

Editorial

The thematic focus of the present edition of the CEPS Journal is the cooperation of school with parents. This is an area that is extremely important from the perspective of ensuring the overall development of pupils, providing optimal conditions for development and learning, encouraging learning and for the achievement of other educational goals. Various empirical studies confirm that it is important to attract parents to cooperation with school and teachers, in order to comprehensively encourage the child's development (Burden, 1995; Gonzalez-DeHass, Willems, & Doan Holbein, 2005; Henderson & Berla, 1994; Hornby 2000; Jordan, Orozco, & Averett, 2001; Pomerantz, Moorman, & Litwack, 2007; Soo-Yin, 2003). Researchers have confirmed that the overall involvement of parents represents a positive contribution to learning and the learning achievements of pupils (Henderson & Berla, 1994; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997 in Gonzalez-DeHass et al., 2005). These studies prove there is a close relationship between the involvement of parents and the learning achievement of pupils, their wellbeing, their attendance at school, their views, their homework assignments, their school marks and their educational aspirations.

Parents are, therefore, important subjects, who with their participation contribute to the formation of the school sphere, while with their support of the pupil at home they can enable optimal conditions for his or her development. It is therefore important that each school encourages and enables a partnership with parents that increases their inclusion and participation in encouraging the social, emotional, moral and intellectual development of the child (Children's Defence Found, 2000, p. 64 in Soo-Yin, 2003). The school, parents and the community should be aware of their interconnection and together form a vision and understand the role of individual factors in relation to the role of other factors. Such cooperation is necessary in order to ensure the support and help that can enable each child to achieve appropriate school success and personal development. However, it is important to remember that dialogue between the parties concerned does not always mean just seeking consensus, but must also allow for confrontation and diverse viewpoints and perspectives.

The importance of cooperation between school and parents is also confirmed by research into school culture. Bryk and Schneider (2002 in Stansberry Beard, Hoy, & Woolfolk Hoy, 2010) explain that there are at least four social conditions in schools that directly promote student learning: a) teachers with a "can do" attitude, b) school outreach to parents, c) a professional community emphasising collaborative work practices with a commitment to improve, and d) high expectations. In his synthesis of over 800 meta-analyses related to

achievement across all home variables, Hattie (2009) determines that parental aspirations and expectations with regard to children's educational achievement have the strongest relationship with achievement, while communication (interest in homework and school work, assistance with homework, discussing school progress) has a moderate effect, and parental home supervision (e.g., home rules for watching television, home surroundings conducive to doing school work) has the weakest relationship.

Cooperation between teachers and parents, between school and home, is multifaceted, and different authors use different terminology in this regard. Rather than talking about corporation, some prefer to speak of the inclusion of parents in schoolwork, which can be a synonym for cooperation, the participation of parents, parental power and the partnership between school, the family and the community (Epstein, 1996 in Soo-Yin, 2003; Wolfendale, 1989 in Soo-Yin, 2003). Epstein (1996 in Soo-Yin, 2003) expanded the conception from "the inclusion of parents" to "a partnership between school, the family and the community" in order to particularly emphasise the fact that the child learns and develops within all three contexts: the school, the family, and the broader community. We must take all three contexts into account in an integrated way, because that is how they are reflected within the education and learning of the individual child.

The inclusion of parents can have various forms and levels, both inside and outside school. It embraces all of the activities that are provided and encouraged by school and that support parents in working towards improving the child's learning and development. Thus, on the realisation of the importance of cooperation between teachers and parents, questions repeatedly arise about the ways and forms of cooperation that most appropriately respond to the needs and challenges of the present times with which parents and their families, but also school and teachers, are faced. What is the level of quality of this cooperation, and to what extent does it really meet the goals and expectations that we have in relation to it? How can we cooperate with parents who perhaps do not want this cooperation or are overburdened with their everyday obligations? How can we include parents with all of their diverse personality characteristics, experience and positions in society? And the fundamental question, from which all of the responses to the other questions are derived: what is the essential purpose and goal of cooperation between teachers and parents, between school and home, and what do we expect from this cooperation? It is important to be aware that we must always have the pupil and his or her optimal development in mind.

In spite of the fact that many teachers and schools have accepted the

concept of the inclusion of parents and are aware of its influence on the child, many have not yet conveyed their knowledge and beliefs to planning, their plans to practice, and their practice to results (Eccles & Harold, 1993; Epstein, 1986; Gestwicki, 1996; Simon, Salinas Epstein, & Sanders, 1998 all in Soo-Yin, 2003). Many studies confirm that parents are interested in cooperation on all levels, from participation in specific events to making decisions on the level of the school. However, many parents still do not know how to enter into cooperation or do not feel sufficiently competent to do so. Most frequently it is a case of a lack of knowledge about inclusion rather than a low level of interest. It is particularly in relation to this question that the needs of the diverse parents whose children are included in the individual school must not be overlooked: differences in the socioeconomic status of families, the education of parents, the native language, belonging to various ethnic groups, the level of inclusion within multicultural society, familiarity with the language environment in which their children's schooling takes place, etc. Particularly in the case of so-called vulnerable groups of parents (families), it is necessary to enable participation and to establish conditions that, to the greatest possible extent, facilitate communication and mutual cooperation between teachers and parents. Research shows that in spite of a declared desire for dialogue with parents, certain teachers do not encourage such dialogue, nor do they actually want it, particularly with parents whom they perceive as part of the problem rather than part of the solution. This does not refer only to parents from minority ethnic groups, nor does it concern only those with a lower socioeconomic status, but also includes parents with a higher socioeconomic status (Peček, Čuk & Lesar, 2008). It is thus necessary to take into account the fact that the material and cultural conditions of families, as well as their feelings towards schooling, differ according to social class. Therefore, as Carvalho (2001) emphasises, the concept of cooperation between school and parents often appears to be a projection of the model of the upper-middle class rather than an open invitation for diverse families to recreate schooling. Family-school relations are relations of power, but most families are powerless.

Carvalho also highlights the other side of the relationship between parents and school, a side that is particularly salient in contemporary times, with the orientation of school towards ever increased productivity and its quantification; namely, the pressure for more family educational accountability, the expectation that parents not only support their children's work in school and for school, but also help them in learning and in completing homework. Of course, we cannot understand these kinds of expectations purely as the transferral of the teacher's responsibility for instruction to parents, but rather as the pressure

of the ever increasing expectations of society with regard to the goals of school. Teachers often feel that the school curriculum is so broad that it is not possible for pupils to achieve academically unless they work hard at home (Peček & Lesar, 2006). In this regard, children from vulnerable groups, whose parents find it a great deal more difficult to help them, are again exposed. Thus school only increases the differences derived from socioeconomic and cultural factors.

In the field of parent-teacher partnership, we would like to stress the importance of an awareness that “an essential starting point of any culture of good cooperation is allowing each other freedom and autonomy, awareness of interdependence and common goals. These are the very foundations on which it is possible to build the culture of partnership in cooperation between teachers and parents” (Šteh & Kalin, 2011, p. 99).

The diversity of views and responses to questions regarding the cooperation of teachers and parents is revealed by the contributions in the present thematic edition. The participating authors come from very different social environments, each emphasising particular questions related to the central theme: from the Republic of South Africa to Scotland, Norway, Italy and Slovenia.

The contribution by Paola Dusi entitled *The Family-School Relationships in Europe: A research review* brings an overview of research in the area of the relationship between school and parents. As the author emphasises, this research points in the same direction: good collaboration between family and school means that students can be provided with a better education and gives them better possibilities for learning. However, in her view, research shows that the home-school relationship is an unresolved issue, the reason for this being the complex nature of the educational role. As the author determines, the success of cooperation between school and parents is not dependent only on the specific, personal relationship between the teacher and parents, but rather is a result of simultaneous influences of factors on various levels: macro (cultural poly-centrism, the multiethnic make-up of society, neoliberal ideology and the decrease in welfare state policies), intermediary (differences in two institutions: family and school) and micro (interpersonal level). In her opinion, the school-parent relationship in Europe is marked by scarce parental participation (which is not only the result of a lack of interest, a lack of motivation on the part of parents to cooperate with school, but frequently also a lack of motivation on the part of teachers), a lack of adequate forms of home-school communication, and the need to invest in parent and teacher training. The author ends the article on an optimistic note, emphasising that despite the difficulty of the family-school relationship it is possible to improve it, and concludes with certain suggestions as to how to do this.

The articles in the continuation also take as their point of departure the supposition that a good relationship between the teacher and parents contributes to better learning results, school attendance, self-esteem, social behaviour and school climate, as well as a higher level of responsibility on the part of the pupils for fulfilling their school obligations. In addition, from the perspective of research undertaken in specific school environments, the articles raise the question as to what, in fact, a good relationship between teachers and parents is, and how this relationship can be formed. As the authors emphasise, the process of teacher education has an important role to play.

Thus, for instance, the contribution by Franc Cankar, Tomi Deutsch and Sonja Sentočnik entitled *Approaches to Building Teacher-parent Cooperation* emphasises that in Slovenia we do not have sufficient empirical evidence to make claims about the problems related to family-school cooperation. One of the key questions refers to the quality of the partnership between these two institutions. In their opinion, the quality of family-school cooperation is determined by the presence of mutual agreement and the extent to which cooperation is harmonised. Therefore, they are interested in areas of cooperation in which parent and teacher expectations are the same and where they differ. The results of their research show that teachers are a rather homogenous group in their claim that their cooperation with parents is as it should be; on the other hand, parents' views are much more dispersed and critical in their perception of the actual situation. Teachers and parents have similar expectations, but they differ in their perceptions of the actual situation. Findings suggest that parents' rating of the importance of parent involvement in school work is influenced by their gender and education, as well as by the frequency of their attendance at formal school events. Mothers with higher education take more interest in how their children spend their time in school, through actively seeking cooperation with school, asking questions and giving suggestions. An analysis of cooperation with parents over a period of one year in the programme 'Reading and Conversation' show that parents especially value trust, honesty, spontaneity and mutual understanding in cooperation with teachers.

The aim of the paper by Sathiapama Michael, Noleen van Wyk and Charl. C. Wolhuter entitled *The Management of Parental Involvement in Multicultural Schools in South Africa: A Case study* was to investigate the management of parent involvement in three multicultural schools in the Umlazi District in Durban. The qualitative research was undertaken within diverse school communities, as schools in South Africa have recently been desegregated. This gives the article additional relevance, as it also touches upon questions of teachers' encounters with social, cultural and linguistic diversity, which is pertinent in

many countries that have become more heterogeneous as a result of various social, economic and political developments. The research in the aforementioned schools reveals a low level of meaningful contact between school and parents. Apathy exists on the side of parents, low expectations on the side of principals and teachers, and an organisational structure facilitating parent-school interaction is lacking. The research also highlights certain restricted opportunities for interaction between parents and schools; namely, a lack of time and the language barrier. Furthermore, schools tend to direct their efforts towards fixing parents rather than altering school structures and practices. The authors conclude their article with a recommendation as to how to increase cultural sensitivity both amongst teachers and amongst school managers, thus improving the management of parent involvement in multicultural schools.

The contribution by Gillian Inglis is entitled *Reconstructing Parents' Meetings in Primary Schools: The Teacher as Expert, the Parent as Advocate and the Pupil as Self-advocate*. The article uses an approach informed by grounded theory to explore the experiences and satisfaction of parents, teachers and pupils around biannual meetings to discuss pupils' progress in three primary schools in the central area of Scotland. In the theoretical section, based primarily on Hornby, the author emphasises various models of teachers working with parents, models that are also evident in her empirical analysis of cooperation between teachers and parents. As she determines, a model of the teacher as the expert and information-giver persists. In this model, passive roles might be expected for the parent. Nonetheless, in an era of the consumerist paradigm, this is changing. As her research confirms, the rise of the consumer model of education has charged parents with an advocacy role and increased professional accountability. The author is not only interested in cooperation between parents and teachers, which is a frequent theme of various analyses that treat the relationship between school and the family, but with the role of pupils, with regard to which she raises the question, increasingly relevant in contemporary times, as to whether and how pupils should also participate in meetings between teachers and parents.

Last but not least in the Focus part, the article by Martha Lea entitled *Cooperation Between Migrant Parents and Teachers in School: A Resource?* deals with the question of cooperation with parents from the perspective of the inclusion of children of migrants in the school system. As the author emphasises, even in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child it is determined that in education the children of immigrants must have equal opportunities. The question is, however, how the school system should be organised and what kind of cooperation between parents and teachers leads to the realisation of the goal of

equal opportunities. In the article, the author asks why schools should cooperate with migrant parents; what are the possibilities and challenges in official Norwegian policy and what are teachers' experiences? She determines that education policy in Norway is inclusive, as is illustrated by the fact that students get language support to a certain degree both in their mother tongue and in Norwegian when needed, that the policy stimulates cooperation between parents and teachers, and that some support is also given to translation. Nonetheless, a whole range of problems are evident on the level of the realisation of cooperation between teachers and parents, which, in the opinion of the author, demonstrates that it is necessary to work through a process of learning how to cooperate and give adequate support. The Norwegian policy shows a will to encourage cooperation, but the implementation of the policy can still be improved. According to the author, cooperation requires clear school policy and the means to implement it, as well as a high level of teacher competence.

In the Varia part the contribution by Ingo Eilks, Torsten Witteck and Verena Pietzner entitled *The Role and Potential Dangers of Visualisation When Learning About Sub-microscopic Explanations in Chemistry Education* reflects upon the central role that visualisations play when learning about the model-based, sub-microscopic level. It also reflects on the dangers inherent in employing insufficiently examined, poorly thought-out, or even misleading visualisations. This is outlined using different examples taken from both textbooks for lower secondary chemistry education and from the Internet. Implications for structuring and using sub-micro visualisations in chemistry education are also given.

This thematic edition of the journal is rounded out with 'The Third Section', which contains a review of a book that also deals with the theme of cooperation between school and parents, a monograph edited by Sandra L. Christenson and Amy L. Reschly entitled *Handbook of School-Family Partnerships* (2010, New York: Routledge, Taylor and Francis. ISBN 10: 0-415-96376/ISBN 13: 978-0-415-96376-3). The editors emphasise that the monograph is a comprehensive review of what is known about the effects of school-family partnerships on student and school achievement.

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