 2007).

Hill and Taylor (2004) explain the connection between parents' involvement in education and children's achievements as the interaction between two components: increasing social capital and social control. Social capital is increasing when parents' skills and knowledge about children's education is also increasing and the pursuit of common goal with the school maintains the social control of (self-) education.

Pomerantz, Moorman and Litwack (2007) claim that parents' involvement in the activity of educational institution stimulates the development of cognitive and metacognitive skills of their children and it is useful for children's achievements because parents involved in education can be as an example to children and raise motivation to participate in school activity more actively. Parents from higher social-economical layer, which means they have better education themselves, are more often involved in the activity of education institution (Pomerantz et al., 2007; Smit et al., 2007). Increasing parents' involvement in children's education determines the development of social skills (El Nokali, Bachman, & Votruba-Drzal, 2010).

Sad and Gürbüztürk (2013) identified the importance of equivalent partnership of parents and educators in the process. Positive impact is presented through better learning achievements of children, decreasing behaviour problems, and higher self-assessment, positive and safe children's feeling at school, improving social relations between children, better opportunities for pursuing the quality of life. Children's success in school is assured if the work initiated at school is maintained and proceeded at home by parents (Sad & Gürbüztürk, 2013). Parents are more inclined to get involved in children's education when the relationship between parents and teachers in partnership is equivalent.

METHODS

Research participants. Research sample consisted of 191 parents of preschool age children attending nursery-kindergarten. Parents up to 30 years old accounted for 41.4 percent and parents over the age of 30 years constituted 58.6% of respondents. Their 87 children attended nursery groups and 104 attended kindergarten groups. The study included 199 pre-school teachers working in education institutions, among them 19.1% were tutors, 70.4% – senior tutors and 5.5% – tutor-

supervisors. There were 12% of educators under the age of 30 years and 88% were older.

Parents participated in the study voluntarily and pre-school educators also volunteered, but they had to have the agreement of the institution administration.

Two questionnaires were used for data collection – one for the parents and the second for educators.

Statistical analysis. Data were processed using SPSS 21 for Windows. The percentage distribution of answers to questions was calculated in this paper. The verification of hypothesis about the equality of groups was carried out using Chi-Square test. The significance of differences was set at $p < .05$.

RESULTS

During the survey parents were questioned about the purpose of preschool education institution. Parents most often associated the purpose with the promotion of child's social, cognitive development (68.6%), enrichment of experience cooperating with others (64.9%) and preparation for school (65.4%). Less frequently the parents linked the purpose of preschool education institution with meeting natural child's needs (34.6%).

The survey revealed that in the education process organized by educators, parents of younger children more often than parents of older children perform the role of an observer ($p < .05$).

According to the data of the survey, 67.0% of the parents indicated that educators presented the programme of education to them during the parent meeting. Respectively 22.3% of parents admitted that they read it personally. Only 5.8% of parents indicated that teachers coordinated the content of education program with them. It should be noted that some parents were not aware (13.1%) or did not hear anything (9.4%) about the education programme applied in preschool education institution.

Most of the parents have heard about the programme of Montessori and Verinélis. Fewer of them heard about Waldorf, healthy, safe lifestyle education, Reggio Emilia and programmes of social skill development and least of the parents have heard about Gardner, Piaget programs. The knowledge about education programmes was significantly higher ($p < .05$) among the parents of kindergarten age children than among parents having nursery aged children.

The research revealed that the majority of parents would request the education programmes for gifted children (75.9%). Whereas only a few indicated that they would like programmes constituted for children with developmental disorders (1.6%), children with behavioural disorders (3.7%), programmes for children where families return from abroad (2.1%) or the programmes created for the children of immigrants (1.6%). Only one parent indicated he would request the programme for bilingual children.

More than a half of parents (59.2%) communicate with a tutor of the group every day and 27.7% indicated that each day they are informed about the child's activity by the tutor of the group. The parents of older children more often helps to organize events in kindergarten ($p < .05$).

During the research of parent opinions about the partnership between them and education institution, most often (84.3%) parents indicated that the success of the partnership between them and the education institution depended on the sincere cooperation between parents and educators of the preschool education institution. It was also indicated that cooperation contributed to the versatile child's education (78.0%) and interaction between both sides was especially significant (73.8%), and parents' participation in educational activity was useful to children (77.5%). Fewer parents agreed that educational activities of the group should be only the responsibility of the tutor (49.2%). About a half of the parents (52.9%) agreed with the statement that their opinion was considered while solving the questions about children's education and both parents and teachers were equal in the process of education (54.5%). It was observed that less than a half parents (41.4%) agreed with the statement that they were encouraged to participate in the activities of the modernization of the education institution.

Parents commonly agreed that the most acceptable forms of cooperation with education institution were individual dialogues (67.0%), parent meetings adopting corporate decisions (62.8%), joint parent-child activities (57.1%) and also cooperation with experts solving problems (44.5%).

According to the opinion of parents, the cooperation between them and teachers was prevented by the employment of the parents (57.6%), parents' unwillingness to participate in activity (34.6%) and their indifference (31.4%).

However, 30.4% of parents indicated that, overall, there were no cooperation interferences between them and teachers.

Exploring the problems of partnership between parents and teachers, parents mostly indicated the low activity of the parents (60.7%), the lack of responsibility for children education (27.7%) and also poor parents' approach towards the educators and preschool education institution (20.9%). Parents of differently aged children had different opinions about the partnership problems between parents and educators. More often ($p < .05$) parents of nursery children than parents of older children mentioned the low activity and insufficient educational culture of parents.

According to parents' opinion in pursuing more efficient cooperation the mutual aspiration to cooperate is necessary. It also requires permanent maintenance of the connection, changing information and bigger confidence in each other. Parents think that higher competence of educators and more often organized events would stimulate cooperation the least of the cases.

It was identified that younger parents related preschool education institution with meeting natural child's needs ($p < .001$) compared to older parents.

Educators often associated the function of preschool education institution with the stimulation of child's social and cognitive development (88.9%), enrichment of experience cooperating with others (51.8%) and preparation for school (46.2%). Less frequently they associate the function with the satisfaction of natural child's needs (32.2%).

Referring to the opinion of educators, the cooperation of parents and educators contributes to the recognition of their learners (67.8%) and determines successful education of the children (59.8%). Teachers over 30 years old more often emphasised the benefit of cooperation bringing together parents and educators than younger teachers (respectively 37.1 and 12.5%, $p < .05$).

The majority (93.0%) of educators agreed that the success of partnership between parents and education institution depended on sincere cooperation and cooperation helped fully educate the child (90.5%), and the interaction between the two of them was useful and very important (91.0%).

More than a half of educators (52%) only partially agreed that parents had the knowledge about the methods applied in educational institution, also about the influence of educational environment

to child's education, about the programme of the education institution, peculiarities of child's development. Educators thought that parents had less knowledge and competence in forming the educational guidelines in school. They considered that the most reasonable forms of cooperation with parents were the dialogues while bringing in and picking up the child from educational institution (86.9%) and parent meetings (69.8%).

Parents in preschool education institution were often interested in child's health and diet (73.4%), meeting their needs (72.9%), knowledge (60.8%) and safety (59.8%). The least parents were interested in artistic activity, games and physical conditioning.

The cooperation between parents and educators was impeded by the employment of the parents, their unwillingness to participate in the activity and also the distance during the cooperation.

Educators thought that the main problems of partnership between parents and educators were: too low parental involvement (80.4%), conflicting demands (33.2%), and poor attitude of parents towards educators and preschool education institution (39.7%). The lack of parents' responsibility for children's education (21.6%) and the lack of parental educational culture (19.6%) were mentioned less frequently. In order to facilitate the most effective form of cooperation, mutual desire to cooperate would be helpful (67.3%), also better education of parents (49.2%), the maintenance of constant connection (41.7%), information exchange (49.7%) and greater confidence in each other (45.7%). Cooperation would be the least encouraged by more often organized events (6.5%) and higher competences of teachers (2.0%). Compared to younger teachers, older teachers more often stated that the parents themselves should demonstrate the bigger initiative to solve problems of their children's education ($p < .05$).

The results of the research revealed different opinions of teachers and parents about the purpose of preschool education institution. The teachers more than parents associated it with the social, cognitive development of the child ($p < .05$) and parents associated it with enrichment of experience cooperating with others ($p < .05$) and preparation for school ($p < .05$).

Comparing parents' and teachers' opinions about the partnership between them and education institution it was identified that all nine statements

of the survey distinguished the opinions of parents and teachers about the partnership between parents and educational institution ($p < .05$). The most notable differences in assessing the statements that educator took into consideration the opinion of parents about the problems of education; parents were encouraged to participate in the development of educational institution activity ($p < .05$). Educators more often agreed with the statement that tutor should take care of educational activity but not the parents of children ($p < .001$). Whereas parents more often agreed with the statements that their participation in activity of the group helped the tutor and also it was useful to children ($p < .01$) and educators more often agreed with statements that interaction of both sides was especially significant to cooperation ($p < .05$).

Comparing with parents more educators, while accentuating the basic problems of partnership between parents and educators, mentioned too low activity of parents, poor attitude towards educators and preschool education institution.

For more effective cooperation educators more often mentioned the need to strengthen parents' education ($p < .001$). Whereas the parents more often indicated that it was necessary to maintain constant cooperation ($p < .01$); presentation of systematic information about the progress of the child ($p < .01$) and higher competence of educators ($p < .001$) were also important.

DISCUSSION

During the research it was found that educators often associate the purpose of preschool education institution with the encouragement of social, cognitive development of the child, enrichment of experience cooperating with other and preparation for school. Research by Tlougan (2011), Anupama (2010) revealed the fact that educators in preschool education institutions emphasize social, emotional and academic development as the main factor. The study of Suizzo and Stapleton (2007) identified that parental involvement in the process of children's education and development both at home and at the educational institution should become family's everyday practice and followed value.

In this study the educators often dedicated the roles of observer and participant to the parents. In other studies they assigned the roles of helper and initiator which were significant in the process of

education and pursuing the quality of it (Anupama, 2010).

It was found that most parents were familiar with the educational programme of preschool education institution that their children attended and also were aware of other alternative programmes. Research shows that understanding and absorption of parents in particular content of preschool education program allow them to join the role of educators. Furthermore, should not be forgotten the fact that perception of preschool education programme by parents and educators should be possibly brought closer (Fantuzzo et al., 2004).

The results of the study indicate the tendency that equivalent and double-sided educational process is significant both at home and at the institution of preschool education. Daily and the most meaningful experience of child, discoveries of recognition and academic achievements should be responsibly and constantly revealed to the educators by parents and vice versa.

According to Schiller and Bryant (2004), the forces which are required for the achievement of general education goal were named as cooperation. The study revealed that looking at the creation of partnership relations in the process of preschool education institution it is significant that relations should be based on the sincerity and mutual trust. It needs to note that the data received in other research coincide with our data and also reflect the aspect of sincerity.

It is argued that the most effective method to achieve high-quality communication is friendly and open dialogue about what each of us think and feel here and now and also the search of better ways of behaviour.

Bailey (2006) points out that if parents and educators feel comfortably communicating to each other about the education and development of the child, then cooperation goes smoothly and healthily.

It was found that 54.5% of the parents agree and 38.7% partially agreed that they are equal partners in preschool education institution.

Studies by Anupama (2010), Tloutan (2010) and Amini (2011) demonstrate the uniqueness and authenticity of relations based of partnership which keeps children safe from threatening difficulties of socialization. Relationships based on partnership involve parents and educators feel equal to each other. These relationships allow individuals to

achieve and use such instruments, methods and resources which encourage and develop social, intellectual abilities of children.

The study also analysed the most important forms of cooperation. The results of the study revealed that they were identified as individual dialogues, parent meetings while accepting corporate decisions and joint events of parents and children in the preschool institutions. It is also confirmed by the study of Anupama (2010) that individual dialogues and meeting are of very great importance in discovering the most effective relationship of cooperation based on partnership.

On the other hand, the study showed that there was some interference in partnership relations between parents and educators based on the cooperation. While naming the obstacles to cooperation with educators, parents highlight their own employment, reluctance to participate in the environment and indifference. This is related to the intense work schedules of modern parents and child caring after the working hours and for educators this is their direct work and the time of their work. By the way, passivity or unwillingness to engage in educational activities can also be exposed to direct parents' work. The studies of others confirm this tendency that increasing and intensifying employment of parents is becoming a decisive factor in building collaborative empowerment (Anupama, 2010). The study of Tloutan (2011) also provides the information that parents often hesitate to participate and be the part their children's education because of the lack of self-confidence and thus they become passive participants of education. Ihmeideh et al. (2008) also confirm that participation of parents is more intensive when the expectations and needs coincide with parents and educators about the development of children's educational process.

The study of Leliūgienė and Simonavičiūtė (2010) reveals that cooperation and communication between parents and preschool education institution is mostly damaged by formal, useless meetings because only children's cognitive skills and discipline are discussed. Also the major part of respondents said that successful communication and cooperation between parents and preschool education institution was interrupted by the poor interest of educators in parental expectations.

Participation of parents in the process of preschool education can be complicated by the fact

that parents have a lack of educational experience. But on the other hand, this study revealed that parents had the knowledge about the methods applied in preschool education institution, about the influence of educational environment for their children's education, about the programme of the education institution and also about the peculiarities of child's development.

It was revealed that competence and educational abilities of educators to involve and interest parents of different characters were very important to parents. While analysing the factors of partnership in preschool education institution Ihmeideh et al. (2008) present the information that educators must use their expertise and intelligence. Such educators with the professionalism of this field have the ability to involve even the most passive and indifferent parents into the process of education through the partnership relations and cooperation. Bailey (2006) also confirms that a qualified preschool educator has the ability to express and engage parents with professional, educational and personal skills. Educators should follow or occupy the leading position in the process of cooperation. Anupama (2010) points out that the educators should not ignore the ideas of the parents, proposed changes or novelties in the process of educational organization. The study of Bakker, Denssen and Brus-Leaven (2007) reveals that the perception of educators about the participation of parents in the process of education has positive influence to the direct achievements of children.

The analysis of factors influencing effective cooperation revealed a tendency that these relations require creation of constant, regular and unbroken relation support, exchanging available information about the child and the trust in each other is the most important.

If parents communicated for at least ten minutes with the educators while bringing in and picking up the child from the institution of preschool education, continuous cooperation would provide the form of partnership to the relations of communication. The most important point in this time spending together is not the things that are discussed or what information is exchanged but the fact of being and communicating together. On the other hand, unlike the quantity, the quality of communication becomes more important for the development of communication process. Green, Walker, Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (2007) highlight the thread of natural and genuine communication and

cooperation between parents and educators and it is becoming the core of partnership influencing quicker and more effective links.

The results of Leliugienė and Simonavičiūtė survey present the information which is provided to parents during the communication. Parents say that most of the information they receive from educators is about children's physical, social and psychological development, peculiarities of their behaviour, the acquisition of knowledge and artistic activities. The participants of the study revealed that there was the lack of information introduction about the civil education, peculiarities of healthy lifestyle education.

The results show that parents are more willing to participate in education of their children when the relations between parents and teachers are equal, when parents feel that teachers understand and support them. And conversely when the relationship between parents and teachers is not equivalent then the chance decreases that cooperation will be effective and useful to the child. According to the Oostdam and Hooge (2013) more than to start the dialogue with the parents of the learner, educators are inclined to tell parents what they should do or keep parents from themselves at "a safe distance". Our study showed that only the one-third of the parents during the communication with educators truly felt equal partners. Less than a half felt equal partially and a little less than one tenth of the parents did not feel equal partners while communicating with educators. The parents with higher education felt more equal partners (63.9%). More acceptable forms of communication for them were individual dialogues with teachers, consultations of experts, group conversations. Meanwhile, only a quarter of parents with lower education were totally satisfied with the communication of the teachers. The tendency should be noted that for parents with lower education the form of pedagogical education is parent meetings when more general issues are discussed and less attention is paid to the discussion of individual cases. According to Şad and Gürbüzürk (2013), the education of parents is not the important factor assessing parental involvement into the education of children. Though Smit et al. (2007), Pomerantz et al. (2007) argued that parent's education could be an obstacle to the involvement of children's education. Parents with lower education often observe the lack of knowledge when it comes to explaining the child how to carry out homework assignment. Also the

parents with lower education think that teachers better than they know how to educate children and these parents hesitate to communicate with teachers as equal partners. Meanwhile, according to these scientists, the parents with university education are more involved in their children's education. Our study also showed that, compared to parents with lower education, parents with university education were more often involved in the education of their children.

CONCLUSIONS

Only some parents understand that the most important thing from preschool education is to meet natural child's needs, create beneficial circumstances for the development of inborn inclinations. The majority of parents are familiar with the process of preschool education; they are also interested in children's activity and participate rather actively in the process of education as well as cooperate with educators.

Educators are not yet fully switched to the tendencies of nowadays and only one third of them believe it is important to meet natural child's needs. According to their opinion, the most important thing is to encourage social, cognitive development.

Both parents and educators in the majority of cases indicated the same factors influencing the empowerment of parents and educators for the education with cooperation developing to partnership but their significance was usually different. Both parents and educators indicated the main problems of partnership in this order: too low activity of the parents, poor attitude towards educators and uncoordinated demands. Parents and educators commonly mentioned five factors that might enhance the empowerment of cooperation: both of the sides should seek cooperation, strengthen mutual exchange of information, bigger reliance and constant maintenance of connection is necessary. Most of the opinions of respondents differed concerning the necessity to increase the education of parents ($p < .001$).

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