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How teachers and parents see each other in their mutual »co-operation«

Abstract: In this paper, various models of teacher-parent relationships are presented: ranging from those that are playing down the involvement and active role of parents to those emphasizing it. The prevailing approach to establishing teacher-parent relationships in a particular school depends also on the dominating teaching culture of the school in question and on the prevailing educational beliefs and attitudes of the teachers. Additionally, the quality of co-operation depends on teachers' knowledge and skills, as well as on parents' experience, expectations and attitudes. In this paper we focus on parents' views of teachers and teachers' views of parents. Only when they see each other as competent persons can they accept each other as partners in mutual educational and problem-solving activities. The results acquired through polling a representative sample of teachers and parents show that this is not always the case, as only half of the parents view teachers as education experts, while the vast majority of teachers only partly agree with the statement that »parents today know how to be parents«.

Key words: beliefs and orientations, attitudes, the role of teachers, the role of parents, models of mutual co-operation, partner relationship, teaching culture

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Introduction

Good mutual co-operation between teachers and parents significantly contributes to providing children with an optimal education. This statement is supported by numerous research projects (Hornby 2000, Olsen and Fuller 2003, Pomerantz et al. 2007). Its effects are manifested not only at the level of pupils and their learning achievements, but also at the level of teachers and parents, for example as increased satisfaction with their work, in better family relations, etc. The nature and scope of these effects obviously depends on the level and quality of mutual co-operation. From the view point of individual schools, as well as the teachers themselves, the immediate questions are: to what extent do they succeed in actively involving as many parents as possible, what foundations for mutual co-operation have they set and how good their relations with parents are.

To guarantee quality co-operation between the school and home it is important for each particular school to form a common vision on this co-operation. Established forms of co-operation are not enough; teachers and school head staff have to embrace quality co-operation with parents as one of their major goals, since it is only through such co-operation that new and more efficient forms of such co-operation can be developed. In a certain sense, the next precondition is that teachers co-operate between themselves, as it is hard to believe that teachers, who enclose themselves within the »walls« of their subject domain, will be open towards parents as their partners. Links between subjects and team co-operation is a weak point of many teachers as is evident from recent research projects concerning teachers' competence performed in the past few years (Razdevšek Pučko 2004; Peklaj, Puklek Levpušček 2006). Typical models of mutual relationships and groupings form a characteristic teaching culture, which significantly influences the teachers' entire activities and their professional development (Hargreaves, 1992). According to Hargreaves (1992) one of the following four forms of teaching culture can be established in a particular school:

1. *Individualized teaching culture* (individualism) is found at those schools where teachers work independently and are isolated from each other;

2. *Balkanized teaching culture* (balkanization)¹ is found when teachers belong to various groups and subgroups (for example class teachers, teachers of a particular subject, teachers of children with special needs, etc.) which are separate from or even oppose each other. In such a mode, teachers express their belonging only to specific groups while being indifferent or even intolerant to or competing with other groups;
3. *Participational teaching culture* (co-operation) is found at schools where teachers work together, share ideas, teaching and work aids, where they are interrelated and considered as members of the same working community. The existence of such a model is based on teachers' daily work where they support each other, but at the same time do not fear to express their disagreement. Furthermore, warm interpersonal relationships are characteristic of this model. However, such an atmosphere is hard to achieve and even harder to maintain;
4. *Challenged (planned) co-operation*, which does not appear spontaneously, rather it is introduced as an administrative measure to improve participational culture among teachers: exchange of experience, common learning, mutual support in professional and personal growth, etc. This type of co-operation is particularly suitable in the initial period of systematic development of teacher co-operation, where it is important to focus on providing opportunities for common work and learning, since the excessive administrative burden and control may even lead to opposite effects and teachers' resistance.

Hargreaves (1992) arrived at the above-mentioned forms of teaching cultures by comparing several research studies and through numerous discussions with teachers on both sides of the Atlantic. It is necessary to bear in mind that the formation of school culture is a dynamic process and it may be called into question whether such »pure« forms exist in reality. By all means, the above-mentioned classification can serve as a good model for analysing the existing culture at a particular school and for further planning of efficient co-operation between school professional staff. We actually have to bear in mind that through a typical form of teaching culture the contents of the teaching culture, such as its norms, values, beliefs and characteristic ways of acting are reproduced and transformed. Hargreaves (1992, p. 232) maintains that this is why understanding major forms of teaching culture helps to better understand the dynamics of educational changes or their absence, »why teachers do or do not persist in using 'traditional' teaching styles, why teachers support or resist innovation, and so on«.

In reality, the prevailing school atmosphere contributes to a great extent to which model of forming relations with parents the majority of teachers in a par-

¹ The author's designation has been used. The expression initially described the disintegration and fragmentation of the Ottoman empire, while today in English-speaking countries it is also used to describe other types of disintegration, such as the disintegration of a group into smaller groups, which may compete and even be hostile towards each other; the expression is no longer bound to its original geographical area (Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary). It is in this sense that the term 'balkanization' was used by the author and is used in this paper in the same sense.

ticular school are inclined to. Namely Sahlberg (1998) sees teachers' beliefs and their formed mental educational models² as core elements of each organization, while being aware that changing these structures is one of the most difficult tasks. He sees the solution in communication and co-operation. It is essential to ensure inflow and flow of quality information, available to all participants in the education process. It is therefore necessary to reorganize the school structure as to provide more opportunities and time for various participational forms, to achieve school openness and to develop an information system. In such circumstances teachers have the opportunity to reflect upon their beliefs, to get insight into school activity in terms of its system and their position in it, to share experience and change their own behaviour, to receive support from colleagues and to form a common vision.

After all, the quality of co-operation among teachers, as well as their co-operation with pupils and parents always depends on individual teachers' beliefs, knowledge and skills.

Orientation of teachers and the role which they are willing to assume towards parents

Appropriate teachers' attitudes and their readiness to co-operate with parents are of key importance if the co-operation is to succeed. Hornby (2000) points out two *key teachers' orientations* which are necessary for the development of *partnership* with parents:

For the teachers to be able to develop a partnership with parents it is of key importance to have *genuine, respectful and empathetic* interpersonal communication with them.

Only teachers with a certain amount of self-confidence manage to be genuine, since this enables them to be frank and capable of admitting their mistakes instead of unnecessarily hiding behind their wall of competence. Respectfulness means, among other things, that teachers always listen to and heed parents' opinions, since it is the parents who are responsible for their child's development in the long run and they know the child from perspectives which may be unknown and hidden to the teachers. Yet it is most important for teachers to develop their own empathic skills, to try and see the child's situation from the parents' perspective, as this will most probably lead to an effective teacher-parent partnership.

1. The second necessary teacher's attitude refers to the pupil – the teacher is expected to assume a hoping yet realistic attitude regarding possible progress and the pupil's prognosis.

Parents need teachers who are optimistic, but still realistic about the de-

² Mental models of education represent a system of notions concerning teaching and learning, the learning process, teacher and pupil roles, division of tasks and responsibilities, education in general, etc. (see also Vermunt 1993).

velopment of their child, and do not avoid an open and sincere conversation. They only need to conduct such conversation with a certain degree of sensibility. They should also challenge their own opinions of certain cases »as hopeless«, as in every situation it is possible to achieve certain progress, even if all of the problems are not solved or all goals are not reached.

Teachers may assume very diverse attitudes towards parents, ranging from seeing them as a problem, as competitors, as too vulnerable and needing help, through the belief that a professional distance has to be kept towards parents, and finally to the opinion that they can provide a valued support in educating their children and act as good collaborators. The key factor for fruitful co-operation is whether the teacher can engage in dialogue with parents on an equal basis and see them as partners in mutual educational activities and problem solving. Or, on the other hand, the teacher may place them in an inferior position, where parents mainly have to be taught, or in a superior role where teachers feel they need to apologize and justify their actions. In establishing and maintaining equal roles or a partnership between teachers and parents, it is worth keeping in mind that both teachers and parents are experts, namely teachers for education and parents for their children. It is only possible to creatively co-operate if their powers and competence are recognized and taken into account (O'Callaghan 1993 quoted in Čačinovič-Vogrinčič 1999). We often underestimate the importance of information which parents can reveal to us about their children, while on the other hand we as teachers can disclose parents how their child performs in school environment not only at the cognitive but also at the emotional and social level. In addition, teachers should be competent in creating an optimal and encouraging learning environment which eases and encourages the learning process. Views of both groups can of course be subjective due to the position from which they enter a relationship. Parents are, as can be expected, usually »advocates« for their own children (Henry 1996 in Čačinovič-Vogrinčič 1999), they are emotionally bound to them and have difficulty in accepting certain »truths« about their child. Neither are teachers as independent in their own views as it would seem at the first sight, as they are a part of the system which poses its own demands and value criteria which can also limit the teacher's perspectives (for example their image of a »good, obedient pupil«). If parents and teachers manage to trust and be frank to each other, they both see pupils, each other and their problems in a more realistic perspective, which contributes to their more efficient co-operation.

Two extremes of parent-teacher relationships are pointed out above: on the one hand there is a relationship with the necessary submission of one party – usually parents, and sometimes also teachers, and on the other hand a partnership. *Approaches to establishing relationships between teachers and parents* can be differentiated and classified from those which downplay the involvement and active role of parents to those which emphasize it. Hornby (2000) lists the following models of establishing teacher-parent relationships, defined by varied sets of assumptions, goals and strategies:

1. In the *protective model* (Swap 1993, quoted in Hornby 2000) it is important to avoid conflicts between teachers and parents. This is best achieved

through total separation of teaching and parenting. Education is the school's and teachers' task, and parent involvement can be perceived as a disturbing interference. It is the parents' task to ensure children come to school regularly with all necessary school accessories. Swap (1993 quoted in Hornby 2000) considers this to be the most common model of teacher-parent relationship.

2. In the *expert model* (Cunningham, Davis 1985, quoted in Hornby 2000) teachers consider themselves as experts in all aspects of development and education of children. The role of parents is to accept information and instructions regarding their children and they are pushed into a completely submissive role and dependence. Parents are not supposed to question teacher's decisions and thus lose confidence in their own competence, while at the same time teachers with such an attitude are not admitted to the rich source of information which parents have of their children and often overlook important problems or abilities of pupils. They also do not have any insight into the child's family life which can significantly influence their learning. Parents are usually very dissatisfied with the attitude of such teachers.
3. In the *transmission model* (Swap 1993, quoted in Hornby 2000) teachers still consider themselves as the major source of expertise, but they accept that parents can play an important role in enhancing their child's progress. They present particular measures to parents and expect them to carry them out. In this way they may even overburden some parents.
4. In the *curricular enrichment model* (Swap 1993, quoted in Hornby 2000) parents' contribution can enrich the curriculum and thus significantly enhance a school's educational goals. Lately, the focus has been placed on multicultural education, where parents of various ethnical, religious and cultural groups assist in presenting the history, values, cultures and customs of the group from which they originate. But parents' contribution is not restricted to the area of multiculturalism. It is a good opportunity for teachers and parents to learn from each other. The problem is that parents thus enter the area of teaching and many teachers find this threatening.
5. In the *consumer model* (Cunningham, Davis 1985, quoted in Hornby 2000), parents have control over decisions. The teachers' role is to present all relevant information and available possibilities to parents and help them choose the optimal course of action. This eliminates the fear that parents are pushed into a dependent role, but the fact that teachers lose their professional responsibility is problematic in the same way as the opposite situation where teachers are seen as experts on all aspects of a child's development.
6. The most suitable model of teacher-parent co-operation is the *partnership model*, as it includes sharing of expertise and control with the view of ensuring optimal education for children, to which both teachers and parents contribute. Naturally it is not possible to establish such partnership if there is no mutual respect between teachers and parents. Teachers and parents

should listen to and take each other's opinions into account. A partnership occurs when there is mutual planning and sharing of responsibilities as well as a certain long-lasting involvement and carrying out of particular activities. Hornby (2000) points out 4 key elements of such partnership:

- Two-way communication,
- Mutual support,
- Common decision-making,
- Encouraging learning.

The *partnership model* is perceived as the most suitable model for developing constructive parent involvement, as teachers also take parents' needs into account and are aware of various manners in which parents can contribute to the development and education of their children. However, this does not mean that this model is the most suitable for all situations. It is important to be flexible and to adapt the approach to parents' characteristics. In a particular moment some parents will welcome a detailed presentation of home reading scheme as an aid to help the child in acquiring specific reading skills, while in other cases parents will make the best choice of a theme to be dealt with in »the school for parents«.

Hornby (2000) points out that everywhere in the world parents have more or less the same expectations towards teachers and teachers towards parents, but this has to be clarified again and again at the beginning of the co-operation, as both groups are usually genuinely surprised at the other's expectations. Many complementary features can be found among them, but there are also differences. Let me name some typical parents' expectations. They expect teachers to:

- Consult them to a greater extent and to listen to their views,
- Be more open to opinions and standpoints of others,
- Be willing to admit that there are things they do not know,
- Get in contact with parents if they suspect their child has a problem,
- Treat all children with respect,
- Take into account individual differences among pupils,
- Identify children's learning problems and to try to help them,
- Discuss pupil's progress with other teachers and parents,
- Regularly correct assignments given to pupils.
- ...

Apart from this we have to constantly bear in mind that parents are a very heterogeneous group of individuals and that we can address all parents and approach everybody's needs with some actions and ways of co-operation, while fewer parents may be approached with certain other actions, and only a handful of parents with other ways of co-operation. Parents' contribution will also differ. All or a vast majority will probably be happy to attend a performance where their child participates. Some will embrace the possibility to communicate via e-mail, while others do not use e-mail and will be most satisfied if teachers are able to propose a date for the parent-teacher meeting which suits them, while the attention of the third group of parents will be gained only by numerous

messages sent to their home and which should never contain only negative information. Some parents may never respond, due to various reasons. The more varied forms of co-operation and involvement we offer parents, the greater the chance to attract them in a greater number. It is important to keep in mind that teachers are susceptible to both objective and subjective obstacles which can prevent parents from getting more actively involved, and endeavour to remove them.

Necessary knowledge and skills of teachers

It is obvious that the more teachers try to intensify parents' involvement and establish a partnership, the more knowledge and skills of interpersonal co-operation they will require. Hornby (2000) stresses the importance of understanding the parents' view that teachers have to be aware of family dynamics and see the child in the family context, and should know how to help parents and pupils tackle various problems (how to handle specific pupils' deficiencies, how to help when their parents are getting divorced or when they come from a particular ethnical group, when parents are extraordinarily »difficult«, etc.). To be able to use this knowledge properly, teachers have to have certain *participational, communicational and organisational skills*³. Hornby (2000) points out the following:

- Mastering basic listening and counselling skills,
- Assertive communication skills,
- Organisational and communicational skills for maintaining contacts with parents (meetings, electronic messages, telephone calls, etc.),
- Skills for involving parents in educational programmes of their children (in organizing learning, in adjusting learning, encouraging motivation, building self-respect, etc.),
- Leadership skills, so that various parent group meetings can be organized.

To be effective in fulfilling their tasks teachers have to have well developed basic interpersonal or communicational skills; it could even be said that they need to master basic counselling skills (Kottler and Kottler 2001). They need these skills when they interact with pupils, colleagues and school head staff and, of course, parents. If we bear in mind the educational process and class work, it is obvious that teachers need to know how to convey information well, how to pose good questions, how to listen, adjust class dynamics, maintain discipline and solve problems. Mastering listening skills, assertiveness and counselling is especially important when working with so-called difficult parents (Hornby 2000, Kottler and Kottler 2001): with parents who give no support to

³ You can read more about these skills, especially the skills of listening, assertiveness and counselling in »Izzivi in smernice kakovostnega sodelovanja med šolo in starši« (Kalin et al., soon to be published).

the teacher and his/her endeavours, who are not prepared to co-operate, who constantly complain, are hostile and threatening, who abuse their child, who have personal, partnership and family problems, who are vulnerable, who expect too much or too little from their children and those who come from a different social, cultural or ethnical environment.

We have to be aware that parents, too, come to school with set attitudes, orientations and expectations. Readiness of both groups to develop quality co-operation is essential. Teachers will much more easily adjust the process of mutual co-operation and nimbly look for new paths for more effective co-operation with all or at least most parents, if they also master basic co-operative, communicational and organizational skills. For the success of their work with children and parents they essentially need willingness to understand, help (Kottler and Kottler 2001) and trust that pupils and parents can find their own powers or can develop competence in solving their own problems (O'Callaghan 1993, Saleebey 1997 quoted in Čačinovič-Vogrincič 1999). Teachers are not all-powerful and pupils and parents should take their own share of responsibility for effective learning and mutual co-operation.

The purpose of the research

In the empirical research conducted as part of the project entitled »Vzvodi uspešnega sodelovanja med šolo in domom: sodobne rešitve in perspektive« – »Lever of successful co-operation between the school and the home: modern solutions and perspectives«, (Kalin et al. 2008), our main objective was to establish the goal of home-school co-operation from the teachers' and parents' perspectives, the expectations and experience of both groups, the original attitude towards co-operation and the limitations and possibilities for improvement. In this paper I primarily pose the question what are teachers like in parents' eyes and parents in teachers' eyes and then present findings related to the following research questions:

1. What do teachers themselves think of the view parents have of them?
2. How do parents view teachers – do they see them as experts for education or not? Who would parents believe if a problem occurred between their child and the teacher?
3. To what extent do teachers and parents agree that today parents know how to be parents, and that they need additional education in parenting and family education problems?
4. What is the role of teachers and parents in mutual consultations from the point of view of both groups?
5. To what extent do teachers and parents agree that teachers have to give concrete advice when a child faces problems and have to be ready to look for solutions together?
6. Do parents' and teachers' answers to the above-mentioned questions differ?
7. Do teachers' perceptions differ in relation to years of teaching, type of school and the triad which they teach?

8. Do parents' perceptions differ in relation to their achieved education, the level of the child's learning achievements, the triad or the type of school their child attends as well as their own school experience?

Method

We used a descriptive and causal-non-experimental method in the research. The basic population includes all primary schools in Slovenia (N = 448), which were further divided into two strongly expressed strata, namely urban (N = 237) and non-urban schools (N = 211). We randomly selected 20 urban and 20 non-urban primary schools from the abovementioned strata. We sent questionnaires on co-operation between school and home to all teachers of these schools. We also asked these schools to distribute a copy of the questionnaire to parents of 3rd, 6th and 9th grade pupils. Anonymity was guaranteed to both teachers and parents. By the end of 2007 we received 467 completed questionnaires from teachers and 1690 from parents. The questionnaires for both parents and teachers included, at the beginning, questions concerning respondents' basic data, while most of the following questions generally collected opinions and evaluations of mutual co-operation, their advantages and obstacles, etc. The questionnaire contents were identical in the most cases which enabled us to compare the answers. While multiple choice questions prevailed, there were 6 open-ended questions, and to assess the degree of agreement with particular statements the Likert-type scale of attitudes was used. In this paper only findings related to the above-mentioned research questions will be presented. The data was processed using the SPSS statistical package for Windows. The following statistical procedures were used: descriptive analysis of variables, χ^2 test or Kullback test⁴, when more than 20 % of theoretical frequencies were less than 5.

Results and interpretation

To establish trust and build positive teacher-parent relationships it is important that, among other things, both groups see each other as competent persons: parents should see teachers as education experts, while teachers should see parents as experts for the development and education of their own child. Only in this manner can both groups accept each other as partners in common educational activities and problem solving.

Do parents see teachers as experts?

We were interested to see what teachers themselves think of the view parents have of them. Do they, in their own opinion, figure in parents' view as

⁴ This calculation has been made using a designated application.

experts, having a good command of their professional work or the opposite – are they seen as not being sufficiently qualified for their professional work?

| What do you think is parents' view of yourself? | | |
|--|-----|-------|
| | F | f% |
| You are experts who know how to provide knowledge and to educate | 362 | 81.2 |
| You know how to present knowledge, but not how to educate | 37 | 8.3 |
| Other | 47 | 10.5 |
| Total | 446 | 100.0 |

Table 1: Teachers' opinions on how parents see them

The majority of teachers who responded (81.2 %) thought that parents see them as experts who know how to provide knowledge and to educate, while only 8.3% of teachers think that parents see them as people who know how to provide knowledge, but not how to educate. There is a high share of respondents who answered »Other« (10.5%), where teachers stated answers such »I don't know« and »I can't decide« etc.

In addition, we looked into the question whether teachers' perceptions of parents' opinions of them differ in relation to years of teaching, type of school and the triad which they teach. Only differences related to the triad proved to be statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 15.76$; $df = 4$, $p = 0.003$, $n = 433$). The largest difference occurs in answers of teachers in the first two triads and the third triad as some teachers of the third triad are more critical. Three quarters of them still think that parents see them as experts who know how to provide knowledge and educate, but the share of those (14.7 %) who estimate that parents see them as people who know how to provide knowledge, but not how to educate, increases. This may be the result of the fact that specialist subject teachers perceive themselves more as subject experts and view their own primary role as that of quality presenting the subject matter and leading pupils to quality knowledge and less as a general educator. This was apparent from one of the previous research projects where we discussed professional autonomy and responsibility of teachers (Marentič Požarnik et al., 2005).

As expected, parents were much more critical in their evaluation of teachers. Teachers were probably inclined to give the desired answers, since it is expected from them to both provide knowledge and educate, and as experts in

| What is your general opinion of teachers? | | |
|--|------|-------|
| | f | f% |
| They are experts who know how to provide knowledge and educate | 806 | 49.8 |
| They know how to provide knowledge, but not how to educate | 678 | 41.9 |
| They are not experts | 18 | 1.1 |
| Other | 115 | 7.1 |
| Total | 1617 | 100.0 |

Table 2: Parents' opinions about teachers

both they also want to be seen as such by parents. Parents' answers differed in a statistically significant degree from the teachers' answers ($\chi^2 = 1.849$; $df = 3$ $p = 0.000$, $n = 2063$).

Only half of parents (49.8 %) estimate that teachers are experts who know how to provide knowledge and educate. As many as 41.9 % of parents view that teachers know only how to present knowledge, but not how to educate. The category Other includes mostly responses from parents (7.1 %), that teachers differ a lot one from another and that such a judgment cannot be generalized to all teachers, since some are also excellent educators, while others do not get involved in education which consequently gives rise to the question whether they have chosen the right profession.

Parents' opinions about teachers show statistically significant difference in relation to their achieved education ($\chi^2 = 52.02$; $df = 6$, $p = 0.000$, $n = 1586$), their child's learning achievements ($\chi^2 = 25.59$; $df = 6$, $p = 0.000$, $n = 1603$) and the triad attended by their child ($\chi^2 = 34.23$; $df = 6$, $p = 0.000$, $n = 1608$), but not in relation to whether the child in question attends an urban or a non-urban school.

| | | | What is your general opinion of teachers? | | | | |
|--------------------|-----------------------|----|---|--|----------------------|-------|-------|
| | | | They are experts | They know how to provide knowledge, but not how to educate | They are not experts | Other | Total |
| Parents' education | PS +VS | F | 283 | 168 | 8 | 12 | 471 |
| | | f% | 60.1 | 35.7 | 1.7 | 2.5 | 100.0 |
| | SS | F | 319 | 331 | 9 | 54 | 713 |
| | | f% | 44.7 | 46.4 | 1.3 | 7.6 | 100.0 |
| | Coll.+Univ. and above | F | 193 | 161 | 1 | 47 | 402 |
| | | f% | 48.0 | 40.0 | 0.2 | 11.7 | 100.0 |
| | Total | F | 795 | 660 | 18 | 113 | 1586 |
| | | f% | 50.1 | 41.6 | 1.1 | 7.1 | 100.0 |

Table 3: Parents' opinions about teachers in relation to their education

Legend: PS = Primary school; VS = Vocational school; SS = Secondary school; Coll. = College; Univ. = University

From the table above it follows that parents with primary and vocational education form the majority (60.1 %) which consider that teachers are experts for providing knowledge and education, while parents with at least secondary or further education point out to an increasing degree that teachers are only experts for providing knowledge or that there are vast differences among them (category Other). For parents with the lowest education level, teachers in most cases still represent experts for providing knowledge and education, while pa-

rents with higher levels of education more often doubt the teacher's expertise and are much more critical in their opinion of teachers. Above all, parents with the highest levels of education most often additionally explain their opinions and point out that teachers are varied and that it is difficult to give a single opinion of all teachers.

Parents of pupils of the first triad where descriptive assessment of knowledge is used, most often think that teachers are experts for both providing knowledge and education (58.2 %). *Getting closer to the ninth grade the share of those who consider them only as providing knowledge experts increases* (46.6 % of parents of children in the ninth class), as very different from one to another (9.3 % of parents) or even that they are not experts at all (2 % of parents). If we compare this finding with teachers' opinion of how parents see them, some teachers of the third triad assess more critically that parents see them only as providing knowledge experts, and not as experts for education. In addition, our research showed that parents with less achieving pupils less often viewed teachers as experts for education (51.5 % of parents think so).

It is also sensible to pose the question whether parents differ in their perception of teachers in relation to their own school experience⁵. Here we established statistically significant differences ($\chi^2 = 25.48$; $df = 6$, $p = 0.000$, $n = 1615$). *The worse the parents' experience from their own school years, the more they are critical of teachers*: the share of those that think that teachers are not experts for education is higher (49.3 %), and some even responded that teachers are neither experts for providing knowledge nor education (4.3 %). *This group of parents is especially difficult to involve in co-operation, since they do not trust teachers due to their own negative experiences*. The share of parents with negative experiences is significantly higher among parents with the lowest educational level ($\chi^2 = 28.42$; $df = 4$, $p = 0.000$, $n = 1630$): 6.7 % of the least educated parents estimate so, whereas only 1.2 % of parents with highest levels of education admit that they do not wish to recall their schooling due to negative experience. Teachers should consider how to involve this albeit small group of parents in co-operation, since there will always be parents who, due to their negative experiences, would prefer to avoid school or would approach the teacher with more distrust than others.

Certainly, the question whether parents see teachers as experts, mastering their professional work, is closely connected to the question of *who would parents believe if a dispute occurred between the child and his/her teacher*. It becomes evident that the vast majority (91.2 %) of parents would believe their child, but it is important that they express their readiness to discuss the problem with the teacher. Parents who answered »other« (1.6 %) mainly explain that both sides have to be heard, that it is necessary to define the problem and solve it together. 6.2 % of parents would doubt their child's judgment and consult the teacher. It

⁵ Parents were asked about their experience from their time at school. They could choose one of three possible answers: 1 – I don't wish to remember that period, because my experience was so bad; 2 – I had both good and bad experience; 3 – I mostly had very good experience.

is useful to pose the question who these parents are and what experiences lead them to distrust their child. Slightly higher number of these parents are less educated or their children have lower learning achievements. Higher educated parents explain in a greater degree that it is necessary to hear both sides.

Further we were interested in whether parents' reactions to emerging problems differ in respect to whether they would be more inclined to believe their child or the teacher, and in relation to their own schooling experiences. The differences proved to be statistically significant ($2\hat{I} = 23.30$; $df = 6$, $p = 0.001$, $n = 1650$). Among parents who have had bad experiences with teachers at the time of their schooling there is a greater share (6 %) of those who would completely trust their own child and would not discuss the matter with the teacher at all, compared to those who had mixed or good experience with teachers at the time of their schooling, as there are almost no parents who would not discuss the issue with the teacher. *Teachers have to bear in mind that it will be more difficult to reach some parents and establish good co-operation with them because of their previous negative experiences with teachers.* Parents' previous negative experience with teachers affects their present view of those who teach their children.

Do parents know how to be parents?

In establishing a partnership it is important for parents to competently fulfil their role, believe in their own powers and also for teachers to attribute them this power (O'Callaghan, 1993, quoted from Čačinovič-Vogrinič, 1999). We asked parents and teachers to what extent they agree with the statement that parents know how to be parents today and in their answers to this question both groups show statistically significant differences ($\chi^2 = 2.24$; $df = 4$, $p = 0.000$, $n = 2062$).

| | | Parents today know how to be parents. | | | | | |
|----------|----|---------------------------------------|---------------|-------------------|---------|--------------------|-------|
| | | I absolutely disagree | I don't agree | I partially agree | I agree | I absolutely agree | Total |
| Parents | f | 20 | 76 | 651 | 663 | 198 | 1608 |
| | f% | 1.2 | 4.7 | 40.5 | 41.2 | 12.3 | 100.0 |
| Teachers | f | 4 | 52 | 329 | 67 | 2 | 454 |
| | f% | 0.9 | 11.5 | 72.5 | 14.8 | 0.4 | 100.0 |
| Total | f | 24 | 128 | 980 | 730 | 200 | 2062 |
| | f% | 1.2 | 6.2 | 47.5 | 35.4 | 9.7 | 100.0 |

Table 4: Presentation of parents' and teachers' attitudes towards the question whether parents today know how to be parents

More than half of parents (53.5 %) agree or absolutely agree with the statement that parents know how to be parents, while 40.5 % partially agree with the

statement and only a small percent of parents don't agree or don't agree at all (5.9%). Teachers are much more critical towards parents in responding to this question, as a mere 15.2 % of teachers agree with the statement, while 72.5 % of teachers partially agree and 12.4 % don't agree with the statement. *Teachers therefore doubt to a greater extent whether parents today can be parents – that they are experts in the area of their own child's development and education.* In their expression of doubt they do not show statistically important differences in relation to the time of teaching, or the triad and school where they teach. It is interesting to note that parents with higher education are much more critical towards themselves, as the share of parents partially agreeing with the statement grows with the increased level of their education (33.8 % to 46.2 % of the most educated parents), while the share of those who agree or absolutely agree with the statement (60.1 % to 46.7 % of the most educated parents) decreases. These differences among parents are statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 18.57$; $df = 8$, $p = 0.017$, $n = 1578$). Parents also differ in their views towards the statement in relation to whether their child attends an urban or non-urban school ($\chi^2 = 9.99$; $df = 4$, $p = 0.041$, $n = 1587$). Indeed, the share of parents of children attending an urban school who »don't agree« or »don't agree at all« that parents today know how to be parents is slightly larger (7.9 % : 4.8 %).

In relation to this we asked parents and teachers to what extent they agree with the statement that parents need to be additionally educated about parenting and problems of family education. In their response to this question both groups show statistically significant differences ($\chi^2 = 1.98$; $df = 4$, $p = 0.000$, $n = 2057$). A good third of parents (36.1 %) expressed that they agree with the statement that they need additional education on problems of family education, another good third of parents (35.3 %) partly agreed with it and less than a third of parents (28.6 %) expressed their disagreement. In contrast, as many as 65.1 % of teachers view that parents need additional family-related education, approximately one third (32.3 %) partially agrees and only 2.7 % of teachers do not agree. *Teachers are therefore inclined to view that parents need additional parenting-related education* and from their point of view planning of co-operation forms like »school for parents« enriches co-operation between the school and home. In their judgment teachers do not show statistically important differences in relation to the time of teaching, to the triad or the school where they teach. According to results *more than a third of parents will be responsive to such an offer*, while other parents are not convinced or have different expectations from the school. Again it shows that teachers can approach with such a proposal primarily parents with higher education. It is noteworthy that the highest share of parents of less achieving pupils (38.6 %) does not agree or does not agree at all with the statement that they need additional education on parenting and family education problems.

The results therefore show *that both groups express a degree of mutual doubt in the other's competence* and certainly it is difficult to build a partnership and fruitful co-operation on such grounds. It became clear that parents with higher education were more critical towards teachers and themselves, as well as

more inclined to undergo additional education on parenting and family education problems. Parents with lower education more often see teachers as experts for both providing knowledge and education. It is noteworthy that parents of less achieving pupils more often deny teachers their educational role while at the same time do not doubt their own role and are more often of the opinion that they do not need additional education related to parenting. These parents probably transpose responsibility for successful education of their child simply to the school and teachers, and these parents are, due to more frequent attitude that it is primarily school which is responsible for learning achievements, particularly hard to involve in more active co-operation. Besides, teachers have to pay special attention to parents who have negative experiences from the time of their schooling. Particular attitudes of both parents and teachers can therefore represent large obstacles on the road to a more fruitful co-operation between teachers and parents.

The attitudes which both groups assume influence the quality of mutual discussions.

What is the role of parents and teachers in mutual discussions?

Parents estimate teachers' competence of conducting parental meetings, consultations and co-operating with parents as good, as 55 % consider teachers to be quite well qualified, while as much as 40.3 % consider that they are excellently qualified. In this regard, teachers are more self critical as they less often consider themselves excellently qualified (9.7 %) and more often consider themselves to be quite well qualified (81.2 %). Let us now take a look at how both groups view a regular consultation meeting. In this perspective statistically significant differences appear among them ($\chi^2 = 1.49$; $df = 2$, $p = 0.000$, $n = 2057$).

| | | In what way do teachers usually conduct consultations with you? | | | |
|----------|----|---|--|------------------------|-------|
| | | They listen and take account of | They listen, but don't take account of | They suggest, I listen | Total |
| Parents | F | 1014 | 113 | 495 | 1622 |
| | F% | 62.5 | 7.0 | 30.5 | 100.0 |
| Teachers | F | 399 | 23 | 13 | 435 |
| | F% | 91.7 | 5.3 | 3.0 | 100.0 |
| Total | F | 1413 | 136 | 508 | 2057 |
| | F% | 68.7 | 6.6 | 24.7 | 100.0 |

Table 5: Consultation meeting from the teachers' and parents' perspective

Almost all teachers (91.7 %) believe that parents listen to them and take their opinions and suggestions into account. In reality they probably see themselves as counsellors who suggest certain expert solutions. Only 3 % of teachers put themselves in the role of listeners where mainly parents voice their opinions

and offer suggestions. *Most parents (62.5 %) still experience teachers as listeners who take their opinions and suggestions into account, whereas one third (30.5 %) think that only teachers give opinions and suggestions and it is them who listen, while 7 % of parents point out that teachers listen to but do not take account of them.*

As we have established, teachers are more or less of the same opinion and their answers do not differ depending on the time of teaching, the triad or the school where they teach. However, parents do differ in their views of how the consultation is carried out in relation to their achieved education ($\chi^2 = 15.67$; $df = 4$, $p = 0.003$, $n = 1591$), their child's learning achievements ($\chi^2 = 28.17$; $df = 4$, $p = 0.000$, $n = 1607$) and the class attended by the child ($\chi^2 = 24.76$; $df = 4$, $p = 0.000$, $n = 1613$), but not in relation to the type of school the child attends.

| | | In what way do teachers usually conduct consultations with you? | | | | |
|------------|-----------------------|---|--|------------------------|-------|-------|
| | | They listen and take account of | They listen, but don't take account of | They suggest, I listen | Total | |
| Education: | PS +VS | f | 299 | 25 | 140 | 464 |
| | | f% | 64.4 | 5.4 | 30.2 | 100.0 |
| | SS | f | 426 | 49 | 248 | 723 |
| | | f% | 58.9 | 6.8 | 34.3 | 100.0 |
| | Coll.+Univ. and above | f | 272 | 35 | 97 | 404 |
| | | f% | 67.3 | 8.7 | 24.0 | 100.0 |
| | Total | f | 997 | 109 | 485 | 1591 |
| | | f% | 62.7 | 6.9 | 30.5 | 100.0 |

Table 6: Parents' opinion of teacher's carrying out consultations as per education level achieved

In all groups parents who consider that teachers listen to and take account of their opinion and suggestions prevail, but this share is the smallest in the group of parents with secondary education (58.9 %). These parents believe to a greater degree than others that teachers primarily give opinions and suggestions while parents only listen (34.3 %). This answer is least present in the group of well educated parents (24 %) who, in comparison to others, most often point out that teachers listen, but do not take account of them (8.7 %). *Better educated parents are probably less ready to assume a subordinate role, where they would simply follow the teacher's opinions and suggestions.*

In the following text we will discuss parents' opinions on teachers' conducting of consultations per the child's learning achievements and class attended.

Most parents whose children attend the first triad where descriptive assessment of knowledge is used take the view that teachers listen to them and take their opinions into account (69 %). In contrast, some parents think it is mostly them who listen and teachers who suggest (27 %), while fewer of them think that teachers listen to them, but do not take them into account (4 %). *The number of parents who believe that teachers do not take them into account increases in each*

triad, while on the other hand the share of parents who estimate that teachers listen to them and take their opinions and suggestions into account decreases in correlation with the triad. It is probably in the first triad that the model of relations between teachers and parents is established to the greatest degree and where parents significantly contribute to their children’s education and enrich the curriculum (quoted from Hornby, 2000), since it seems that at the first level teachers are ready to accept parents as partners in the highest degree.

If we compare answers of parents per level of their child’s learning achievements, *parents of pupils with lower learning achievements predominantly see themselves in the role of receiving teachers’ advice (39.2 %)*. Parents of higher achieving pupils point out most often in comparison to others that teachers listen, but do not take account of them (9.2 %). In each next triad, parents are more and more pushed into a subordinate role, which the parents of less achieving pupils are more ready to accept.

In relation to analysis of carrying out consultations it is worth reviewing the expectations of both groups regarding their roles. Therefore we asked teachers and parents about their attitudes regarding offering specific teacher advice and looking for a mutual solution to an emerging problem.

Expectations of teachers and parents regarding teacher’s advising are quite unified, since both groups predominantly agree or absolutely agree (70.1 % of teachers and 74.7 % parents) that teachers have to offer concrete advice to overcome a child’s problem when they occur, while less than a quarter of both groups only partially agree. Respondents that did not agree were almost nonexistent (5 % of teachers and 3.3 % of parents).

| | | Teachers have to give concrete advice to overcome a child’s problems when they occur. | | | | | |
|----------|----|---|---------------|-------------------|---------|--------------------|-------|
| | | I absolutely disagree | I don’t agree | I partially agree | I agree | I absolutely agree | Total |
| Parents | F | 6 | 52 | 346 | 787 | 405 | 1596 |
| | F% | 0.4 | 3.3 | 21.7 | 49.3 | 25.4 | 100.0 |
| Teachers | F | 2 | 21 | 112 | 221 | 96 | 452 |
| | F% | 0.4 | 4.6 | 24.8 | 48.9 | 21.2 | 100.0 |
| Total | F | 8 | 73 | 458 | 1008 | 501 | 2048 |
| | F% | 0.4 | 3.6 | 22.4 | 49.2 | 24.5 | 100.0 |

Table 7: Shares of teachers’ and parents’ attitudes regarding teachers giving concrete advice in relation to a child’s problems

In expectations regarding teacher’s giving advice when children have problems, parents do not differ in a statistically significant degree regarding the learning achievement of their child, the class or the school he or she attends. We have noted the tendency that, together with the level of education, the share of those who partially agree with giving advice increases (from 19.5 % to 27.2 %), while the share of those who agree diminishes (from 75.7 % to 69.9 %).

Teachers show a statistically significant difference in their attitudes about giving advice depending on the triad which they teach ($2\hat{I} = 25.15$; $df = 8$, $p = 0.001$, $n = 437$): from one triad to the other, the share of those who agree increases only partially (from 14.8 % to 32.7 %) and shares of those who agree or absolutely agree (from 80.7 % to 60.6 %) diminish. It appears that teachers are more and more aware from one triad to the other that active involvement of all affected parties is necessary for effective problem-solving. But the question arises whether this awareness is also acted upon, as it contradicts the opinion of parents concerning teachers' performance during consultations. From one triad to the other the percentage of parents who estimate that they only listen to teachers or that teachers listen to them but do not take their opinions and suggestions into account, increases. In addition, the overwhelming majority of teachers and parents agree that in case of a child's troubles teachers have to give concrete advice to overcome such problems, which shows *that the prevailing relationship between teachers and parents places the teacher in a superior role of an expert in all aspects, and this is contrary to the attitude that teachers, in case of a child's troubles, have to be ready for mutual searching of solutions and problem solving, with which a great majority of teachers and parents agree.* In comparison to parents, significantly more teachers absolutely agree (59.3 % : 46 %), while there are fewer teachers who agree (38.3 % : 46.4 %) or agree partially (2 % : 6.4 %). These differences proved to be statistically significant ($2\hat{I} = 35.85$; $df = 4$, $p = 0.000$, $n = 2073$).

| | | When a child has a problem, teachers have to be ready to look for solutions together with involved parties. | | | | | |
|----------|----|---|---------------|-------------------|---------|--------------------|-------|
| | | I absolutely disagree | I don't agree | I partially agree | I agree | I absolutely agree | Total |
| Parents | F | 2 | 17 | 103 | 752 | 745 | 1619 |
| | F% | 0.1 | 1.1 | 6.4 | 46.4 | 46.0 | 100.0 |
| Teachers | F | 0 | 2 | 9 | 174 | 269 | 454 |
| | F% | 0.0 | 0.4 | 2.0 | 38.3 | 59.3 | 100.0 |
| Total | F | 2 | 19 | 112 | 926 | 1014 | 2073 |
| | F% | 0.1 | 0.9 | 5.4 | 44.7 | 48.9 | 100.0 |

Table 8: Shares of teachers' and parents' attitudes regarding teacher's readiness to look for solutions with other involved parties.

Teachers do not show statistically important differences in their attitude on mutual searching for solutions in relation to the time of teaching, to the triad or the school where they teach. Again it became obvious that especially parents with higher education expect mutual problem solving when their child has problems ($2\hat{I} = 21.76$; $df = 8$, $p = 0.005$, $n = 1590$). There is also a tendency that parents of less achieving pupils are to a smaller extent convinced that teachers have to be prepared to look for other solutions together with other involved parties when their child has problems.

In one of the previous research projects conducted in Slovenia by Kalin (2003) about expectations of grammar school students' parents it became evident that parents mostly expect teachers to understand their children, follow their work and help them in case of problems. The next highest ranking parents' expectation – expectation for the class teachers to co-operate with them and counsel them in case of troubles – follows. Thus parents expect teachers to correctly deal with the situation and only after this fails, to involve others if necessary. Teachers may be aware to a slightly larger extent that mutual problem-solving is more efficient. Most respondents (51.6 %) also point out that they would need additional training in the area of problem solving and conflicts when parents have to be included. Involving parents of less achieving pupils and less educated parents in co-operation and problem solving presents an especially difficult challenge for teachers.

Although most parents (62.5 %) estimate that teachers listen to them and take their opinions and suggestions into account, it seems that in our environment the expert and possibly the transmission models of teacher-parent relationships are still widely present (quoted from Hornby, 2000). This particularly applies to the second and the third triad. Teachers are supposed to be experts in all aspects of development and education of children and when a child has problems, teachers should give concrete advice to overcome such problems. Within the transmission model, parents assume a slightly more significant role in supporting teacher's endeavours and in carrying out teacher's measures; however, their role is still subordinate. Parents with higher education are particularly less willing to accept such a submissive role as others. But some teachers, probably based on previous experience, reach the conclusion that mutual problem-solving can be more effective.

Conclusions

It has become evident that teachers' and parents' views of the competence of each other and of conducting mutual discussion differ significantly. Doubt in each other's competence – when only half of parents (49.8 %) estimate that teachers are experts for providing knowledge and education, and the vast majority of teachers (72.5 %) only partly agrees with the statement that »today parents know how to be parents« – is not a good basis upon which to establish a partnership and quality co-operation of both groups.

Further analysis of their views on conducting discussions and their attitudes regarding the expectations which they have towards themselves and towards each other shows that the expert or the transmission model of teacher-parent relationships are still very much present (quoted from Hornby, 2000), particularly at the second and third triads. Teachers are supposed to be experts in all aspects of development and education of children and when a child has problems, teachers should give concrete advice to help solve such problems. Within the transmission model parents assume a slightly more significant role

in supporting teacher's endeavours and in carrying out teacher's measures, but still have a subordinate role. Many parents find this convenient, but teachers have to bear in mind that parents are an extremely varied group. Parents with higher education will be less willing to accept such a subordinate role as they want to be heard by teachers and to a greater extent involved in mutual problem solving. Parents of less achieving children may wait passively for the teacher's incentives or may even not dare express their own opinion, which certainly does not contribute to successful problem solving. This group of parents has negative past experience with teachers, are less educated, will doubt even more than others in the teacher and his or her expertise, and will most often try to avoid coming to school. In addition, how to attract the so-called more demanding parents into co-operation is an especially difficult challenge for teachers.

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