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The Cooperation of the Kindergarten with Parents and the Local Community as One of the Trends in Pre-school Education – a Comparative Analysis

Współpraca przedszkola z rodzicami i środowiskiem lokalnym jako jedna z tendencji zmian oświatowych w edukacji przedszkolnej – analiza porównawcza

The function of the partnership of pre-primary institutions, parents and local community is increasingly important nowadays. In times of financial crisis, the increasing role of local authorities, the decentralization of educational systems, the devaluation of human values and the progressive tendency towards the individualization of education and personal life – cooperation is an advantage. It does not mean that all of the above-mentioned processes and situations are wrong and negative for human beings. Some educational politicians and scientists claim that, decentralization, for example, which is moreover inevitable, can be favourable for local communities and institutions because they can decide for themselves and adjust the organisation to their individual needs. However, some of them

are definitely threatening with regards the depreciation of important values. To conclude, all these processes are ongoing and this is why local communities need to collaborate with all the available educational institutions and members of the community. Moreover, with regards the parents of young learners, they need some support from teachers to socialize and also to teach their children properly and effectively. In return, the teachers would generally like to know more about each pupil and the parents can share the information with them. This mutual cooperation can be profitable for all educational participants: teachers, parents and above all children.

Terms connected to the topic of that article and some models of cooperation

The concept of family has been widely explained in the literature but the “local community” is not so commonly understood. This is why its meaning is mentioned below.

According to T. Pilch, the local environment is a “limited group of people living on relatively isolated territory and appreciate the value of a common tradition and symbols, service and cultural institutions, conscious of the unity, identity, and willingness to work together, living with a sense of belonging and internal security”.¹ Such an understanding of the local environment shows an image of the individual features of each human community, which after the set of attributes, properties and internal regulatory mechanisms also creates a particular type of educational environment.

However, a local community is usually more stable in rural areas than in urban and industrialized areas where people are relatively more likely to change their place of residence and work.² People in rural areas appreciate the relationship with other people who live nearby and try to establish common values and social responsibilities.

From another perspective, R. Wroczyński defined the local environment as a “team of objective indicators of development and education, in particular objectively existing and relatively stable elements of the structure of the environment, which are the source of certain development incentives”.³

In the literature one can find a number of different typologies of cooperation. Among them are the cooperation models of Adil Najam, Chris Huxham and Roman Dorczak. The first developed a typology as “*models of the four C*”. He added four main forms of cooperation of characteriz-

¹ T. Pilch, *Środowisko lokalne – struktura, funkcje i przemiany*, [in:] *Pedagogika społeczna*, (ed.) T. Pilch, I. Nepalczyk, Warszawa 2003, p. 122.

² W. Okoń, *Nowy słownik pedagogiczny*, Warszawa 1996, p. 154.

³ R. Wroczyński, *Pedagogika społeczna*, Warszawa 1985, p. 122.

ing them using two criteria: objectives that are committed to organizations and how they operate. A. Najam called the first form cooperation which applies when both the objectives and methods of operation of the cooperating organizations are similar to each other. Cooperation in this form is relatively rare. It sometimes occurs in the relationship between institutions of the same type that work together to improve ways of working. The second form of cooperation is a confrontation, which occurs when both of the criteria are different and means the purposes and means of cooperation are incompatible. An example may be the relationship emerging between public and non-public kindergartens or for-profit organizations working in the field of education. The third form of cooperation is called complementarity. The objectives of the cooperating organizations are similar but they differ in terms of modes of action. Complementarity is the most common form of cooperation that takes place in school relations with other institutions. An example of this form of cooperation may be acting on behalf of a kindergarten pupil's development by a psychological clinic, sports club, foundation or any kind of organization working for the welfare of the children. Organizations working on behalf of children or have common goals, but they do it in other ways.⁴

The last form of cooperation is the co-optation and occurs when the goals of the organization are different, and the modes of action similar to each other. Relationships of this type occur when educational institutions included in cooperation with organizations that are stronger than they are, and for some reason they can impose their goals and use to implement their own plans. An example of such cooperation here could be that of a nursery cooperation with the police when they perform their programs on the premises of the institution.⁵

The comparative perspective of cooperation: kindergartens with parents and local communities in some European and Asian countries

There are some countries that appreciate teacher-parent collaboration and they have already worked out models of it. Great Britain (especially England and Wales) is characterized by well-organized and, according to some statistics, fairly common teacher-parent meetings.⁶ The parents spend some time with their children in kindergartens and nurse-

⁴ A. Najam, *The Four C's of Third Sector – Government Relations: Cooperation, Confrontation, Complementarity and Co-Optation*, Nonprofit Management and Leadership, 2000, Vol. 10/4, pp. 375, 396.

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 376–377.

⁶ <http://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-education/about/statistics> (online access: 05.02.2015).

ry schools during some extra tasks, special meetings, common workshops and so on. They can come to the educational institution anytime they want without the need for a special invitation and take part in the activities in which their children are involved.

Countries whose educational systems are decentralized have long lasting traditions of cooperation with local institutions, including pre-schools (and schools as well). This kind of system imposes it in some ways and European countries such as UK, Germany, Austria and US are better prepared for collaboration than countries that are characterized by centralized systems such as France. However, according to some comparisons, the European educational systems are changing towards the decentralization.⁷

Moreover, pre-school institutions in Europe are becoming more and more independent and, at the same time, headmasters and teachers have more duties and responsibilities to fulfil. Some of them have to be executed in consultation and agreement with local authorities and also parents. The number of independent or alternative pre-schools is also increasing. The character of these institutions requires increased cooperation with the parents. The parents would like to have the opportunity to decide on important matters such as the curriculum, pedagogical approach, organisation of pre-school calendar and so on and nowadays this is becoming increasingly possible.

As for Scandinavian and Nordic countries, teachers are obliged to cooperate with the families and they generally fulfil their duties properly. However, Finns, for example, do not spend lots of time at pre-school institutions. The positive aspect is the smooth flow of information between these two educational partners and they are generally equal partners. Teachers in these countries are highly respected and parents often ask them for advice.⁸

In Asia there is a tendency towards an appreciation of cooperation and so called interdependency in contrast to the European trend of interdependency in the society.⁹ In Japan, China, North Korea or South Korea the citizens are taught to respect collectiveness in almost all areas of human life. These countries are overcrowded and classes of pupils and students at all educational levels, including kindergartens, consist of about 30–40 members. Therefore, both pupils and parents (especially mothers) have to be self-disciplined and cooperate with teachers very well.¹⁰

⁷ W. Błażejowski, *Pedagogika porównawcza*, Rzeszów 2006, p. 200.

⁸ T. Gmerek, *Spoleczne funkcje szkolnictwa w Finlandii*, Poznań–Leszno 2007, pp. 71–73.

⁹ M. Adamczyk, *Cywilizacja Zachodnia*, Wrocław 2011, p. 54; See: J. Kieniewicz, *Wprowadzenie do historii cywilizacji Wschodu i Zachodu*, Warszawa 2003.

¹⁰ J. Kowalski, *Powstanie i rozwój cywilizacji chińskiej*, [in:] *Azja – Pacyfik. Społeczeństwo – polityka – gospodarka*, vol. 2, Toruń 1999, p.107.

In Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary the tradition of the cooperation of kindergartens and schools with families is not long lasting. It probably started at the end of the twentieth century because of the educational changes which came about in 1996 and 1999.

To conclude, some resolutions connected to pre-school education have been made by the European Commission Union. They include recognition of the important role of that level of education, development of the curriculum based on quality standards or increasing the number of kindergarten institutions. Among them there is also the decision of the extension of the role and range of the cooperation in European kindergartens and nursery schools.¹¹

The important role of the collaboration of kindergartens with parents and the local community in the literature

The proper organization of educational space is a prerequisite for the effective work of the teacher. Information contained in the educational environment can be used in varying degrees to achieve the objectives of teaching.¹²

The kindergarten is strongly related to the social local environment, and this compound can be seen in several aspects as follows: resource of teaching content, resource of social situation preschoolers, factors in the differentiation of their level of development or integrated resource of activities for preschoolers.

The role of parents in kindergartens is significant because they are one of the active links in the work of preschool institutions. Teachers should involve them in many activities in kindergarten, to take into account their needs, initiations and commitment. The involvement of parents in the work of the nursery fulfils the following roles:

- makers, as they learn new educational and social abilities in pre-school environment,
- people to help the teacher and the decision-maker facility,
- people that support the nursery in organizational activities.

S. Guz emphasizes that the correct and full implementation of the objectives, tasks and functions of kindergarten is only possible in cooperation with the family as the primary educational environment of the child. Only the consistent cooperation between these two communities can provide the right conditions to stimulate the proper upbringing and develop-

¹¹ R. Nowakowska-Siuta, *Pedagogika porównawcza. Problemy, stan badań i perspektywy rozwoju*, Kraków 2014, p. 261.

¹² J. Kujawiński, *Ewolucja szkoły i jej współczesna wizja*, Poznań 2010, p. 26.

ment of the child. The kindergarten should initiate these contacts as well as the specialized educational institutions.¹³

Creating positive relationships that address the needs of both teachers and parents is not an easy and quick process, but by developing close and constant contact forms it can have benefits for both parents and teachers. The teachers can obtain wider and deeper knowledge of the child, count on the cooperation with parents in difficult from educational moments, or have the opportunity to check their educational activities. The parents can feel important partners in education that may enhance him/her for further cooperation, have many opportunities for the growth of their educational competences, especially in crisis situations.

The kindergarten works with parents in an intentional and planned way, and a plan of cooperation is adapted to current needs, but it has some elements of a framework that can be defined as the following tasks:

- Obtaining wider diagnosis of children's needs, habits, preferences, talents and learning difficulties. This kind of collaboration usually consists of individual interviews with parents that are initiated by both teachers and parents or personal interviews at the invitation of the director, teacher;

- Encouraging parents to interact with kindergarten: conducting corner for parents (current newsletters on topics of education, presentation of the curriculum), presentation of works of art and all the products of children's activities, organisation of some sessions activities open to parents and combined with further discussion or meetings with experts from various fields to enrich the pedagogical knowledge and the acquisition of knowledge about child development and health.

- Making parents interested in some celebrations of special events in the kindergarten by asking them to prepare some special clothes for children or the organization of activities for children (gifts for Christmas or help with trips).

- Creating the possibilities for the unification of the education and upbringing at home and in the kindergarten by conducting meetings with parents (topics related to the general objectives of the work plan of the kindergarten, a plan of work with parents, conditions for the proper development of children, their physical and mental health, the organization of pre-school celebrations and events).

Getting to know and understanding the environment should therefore serve not only have the knowledge and experience but also the formation of appropriate attitudes towards the environment, the world, society and human communities, to themselves and others, to knowledge and

culture. From the educational point of view, such an environment will serve the dual function of teaching. It may serve as a starting point in teaching, as concrete, or a means of understanding certain concepts, facts and phenomena or may be in itself the object of cognition.¹⁴

The cooperation of the kindergarten with the local community can serve many diverse objectives and take a variety of forms and tasks. First of all, it can be a chance for promotion in the local environment. Then, it gives some opportunities for the more attractive education of children and involve some people from the community to work for kindergartens. The closer contact with the local community, or with institutions mainly provide children with the opportunity for direct contact with reality, which largely contributes to their desire to explore the world.

Greater commitment to cooperation with the local community could enrich the lives of preschool. However, it requires very good communication skills and negotiation of the headmasters and teachers. It is not easy task for some of them as they need some trainings and support to become genuine professionals and to be able to encourage parents and other adults to work together for the welfare of the child.¹⁵

The institution cannot be limited only to its own area. It has to cooperate with other institutions and social organizations in order to create an optimal educational environment. It is commonly said that parents and families do not have to have such a burden of responsibility for their education than in the past and more than ever, they are dependent on the quality of public and private institutions, the cultural life in the nearest environment and the situation on the labour market.¹⁶ That is why the importance of the pre-school institution is continues to grow.

In the process of childcare and education, the local conditions and the ability to engage in a partnership in education that can provide not only knowledge, but also the all-round development of personality should also be considered. There is a great need for organizing various meetings, seek some effective ways of informing, conducting interviews – at different times and on different occasions. Moreover, the content of these activities must be valid for all the participants.

Research methodology

The purpose of the research was to make a diagnosis with regards the range of the chosen private and public kindergarten institutions in Krakow and to cooperate with parents and local institutions according

¹⁴ M. Winiarski, *Rodzina – szkoła – środowisko lokalne. Problemy edukacji środowiskowej*, Warszawa 2000, p. 117.

¹⁵ K. Ferencz, *Współczesne funkcje przedszkola*, „Wychowanie w Przedszkolu” 4 (1999), p. 243.

the opinion of 40 teachers of kindergartens that work in them. The respondents have worked for about 5 years to 20 years. However, most of them 15 people (37%) have worked no longer than 5 years, 13 (32,5%) – from 5 to 10 years, 7 (17,5%) from 10 to 20 years and 5 (12,55%) longer than 20 years.

The main question is: What range does the kindergartens institution collaborate with parents and some local institutions?

There are some specific questions:

1. What kinds of cooperation did the kindergartens establish and maintain?
2. How frequent are these contacts?
3. How do the kindergarten teachers perceive the role of the cooperation?

The information was gathered as part of a BA seminar and, to collect the data from the kindergarten teachers, a survey was made. The research was conducted in 2014.

The analysis of the research

The claim that the average frequency of meeting with parents is high. Thirty teachers meet them every day and ten of them once a week. However, these meetings are short, such as when the parents bring the child to the kindergarten or take him/her from it. They share basic information about the child's day in the institution (meals, some achievements of the child, problems). The person that initiates the dialogue is mostly the teacher – 23 people – and less often it is the parent – 17 people. The teachers mostly inform parents about some matters personally – 30 respondents. Six teachers usually call the parents and only two teachers said that they wrote some information in the child's notebook and one that he/she sent some letters or e-mails to parents.

Thirty two teachers (80%) claim that they do not have any problems with the dialogue with parents but 8 persons (20%) stated that they had some problems.

In the mind of the teachers, parents are generally involved in kindergarten matters – 30 people (75%), but some of them do not do it very often – 10 respondents (25%). As for the quality of that involvement, there were not any teachers who assessed it as very good, 10 teachers (25%) said that it was good enough and 30 (75%) percent that it should be better.

As for the form of the cooperation with other local institutions they mentioned: libraries, some workplaces such as bakeries or factories, a psychopedagogical clinic, some schools (elementary level), health centres, the fire brigade, the police and other kindergartens.

The teachers, when asked for the purposes of the cooperation with parents and local community, enumerated the promotion the kindergarten achievements and creating the positive relationship among all participants as the most important – 35 teachers (87,5%). A small number of them – 5 respondents (12,5%) – mentioned the financial purpose of the cooperation.

This fragmentary data may indicate that kindergarten teachers understand cooperation only in the basic sense. They confine it to some every day meetings with parents and the sharing of some current information about pupils. They do not take into consideration any wider collaboration with local institutions. They take children to some of them occasionally to show them how some professionals such as firefighters or policemen work or how the process of some production is organized. They do not have also any plans as to how this cooperation should look like. If that fragmentary research may be taken as representative, one would claim that the collaboration of the kindergartens with parents and local community, including with some institutions, should be improved. Moreover, this research coincided with the opinion of some educational politicians and scientists that we do not have well-developed cooperation with all of the above mentioned participants of social and educational processes in Poland.

To conclude, some countries such as UK or Scandinavian countries should be taken as the model for establishing the suitable cooperation among the participants of the educational process on the pre-school level. The Author does not suggest the mechanical copying the foreign solutions but they can inspire Polish educational politicians, teachers and parents. First of all, the teachers and parents and some members of local communities (such as library workers and so on) should be taught how the proper cooperation between all members is important and how to organize it. Some courses and workshops about it should be conducted by pre-schools and the local authorities. It could raise their awareness of it and prepare them for taking action to establish and maintain it in the long term.

Moreover, the leaders of cooperation in each pre-school institution should be chosen. That person could take care of the cooperation of all institutions and he/she would be a mentor and coordinator of all actions connected to it. He/she would be responsible for collecting some funds from local authorities and some local work institutions for the pre-school, organizing some mutual meetings of all the mentioned members of educational process, promoting cooperation in the local community and so on.

Some functions should be assigned to some parents that are interested in cooperation and are ready for it. They also should have their own place in the kindergarten. It could be called the “parent’s room”. It would

have a complex purpose, both a practical (a place for meetings, talking, working) and a psychological one (parents would feel important in the institution).

Children should be taught from the beginning of their education that they can rely on parents, teachers and some members of local community. They should observe that the above-mentioned participants work together for their mutual good and they are all responsible for the socialization of children. It would give them a sense of security.

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Abstrakt

The importance of cooperation can be examined from the historical perspective and in Poland it was not as popular even five years ago as it is today. Contemporary social, political, economic and educational changes have forced a different meaning of cooperation of the participants of education. It seems that they are more dependent on one another and they need each other to fulfil educational purposes. One of the tasks of the pre-school institution is to socialize young learners. It can be done properly only when it is organized as a collaboration between the mentioned institution, parents and the local community. The aim of the article is to depict how cooperation among those educational participants is valuable and how it influences children. The paper shows both the benefits and some difficulties concerning its organisation. It has a comparative dimension because it approximates the adjustments of other countries connected to it. What is more, some fragmentary research of cooperation between pre-school institutions, parents and local community is characterized.

Keywords: cooperation with parents, cooperation with local community, local community, pre-school education, participants of education.

Współpraca przedszkola

**z rodzicami i środowiskiem lokalnym
jako jedna z tendencji zmian oświatowych
w edukacji przedszkolnej –
analiza porównawcza**

Abstrakt

Znaczenie współpracy może być rozpatrywane w perspektywie historycznej. Nigdy dotąd nie była ona tak ważna, jak obecnie. Współczesne zmiany społeczne, polityczne, ekonomiczne i oświatowe wymagają innego spojrzenia na współpracę podmiotów edukacyjnych. Wydaje się, że są one od siebie coraz bardziej zależne i potrzebują wzajemnych relacji do osiągnięcia celów edukacyjnych. Jednym z zadań placówki przedszkolnej jest socjalizacja najmłodszych. Może ona przebiegać prawidłowo jedynie wtedy, gdy jest zorganizowana z udziałem wspomnianej instytucji, rodziców i lokalnej społeczności. Celem niniejszego artykułu jest ukazanie roli współpracy podmiotów edukacyjnych oraz wpływu owej współpracy na rozwój intelektualny i wychowawczy dzieci. Artykuł prezentuje zarówno korzyści wynikające ze współpracy, jak i trudności w jej organizacji. Posiada charakter porównawczy, gdyż przybliża rozwiązania innych krajów w tym zakresie. Dodatkowo scharakteryzowane zostały pilotażowe badania dotyczące współpracy placówek przedszkolnych z rodzicami i lokalną społecznością.

Słowa kluczowe: współpraca z rodzicami, współpraca ze środowiskiem lokalnym, środowisko lokalne, edukacja przedszkolna, podmioty edukacyjne.

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