CONSULTING AND INVOLVING PARENTS IN PROVISION OF EDUCATIONAL SERVICES PROCESS FOR FAMILIES IN EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

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Abstract. *The paper focuses on the issues of parents consulting and their involvement in an educational service process for families at schools. The quality of education and the effectiveness of provision of educational services are considered as an integral part of successful learning. To analyze parental opinion (N=530) towards their consulting and involvement in provision of educational service process quantitative and qualitative method of data collection have been chosen. According to the parental opinion, the content of consulting should be linked with learning achievements and motivation. Parental involvement is considered through the processes of professional orientation, prevention and organizing social events at school. Though, the fields of self-support groups, organizing teaching-learning programs for families, parental involvement in a formal educational process is considered as a challenging issue.*
Keywords: *educational services for families, parental consulting, parental involvement in provision of educational services.*

Introduction

As the current Lithuanian economical and social situation emerges new challenges for children and parents on improving the welfare system, the education system of Lithuania requires the garantuees to each child and adult have an opportunity to use the state-providing services, to create diverse, based on persons needs educational and social service forms. This insight is a significant educational and political statement, declared in the new documents of the state (the State Education Strategy for 2013-2022, the National Progress Program for 2014-2020, the Progress Strategy of State by the Name of "Lithuania 2030" etc.). The aim is to raise the educational culture of families and strengthen the collaboration between the family and the educational institutions.

It is highlighted that an eduactional institution creates a child's educational space together with children and their parents, and the aim is that a school and parents became partners, who collaborate, communicate and seek for the same objectives together.

The researches by Leliūgienės and Simavičiūtės (2010) and others prove that the communication and collaboration between school and parents and their mutual interaction is a process of *consulting* on important issues and questions about child's education. Thus, it means that a bigger attention must be focused on collaboration, which is based on consulting, because the meeting between parents and specialists usually starts from a process of *consulting*, which, later on, grows into collaboration, parental involvement and team collaboration.

Parental involvement in a child's educational process has been evaluated as one of the most signficant and positive features of a child's socialization. The importance of parental involvement and participation in a child's education process, the forms of involvement and the methods had been investigated by national and international scientists in their works (Epstein, 2007; Ruškus & Mažeikis, 2007; Gerulaitis, 2007; Trakšelys, 2010; Valantinas & Čiuladienė, 2012 etc.).

Parental involvement in an educational process is related to *an activeness in an educational process; to the knowledge building while all the memebers, related with a child, are involved together; to problem solving and practise as such; to an engagement to investigate; to different educational oppportunities and acceptance of the diversity; to being able to share the resources and to apply changes on critical issues etc*. (Gerulaitis, 2007).

The investigations of Valantinas and Čiuladienė (2012) demonstrated that Lithuanian educational institutions had a feature of parental involvement, *based on school activities*, as the individual communication method appeared to be dominating because the one channel communication had been realised from the top to the bottom.

Problematic research issues: How the content of consulting about educational services has been valued? How the consulting content meets the parental needs? What is the mechanism of the parental involvement process like? What are the strenghts and goals of parents, involved in the educational service providing process?

Object of the research – the parental consulting and involvement in the educational services for families in an educational institution.

Aim of the research – to reveal the content and the importance of parental consulting and involvement in educational services for families process in educational institutions, according to the aspects of the parental evaluations.

Samples and methodology of the research. Totally, 532 parents/carers, whose children attend Siauliai Town educational institutions, have participated

in the research. Quantitative and qualitative method of data collection have been chosen. The questionnaire was applied to get the results of the research. The closed type questioning data was processed by methods of statistical analysis. The data was analyzed by SPSS 19.0. (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences). The descriptive statistical methods were applied: percentage frequency tables, calculated average rates (M), standard deviation (SD) and standard error (SE). The open type questioning data was processed by content analysis method: the frequent data reading and text comprehension, the determination of data, related to investigational issues, the main categories and subcategories settings, the determination of relations amongst groups, the determination of differences.

The research results and discussion

Parental consulting about the educational services for families: needs and the evalutation of the consulting importance. The evaluation of the providing consulting and its' importance is given below in the table number 1; the diagnostical field consists of 18 dynamic units, fixing the current situation.

All consulting fields were evaluated by parents as medium (M=3,76 – 4,13). The highest evaluation was pointed out to a *child's self-confidence motivation* (M=4,13), *providing help to prepare for a formal examination or test* (M=4,04) and to an *ability to evaluate skills and knowledge by a child himself.* The survey for parents may lead to a conclusion that the provision of parents is related to their children's learning results and motivation engagement.

The lowest evaluation about consulting issues was evidently demonstrated as *Support for a child to do his homework and other activities at home* (M=3,76), *finding methods to be applied in learning process* (M= 3,77), s*upport for a child with special needs at home* (M=3,79), and *creating appopriate learning space conditions at home* (M=3,79).

The importance of teaching and learning strategies and a good educational space creation was updated. The lack of helping methods for children with special needs was revealed.

The importance and usefullness of consulting about children teaching and learning was evaluated as medium (M=1,42 – 1,89). According to parents, the most important consulting is about a child's motivation in learning (M=1,45) and self-confidence engagement (M=1,42) issues. The less important consulting, based on the evaluation by parents about consulting for families, was a specific consulting about helping a child with special needs in teaching and learning. (M=1,89).

Table 1 **Parental consulting services and its' importance to a child's education (N=532)**

Consulting about:	Provided consulting: evaluation of the situation[1]			Provided consulting: evaluation of the importance[2]		
	M	SE	SD	M	SE	SD
Support for a child in learning regarding his age	3,87	0,04	0,91	1,57	0,05	0,98
Support for a child to do tasks and activities at home	3,76	0,04	0,87	1,75	0,05	1,06
Support for a child with special needs to learn at home	3,79	0,04	0,88	1,89	0,06	1,21
Creating appropriate learning conditions for a child at home *(e.g., personal working space, etc.)*	3,79	0,04	0,89	1,88	0,06	1,23
Helping a child with special skills to learn more and extend his knowledge at home *(e.g., additional tasks and activities etc.)*	3,97	0,04	0,91	1,56	0,05	1,04
Engaging a child in learning	4,06	0,04	0,94	**1,45**	0,04	0,93
Engaging a child to be more confident	**4,13**	0,04	0,97	**1,42**	0,04	0,89
Support for child to plan and make a schedule	3,99	0,04	0,96	1,58	0,05	1,01
Support for a child to evaluate his knowledge and skills	**4,05**	0,04	0,87	1,59	0,05	0,99
Support for a child to prepare for a formal examination/test (e.g., exams, skill and knowledge testing, etc.), while passing from one educational level to another	**4,04**	0,04	0,88	1,63	0,05	1,08
Support for a child to find methods that could be applied in his learning process (informational, memorising, choice, analysing, etc.)	3,77	0,05	0,95	1,79	0,06	1,17
Using child's skills and his experience in learning	3,86	0,04	1,90	1,64	0,05	1,04
Using child's interests in learning	3,97	0,04	0,93	1,60	0,05	1,02
Applying gained theorical skills	3,99	0,04	0,92	1,59	0,05	1,02
Support for a child according to his individual opportunities	**4,01**	0,04	0,93	**1,55**	0,05	0,98
Improving relationships with a group	3,93	0,04	0,93	1,69	0,05	1,08
Improving relationships with teachers	3,96	0,04	0,9	1,68	0,05	1,10
Solving the issues of bullying	**4,00**	0,04	0,94	1,60	0,05	1,04

[1] Scale from 1 to 5 as follows: 1 – very bad; 2- bad; 3 – neither bad nor good; 4 – good; 4 – very good.
[2] Scale from 1 to 4: 1- Agree; 2 – Partly agree; 3 – Disagree; 4 – No opinion.

Qualitative data analysis. The parents were asked to express their opinion about what kind of consulting they would mostly prefer at the time. After the open type questioning analysis has been finished, two most needed categories of consulting contents were concluded: a child's learning skills and opportunities; and bullying prevention and positive relationship creation and engagement. (see table nr. 2)

Table 2 **The most needed consulting contents for parents**

Category	Subcategory	State-ment nr.	Proving statements
Children learning skills and opportunities (D=9)	The usage of children's interests, individual opportunities	4	*Use the children's interests in learning; for the individual opportunities; how to use child's interests in learning.*
	Learning methods, motivation	3	*How to teach a child since an early age; What kind of methods could be applied in a learning process; Help to find learning, engagement and motivation methods.*
	Subject learning	2	*Lithuanian language; history.*
Bullying prevention and positive relationship creation / engagement (D=9)	Bullying prevention	5	*About bullying, bullying and how to stop and prevent; The issues about children's questions on bullying, <...>; <...>, How to prevent bullying and solve bullying issues?*
	Relationships amongst children, and children-parents relatiosnhips	4	*To improve relationships with children/ group, Children's <...> friendliness, educational; how to improve relationships, <...>; Any, unless about a relatioship with a teenager; How to explain to a child that friends are not always friends and etc.*

Receiving a *consulting service about children's learning skills and opportunities* was evidently *highlighted*[3] by parents. (N=9). The content of the category permits to make a detailed consulting content. Parents would like to get a consulting on how to use the interests of children in their learning process. Also, they would prefer to receive a consulting on more specific subjects' learning (e.g. language, history). Parents state that it is very important to help a

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[3] The categories of *child's learning skills and opportunities content* are based on three subcategories: The categories of *bullying prevention and positive relationship engagement/creation* are based on two subcategories.

child to find individual methods of learning, thus, they would like to get consultings about learning methods since an early age, engagement and motivation issues. The conclusion might be mentioned that the qualitative research data represents parental preferences to be involved into a child's educational process, help a child to learn, get learning skills.

The category about bullying prevention and positive relationship creation/ engagement (N=9) reveals that parents find the importance not only in the learning process itself, but the child's emotional status and feelings. The participants of the research would prefer to receive a consulting about the issues on bullying prevention, children and children-parents relationship improvement.

The cases, that do not appear in the content of the categories, should be mentioned either, as they represent parental preferencies about the consulting content as well. Though, there are parents who would prefer to receive *consultings about a healthy lifestyle (healthy eating habits, a healthy living, sport, hygiene, schedule planning issues etc.) and about the indications how to leave an educational institution (what formularities must be done to be able to leave the educational institution correctly). The need of consulting about the profession choosing issues was also mentioned (Help children to choose future opportunities and professions).*

Parental involvement in educational services for families process and the evaluation of the importance of the parental involvement. This research field focuses on 6 types of parental involvement in children learning (based on Epstein, 2007): *parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, collaborating with the community.* Parental involvement diagnostical field consists of 14 dynamic units, fixing the current situation (the evaluation of parental involvement status), and the evaluation of the parental involvement importance (see table nr. 3).

Parental involvement in teaching and learning process, based on the evaluation by parents, has been concluded as positive. The scope of all the mentioned above diagnostical field dynamic units was not evaluated conditionally: the majority of respondents in this field *valued from "neither good/ nor bad" to "good"*. The evaluating homogeneity could be disputed, as the standard deviation on some parental involvement aspects demonstrates that the evaluation obviously do not coincidence. The opinions of parents mostly differenciated in evaluating the parental involvement in apllying innovation (SD=2,08).

Table 3 **Parental involvement in a child's educational process in an educational institution: evaluation of the situation and importance (N=532)**

Variables	Parental involvement: evaluation of situation[4]			Parental involvement: evaluation of importance[5]		
	M	SE	SD	M	SE	SD
Parents involve in orientational activities about professional choises	**3,899**	0,04	0,92	**1,64**	0,04	0,92
Parents willingly involve in to events organisation activities in educational institutions	**3,78**	0,04	0,91	**1,71**	0,04	0,87
Various activities about prevention issues are being organised for parents	**3,72**	0,05	0,98	1,78	0,05	0,94
Parents together with their children participate in social activities	3,71	0,05	0,97	**1,71**	0,04	0,88
Parents encourage innovations	3,70	0,10	2,079	1,86	0,05	0,93
Various activities about prevention issues are being organised for parents and children	3,68	0,05	1,05	1,77	0,05	0,96
Parents willingly involve into the prevention activities	3,67	0,04	0,895	1,76	0,05	0,92
Parents willingly involve into the project activities	3,61	0,05	0,95	1,83	0,04	0,92
Activities for parents are being organised (e.g. lectures, seminars etc.) about how to be a good parent	3,61	0,05	1,01	1,82	0,05	0,93
Parents are involved in a project activity	3,60	0,04	0,93	1,85	0,04	0,92
Parents participate in creative activities	3,59	0,05	0,95	1,91	0,05	0,93
Parental clubs are held in educational institutions	3,47	0,05	1,01	2,01	0,05	0,98
Seminars for families (for children together with parents) are being organised in educational institutions	**3,397**	0,05	1,04	2,01	0,05	0,97
Parents willingly involve in the daily activities and lessons at schools	**3,31**	0,05	0,99	**2,04**	0,05	0,96
Parental s groups are being organised in educational institutions	**3,27**	0,05	0,99	**2,10**	0,05	0,996

During the analysis of the evaluation of a current situation of parental involvement in children teaching and learning process, it was noticed that the respondents valued most these fields as follows: *parental involvement and*

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[4] Scale from 1 to 5 as follows: 1 – very bad; 2 – bad; 3 – neither bad nor good; 4 – good; 4 – very good.
[5] Scale from 1 to 4as follows: 1 – Agree; 2 – Partly agree; 3 – Disagree; 4 – No opinion.

participation in profession orientation activities, event organisation activities and prevention activities. 24,5 percent of the respondents valued *an involvement in professional orientation activities* (M=3,89) as a very good activity, and 38,6 percent of respondents valued it as a well provided activity (see table nr. 3). The second place under the rates of evaluation, according to respondents, highlighted the voluntary parental involvement in *event organisation activities in eduactional intitutions* (M=3,78), 19,3 percent of participants value that as very good, 41,3 percent – good. The half of the respondents value the provided *activities for parents about prevention issues* as very good (17,8 percent) and good (35,0). Paradoxically, 18,2 percent of respondents state that the mentioned activity is not performed/provided at all.

The lowest evaluation by parents about the parental involvement in children teaching and learning process forms belongs to such fields as *activities of self-support parental groups* (M=3,28); a *voluntary parental involvement in daily activities or lessons in educational intitutions* (M=3,30); *seminars for families (children together with parents)* (M=3,38). Only 30 percent of participants value *parental self-support group activities* as a positive phenomenon. 25,9 percent of respondents have never faced with such a parental participation form in a child's educational process. (see table nr. 3)

The most needed parental involvement activities in children teaching and learning educational processes were determined as the most positively valued by parents. However, the less necessary activities were those poorly valued by parents and, in general, not provided at educational institutions at all. It is obvious that unknown activities for parents does not give any opportunity for parents to understand the usefullness and importance of such activities in an educational process. The research (Valantinas & Čiuladienė, 2013) reveals that the parental attitude, depicting parental involvement in the educational life, is often related to children's achievements: less involving parents are often disatisfied with their child's educational institution and manifest that their child do not like studing in this educational institution and they tend to accuse specialists and teachers of unseccessfull child's achievements without any objectivity and of poor support when having difficulties in learning.

Parental involvement in the educational process: the aspect of service realisation. The empiric data analysis created an oportunity to update the spectrum of the non-provided services. It is obvious that *activities, related to parental self-support groups, clubs for parents, voluntary parental involvement in a formal educational process (during lessons and activities), seminars for parents together with children* are not extended in educational institutions. Even 25,9 percent of respondents declared that there are not any parental self-suppor groups at schools, nor seminars for families (for parents together with children). The parental participation in activities together with their children (e.g.

seminars, various school events, etc.) creates opportunities for parents to know their children better, identify their social, educational needs, also, to approach to a context of an education as such, to what motivates their engagement and participation in school life. Teachers sometimes objectively express their anxiety and needs about a bigger parental involvement in a child's formal educational process. It is believed that having established the appropriate conditions for parents and children to participate in activities together and special tasks, related to child's cognitive skills in different social, educational ativities (outside the educational institution boundaries), would motivate parents to involve more and participate in a formal education process, help teachers and specialists, support the dialogue and, also, participate in the educational field.

Parental involvement and voluntary participation in activities: qualitative data analysis. The aim was to reveal how parents get envolved into the voluntary activities, as it is one of the forms to participate in an educational process. The participants were asked to indicate the voluntary activities they remembered most during the latest years. After analysing the open type questioning qualitative content, two thematic categories were determined: *the variety of forms to involve parents into the voluntary activities and non-participation in voluntary activities* (see table nr. 4).

The content about the variety of *forms of parental involvement in the voluntary activities* reveals that parents get involved in the professional orientational activities such as the presentation of a profession or a working place (N=7), they participate less in activities of organising traditional events or perfomances (N=4), also, they accompany children to school trips and excursions (N=3), they do participate in sports events (N=3) and creative activities (N=2), or social activities (N=2) in educational intitutions. What concerns the parental non-participation in voluntary activities, parents argument their answers with factors of a lack of an interest or information and time. The particular case of a parental non-participation in voluntary activities must be mentioned where the case is related to parental attidute towards educational institution responsabilities and that it is only for children and the activities must be orientated only to the children *("In my opinion, school - is for children!"*).

The semantic sense of subcategories and the frequency of repeated statements may define that parents are traditionally active in participating in diverse types of events, they are active in professional orientational activities (N=9/12), and less involving/being involved in social activities.

Table 4 **Parental involvement in voluntary activities**

Category	Subcate-gory	State-ment nr.	Proving statements
A variety of parental involvement in voluntary activities (D=21)	Professions, presentation of a working place	7	*The presentation of a profession, the presentation of a working place; <...>. To present a profession, college fairs. Parents present their professions; tell about professions.*
	Involvement in the festive /traditional events organisation activities	4	*During Christmas celebration event, I was presenting the children Christmas performance; Christmas welfare event, when the money, received from sold children created works, were given to charity and poor people; Organising Christmas evening, Easter talks, <...>.*
	Accompanying children to excursions, school trips and events	3	*Accompanying to a school trip. <...>; go on a school trip with the group; <...>, accompanying children to special events.*
	Participation in sports events	3	*<...>, participating in a sport event to support a child's school; assisting an event "My sport group".*
	Participation in creative activities	2	*Making photo albums in an early age school children group (family members, animals, etc.); Participation in a creative activity (A event in a pre-school).*
	Involvement in social activities	2	*Cleaning environment, <...>; Scouts campings, <...>.*
Non-participation in voluntary activities (D=5)	Non-participation in voluntary activities	2	*I haven't participated.*
	The reasons of a non-participation in voluntary activities	3	*Maybe there are such activities but I know nothing about them; No, because we don't have time for such activities, we are working people; In my opinion, school is for children!*

Conclusions

1. The research revealed that the consulting content, according to the evaluations by respondents, has to be related mostly to learning results or achievements and motivation engagement. The evaluation of the consulting importance and usefullness is related to a consolidation of a child's engagement and self-confidence.

2. Analysing the evaluation about the current situation of a parental involvement in teaching and learning processes, it has been noticed that respondents mostly valued the field, related to parental involvement in professional oreintation activities, activities of organising events and prevention issues. A parental non-participation in voluntary activities was argumented by parents as a lack of time or information and a lack of interests.

3. The lowest rates of evaluation were related to such fields as parental self-support groups, organisation of seminars for families (parents together with children) and parental involvement in a formal educational process at school. The most important and useful activities of parental involvement in an educational process were most postively valued by parents. Less usefull activities were valued poorly or as not provided in the educational institutions at all.

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