ANALYSIS OF SOCIAL EDUCATORS' AND PARENTS' COOPERATION POSSIBILITIES: PROMOTING AND HINDERING FACTORS

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Abstract

The article deals with the peculiarities of social educators' and parents' cooperation possibilities in schools. The article presents the analysis of a qualitative semi-structured interview with parents (N=15) and a quantitative study with school educators (N=176). Employing targeted content analysis of parents' and teachers' opinion and written quantitative questionnaire, the peculiarities and possibilities of the cooperation between the participants of the educational process have manifested themselves. These include possible cooperation areas, factors promoting and hindering this process.

Key words: cooperation, social education, social educator.

Introduction

In the modern society one of the key characteristics of the organisation in the learning society is cooperation grounded activity. According to Hargreaves (1999), one of emergent and most promising meta-paradigms of the post-modern age is that of collaboration as an articulating and integrating principle of action, planning, culture, development, organisation and research. Cooperation becomes an efficient response to the world, which makes it impossible to foresee problems, when the solutions of the latter are unclear and requirements become increasingly intensive. In such context cooperation is diverse, broad and is offered as a solution for many various challenges with which the society, educational institutions and their communities encounter. Hence, at the moment, cooperation is a particularly significant factor of society improvement and development, which is treated by scientists as a modern approach and strategy, in which the educator's new position towards pupils and families manifests itself. This position manifests itself by a pedagogical ability to treat participants of the educational process as tantamount partners (Kontautienė, 2006, 2010).

The Dictionary of Modern Lithuanian Language (1993) defines "cooperation" as a joint work acting together, concentrating intellectual capacities, helping each other and joining forces. The scientists' community has to acknowledge that we can hardly find a common, universal cooperation model that would be suitable for various social welfare areas; the activities of communities of educational and upbringing institutions is not an exception. Moreover, communities of these institutions encounter with substantial challenges, complicated social and educational problems because learners' experience becomes increasingly intense and diverse, it happens to work with children from single parent families or from families who went abroad, with children who are inclined to commit a crime, poor achievers. A big share of responsibility for children's welfare falls on educators, who would find it difficult to provide quality support and ensure children's welfare on their own, without the assistance and collaboration with families, school and other institutions (Dobranskienė, 2002; Ališauskienė & Miltenienė, 2003; Merfeldaitė, 2007, 2009a; Anafara & Mertens, 2008; Kontautienė, 2010). Collegial cooperation enables decision making, sharing responsibilities between the participants of the educational process and search for new solutions.

Important national documents on education development provide for the development and cooperation of educational and upbringing institutions, cooperation, constant exchanges of opinions among specialists, groups of the society and input in common educational aims, organisation and implementation of socio-educational initiatives, thus creating possibilities for a young person to become independent, responsible and creating (Law on Education of the Republic of Lithuania[1], 2011, State Education Strategy for 2013–2022).

Lithuania's Progress Strategy "Lithuania 2030" speaks about the acknowledgement of social exclusion existing in the society, breaches of rights of its people, particularly children, it provides for the improvement of their life quality, social welfare and equal opportunities. Creation of an enterprising, creative, solidary and learning society is discussed in the strategy, additionally providing for social inclusion and participation of vulnerable groups of the society, particularly children. Child Wellbeing Programme for 2013–2018 provides for meeting the learner's interests and needs, creating conditions for the child to grow in the family, developing cooperation between institutions and specialists, availability of miscellaneous preventive and complex support and services in order to reduce social exclusion and ensure the quality of social education.

Referring to the aforementioned documents, it can be stated that seeking successful changes in the society, it is of utmost importance that changes in the main environment of personality education should be initiated: the family, the system of education, community, public and cultural space. On the other hand, according to Vaitkevičius (1995), Juodaitytė (2002), Randolph, Teasley, & Arrington (2006), Gerulaitis (2007), Anafara, & Mertens (2008), Aramavičiūtė (2009), Ratcliff & Hunt (2009), the family cannot cover all life areas and problems arising in them. Therefore, the necessity is underlined that the family should cooperate with other public institutions, in the first place, of course, *the school,* which in turn addresses many other educational institutions, voluntary services, cultural institutions for support. The authors disclose the functions of these educational institutions, their activity forms, the importance for personality development and socialisation. *Systemic-structural* perception of social education factors is particularly important as it distinguishes the functions and interrelations of participants of the educational process, acting in various educational and upbringing institutions, social support institutions, laying foundations for an integral system of actions. This integral system of factors of social education must encompass the system of various educational institutions, distinguish their interrelationships, procedural-historical collaboration of the participants of the educational process, the very learner's self-education and this way lay the foundations for an integral system of factors of education and support (Vaitkevičius, 1995; Bitinas, 2000).

According to the authors Butkienė & Kepalaitė (1996), Teresevičienė & Gedvilienė (2000), Ališauskienė (2005), cooperation encompasses the pursuit of a common aim, which presupposes interaction, cooperation between the participants of the educational process and coordination of joint actions, requiring mutual respect and trust. The authors acknowledge that no universal model of cooperation, social and educational support provision, which could function in any educational environment, exists and it can hardly exist. It is a multidimensional process, containing many interacting ecological factors: peculiarities of personalities (learners', parents', educators'), social and cultural context of the educational environment.

How do parents and educators perceive and evaluate the importance of cooperation between the participants of the educational process, their abilities and efforts? What cooperation successes and hindrances do they envisage? Namely these questions define the problematic space of the presented study.

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1 Lietuvos Respublikos švietimo įstatymo pakeitimo įstatymas (2011).

Research aim: to analyse social educators' and parents' cooperation possibilities at school, to disclose the factors promoting and hindering this process.

Research subject: social educators' and parents' cooperation possibilities at school, factors promoting and hindering them: the dimension of educators' and parents' opinion.

Research methodology and sample. To disclose educators' and parents' opinion qualitative and quantitative research approaches were chosen. The quantitative study was attended by 176 school educators of different age and gender. The study was conducted employing a closed type questionnaire, compiled on the basis of the researches and practical experience of Kontautienė (2010), Merfeldaitė (2009a; 2009b), Vaitkevičius (1995). It was sought to disclose the respondents' efforts and abilities to cooperate. Using *Likert* type scale, the respondents had to rate the statements according to the intensity of the opinion ranging from *certainly yes* to *certainly no*. To check the empirical data the SPSS 17 version was used, descriptive statistics (unitary, percentage frequency, mean, standard deviation) and statistical analysis Student t criterion ($t \leq 0,095$) were employed. In order to evaluate internal reliability of the questionnaire, *Cronbach α* indicator was used (internal consistency measure – α coefficient); it is treated as sufficient when it exceeds 0,75 digital representation.

Qualitative data collection method (semi structured *interview* method) was used to find out parents' (N=15) attitude. *Interview* questions were prepared on the basis of the aforementioned scientists' researches related to the explored problem, disclosing the essence of cooperation, its significance, hindrances and success factors of this process. Qualitative research data were analysed employing the qualitative content analysis method. Qualitative research data were validated on the basis of education expert's conclusions. The results of the qualitative study were distributed into diagnostic areas and categories.

Analysis of Social Educator's and Parents' Cooperation Possibilities

To find out parents' and educators' cooperation possibilities in various activity areas, the respondents were given statements, disclosing joint activity and activeness areas of educational process participants (pupils' self-education, achievements, behaviour, drug usage, inappropriate behaviour prevention, informal education, etc.). Analysing the research data on cooperation in various activity areas, internal reliability indicator *Cronbach's alpha* of the questionnaire (internal consistency measure $α=0,860$) was established, enabling to state about the reliability of the questionnaire.

Table 1. Educators' Cooperation in Various Activity Areas

Cooperation in various activity areas	Age	Number (N)	Mean (M)	Standard deviation, mean (SD)	$t \leq 0,095$
Analysing self-education and achievements	up to 35	79	2,87	0,344	**0,020**
	from 36	97	2,58	0,714	
Solving risk group pupils' problems	up to 35	79	1,25	0,438	**0,028**
	from 36	97	1,30	0,460	
Analysing the situation of pupils receiving social and material support	up to 35	79	2,74	0,689	**0,050**
	from 36	97	2,41	0,914	
Analysing pupils' inappropriate behaviour	up to 35	79	1,34	0,477	**0,028**
	from 36	97	1,20	0,399	
Participation preparing preventive programmes	up to 35	79	1,59	0,494	0,294
	from 36	97	1,52	0,502	

Cooperation in various activity areas	Age	Number (N)	Mean (M)	Standard deviation, mean (SD)	t ≤ 0,095
Problems of using psychotropic substances	up to 35	79	1,23	0,422	**0,042**
	from 36	97	1,11	0,319	
In informal education	up to 35	79	1,14	0,348	0,519
	from 36	97	1,18	0,382	
Organisation and participation in festive events (exhibitions, concerts, competitions, working bees, support and charity actions, etc.)	up to 35	79	1,25	0,438	0,337
	from 36	97	1,32	0,469	
Pupils' involvement in school events	up to 35	79	2,74	0,689	**0,050**
	from 36	97	2,41	0,914	
Organisation and conducting of school educators' and parents' meetings	up to 35	79	2,74	0,689	**0,051**
	from 36	97	2,41	0,914	

Educators, parents and other participants of the educational process cooperate solving various problems related to (self-) education and social support. At this stage of the survey it was sought to analyse in which areas of the educational process the respondents cooperated the most and in which areas more activeness and cooperation should be sought. Various areas of cooperation were distinguished in the study. Analysing the data, it was found that according to educators, cooperation with parents had to take place analysing children's self-education and achievements $(t \leq 0,020)$, solving risk group pupils' problems, analysing inappropriate behaviour $(t \leq 0,028)$, $(t \leq 0,002)$, analysing the situation of pupils receiving social and material support, involving pupils in school events $(t \leq 0,050)$ and organising, conducting educator's and parents' meetings $(t \leq 0,051)$. The research data show that learners' achievements, behaviour, drug usage, material wellbeing (especially of children from risk families) are those problematic activity areas, successful solution of which require joint parents', children's and educators' efforts. Respondents see meaningfulness of cooperation in ensuring family wellbeing, parents' participation at the meetings $(t \leq 0,051)$, pupils' involvement in school events $(t \leq 0,050)$. Statistically reliable data were obtained in these activity areas.

Senior and junior age educators maintain that it is important to cooperate in the areas of project preparation, informal education, and organisation of joint events with parents, development of social abilities, school truancy, adaptation, meeting special needs or even in-service development. Although in these areas of cooperation no statistically reliable data were obtained, the results show the tendencies of possible development of these areas, encouraging versatile school-family cooperation.

The areas of educator-family cooperation that manifested themselves in the study are also provided for in the most important documents regulating social educators' activities *(Social Educator's Job Description (2001), Social Educator's Qualification Requirements (2001), Regulations of Provision of Social Pedagogical Support (2011).*

The study aimed to analyse both educators' and parents' opinion about cooperation development possibilities in school communities. For this purpose a qualitative in-depth study was conducted: a semi-structured interview, involving the analysis of cooperation success cases, promoting and hindering factors. The research data were processed employing the content analysis method according to the foreseen diagnostic areas. Parents were asked to

express their opinion about the factors, which in their opinion, were promoting or enabling successful cooperation between the participants of the educational process. Parents' statements enabled to distinguish the following factors grouped into categories (see Table 2).

Table 2. Factors Promoting Cooperation (N=15)

Category	Examples of statements	Number
Personal features	*Mutual respect and understanding; *sincerity, communicativeness, goodwillingness, flexibility, ability to control emotions, sensitivity to other people's experiences and needs; *sincere and open conversation with teachers, social educator, at the same time to promote the child to be sincere; * goodwillingness, tolerance, understanding, carefulness; *first I think there should be trust, search and finding a unanimous opinion; * goodwillingness, openness, trust, professionalism; *empathy, concern with the child, with the problems of the institution, with respect for others, respect of their opinion;*parents' and teachers' goodwillingness; *understanding that close teacher-parent cooperation can solve the formed situation;	9
Ability to work together	*cooperation with a class tutor, social educator, psychologist (if necessary); *if one wants to achieve successful cooperation, mutual devotion is required (from parents, teachers, social educator, special educator), sparing both time and money, to discuss with teachers more often and share information;*close cooperation with subject teachers and parents; *operative reacting to problems, their solution.	4
Timely submission of information	*timely information, measures directed against negative factors, helping both pupils and parents; *the school provides parents with necessary information, organises open lessons, involves parents in solution of school problems. Informs parents about arisen problems immediately and not after a week;*timely information helps to solve various problems faster.	3
Positive attitude to children	*communication with subject teachers should be based on the approach that all children are gifted and teaching is adjusted to children's needs. A disorder can also be a feature of a normal child. It is important to get rid of negative attitude to exceptional pupils, respect a pupil; *the teacher should adjust to any pupils and any abilities of theirs; *teachers should understandingly accept and tolerate pupils whose abilities are worse or limited;	3

The research data show that parents treat specialists' personal features as the main factor promoting the cooperation with educators. Parents are of the opinion that cooperating with a mature personality, successful resolution of social and educational problems can be expected. Informants attribute respect, sincerity, empathy, understanding, care, goodwillingness and positive attitude towards learners to the features of the educator's mature personality. Parents' opinion apparently shows that not only subject knowledge and competency are important in the interaction of participants of the educational process but also the maturity of the personality, positive self-evaluation and positive evaluation of the child (Maslow, 2006, 2011; Rogers,

2005). In the interaction "person-person" (not "person-machine"), the features and maturity of the specialist's personality become important. Parents find it easier to address a teacher, who is frank, tolerant and not blaming, not diminishing learners' abilities, a teacher who is good willing, envisages advantages, and respects children and parents, hoping for positive cooperation and support.

The research results demonstrate that solving social and educational problems of learners and families, parents think that it is important that the social educator should work together with other professionals (a psychologist, special educator, subject teachers, class tutors), sharing important information and informing in a timely manner. According to parents, the factor promoting positive cooperation is involvement of families in school life is the organisation of open lessons, after-school activities and meetings. Then parents will feel not only as creators of material welfare of school community, "fire-fighters" of arisen problems but also tantamount members of the community, equal participants searching for the way out, who are able to get involved into this process as tantamount members of the social education process.

Table 3. Factors Hindering Cooperation (N=15)

Category	Examples of statements	Number
Personality features	*unwillingness to communicate and hear about the arisen problem. Dissociation from everything and hope that everything will settle by itself; *indifference to the pupil's education, wish to show off. Let the child be educated by school: my task is to feed and dress the child (parents' opinion); *uncontrolled emotions, lack of good-willingness; *indifference, intolerance, non-understanding; *I think, one of the key factors is unwillingness to cooperate; *unwillingness to find the way of solving the problem; subject teachers and pupils should learn to tolerate new, unique and maybe sometimes strange ideas. While communicating one shouldn't impose his/her opinion, moralise, and if necessary should sometimes explain, allowing the pupil to judge himself/herself; *unconcern, disinterest in the problems of the child, institution, disrespect of other persons;	9
Absence of parents/ parents abroad	*parents are abroad; *leaving to live abroad;*parents' frequent visits abroad; *due to work abroad children live with relatives;	4
Lack of competencies	*when parents or teachers have the only undisputed truth, in case of conflict or problem, no compromise is searched for; *lack of information, non-operative information; *sometimes there is a lack of information about arising problems, it is difficult to coordinate time with teachers; *teachers lack elementary communication and cooperation culture;	4
Teachers' attitudes	*teachers' attitudes (3); *negative and contradictory opinions with regard to the child;	4

The research data analysis demonstrates that the main factor hindering cooperation, according to parents, is again not the teacher's subject-based and professional competencies but personality features. Parents envisaged that educators working in schools are educated, they are university graduates but, according to parents, they lack personality maturation. In parents' opinion, a mature person can much more successfully help to solve social and educational problems arising in families and, on the contrary, an immature teacher does not ensure the success of the support provision process. Informants attribute indifference, lack of

good willingness and tolerance, disrespect, moralising, imposing one's opinion, unconcern, disinterest in children, unwillingness to cooperate, in many cases formation of preconception about children to lack of maturity.

In parents' opinion, pupils not always can trust educators; teachers' opinion is often categorical, one-sided, not attempting to understand children's needs. According to parents, successful cooperation is hindered by teachers' big workload and fatigue; constant attempt to adjust to changing working conditions causes permanent tension, fatigue. Parents' frequent visits and work abroad, when children are left to live with grandparents or other relatives, can also be a factor hindering cooperation.

A small share of informants indicated that, in their opinion, there are no factors hindering cooperation; they stated: "I would think that there are no such factors because all services and teachers are working for the sake of the child", "there is only a lack of wish and efforts seeking cooperation, even if you work abroad, you can find ways how to take interest: there is Skype, e-mail, etc.".

Generalisations

- Analysing qualitative research data, key cooperation areas of participants of the educational process manifested themselves. Statistically reliable data show that teachers think that the cooperation with parents should take place while analysing children's self-education and achievements ($t \leq 0,020$), solving risk group pupils' problems ($t \leq 0,028$), analysing inappropriate behaviour ($t \leq 0,002$), situation of pupils receiving social and material support ($t \leq 0,050$), involving pupils in school events and organising parents' meetings. Cooperation is equally important seeking good academic achievements, appropriate behaviour, drug usage prevention, parents' and pupils' involvement in school community life.

- The analysis of the qualitative study enables to state that parents think that the most important factor promoting cooperation with educators is educators' personal features, to which parents attribute respect, sincerity, empathy, understanding, care, goodwillingness and positive attitude to learners. Cooperating with the mature personality, successful resolution of social and educational problems can be expected. Data analysis shows that not only subject knowledge and competency are important in the interaction of educational process participants but also the maturity of the personality, positive self-evaluation and positive child's evaluation. The social educator's work together with other professionals of the child's welfare (a psychologist, special educator, subject teachers, class tutors) and parents' involvement in school life (organisation of open lessons, after-school activities, meetings) should also be treated as an important factor promoting cooperation.

- Research data analysis demonstrates that the main factor hindering cooperation, according to parents, is not the teacher's subject-based and professional competencies but personality features. Teachers working in schools are educated, they are university graduates but according to parents, they lack personality maturation to which they attribute indifference to the problems of children and community, lack of goodwillingness and tolerance, disrespect, moralising, imposing one's opinion, unconcern, unwillingness to cooperate, often formation of preconception about children.

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Cooperation is a multidimensional process, containing many interacting ecological factors: peculiarities of personalities (learners', parents', educators'), social and cultural context of the educational environment.

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Analysing qualitative research data, key cooperation areas of participants of the educational process manifested themselves. Statistically reliable data show that teachers think that the cooperation with parents should take place while analyzing children's self-education and achievements ($t \leq 0,020$), solving risk group pupils' problems ($t \leq 0,028$), analyzing inappropriate behavior ($t \leq 0,002$), situation of pupils receiving social and material support ($t \leq 0,050$), involving pupils in school events and organizing parents' meetings. Cooperation is equally important seeking good academic achievements, appropriate behavior, drug usage prevention, parents' and pupils' involvement in school community life.

The analysis of the qualitative study enables to state that parents think that the most important factor promoting cooperation with educators is educators' personal features, to which parents attribute respect, sincerity, empathy, understanding, care, goodwillingness and positive attitude to learners. Cooperating with the mature personality, successful resolution of social and educational problems can be expected. Data analysis shows that not only subject knowledge and competency are important in the interaction of educational process participants but also the maturity of the personality, positive self-evaluation and positive child's evaluation. The social educator's work together with other professionals of the child's welfare (a psychologist, special educator, subject teachers, class tutors) and parents' involvement in school life (organization of open lessons, after-school activities, meetings) should also be treated as an important factor promoting cooperation.

Research data analysis demonstrates that the main factor hindering cooperation, according to parents, is not the teacher's subject-based and professional competencies but personality features. Teachers working in schools are educated, they are university graduates but according to parents, they lack personality maturation to which they attribute indifference to problems of children and community, lack of good willingness and tolerance, disrespect, moralizing, imposing one's opinion, unconcern, unwillingness to cooperate, and often the formation of preconception about children

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