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The DETERMINANTS of cooperation between schools and families in partnership and parenthood Education

Introduction

Preparation for partnership and parenthood is socially important area of human education. In Slovakia there is quite extensive literature in this area (H. Rozinajová, E. Poliaková, M. Hargašová, J. Prevendárová, I. Lukšík, M. Supeková, E. Bujnová, L. Nemcová, L. Lenczs, E. Višňovský, G. Bianchi, J. Vernarcová, Š. Švec, L. Rovňanová and others). The sexual education is a part of broader concept of education for responsible partnership, marriage and parenthood. In Slovakia the concept “education for marriage and parenthood” is preferred recently. In the present study concept of “partnership and parenthood education” is used.

The quality of partnership and parenthood education is influenced by many factors. According to research findings, the most important are the attitudes of teachers, teachers’ inner motivation, expertise, poor work of coordinators for partnership and parenthood education (in some schools there is no position of coordinator or the coordinators do not use appropriate methods of education), low cooperation with parents, etc. (Nemcová, L., 2007; Vernarcová, J., 2011).

The quality of cooperation between teachers and parents is the fundamental determinant of success of partnership and parenthood education (Kurincová, V. – Turzák, T., 2012, Turzák, T., 2012, 2014). This finding is also emphasized by many research studies from various countries. Walker, J. & Milton, J. (2006) in their qualitative study describe the roles of parents and teachers in the development of partnership and parenthood education concept in primary and post-secondary educational level. The authors conclude that active involvement of parents is crucial in the process of determining the content of education. Parents and teachers should

cooperate in the following areas: development of quality relationships, detection of the prejudices and stereotypes, assessment of family environment, acceptance of differences, union of school and family life education, facilitating discussion.

The studies by McCall, D. S. (2012), Oliver, D. P., Leeming, F. C. & Dwyer, W. O. (1998) deal with expectations parents have about the partnership and parenthood education and about what involvement of parents is needed. The benefits of active involvement of parents in schools are: improving the relationship and communication between parents and children, strengthening health and increase self-esteem of students and improving the cooperation between school and family. In our country there is still some scarcity in research on the issue of cooperation of school and family in the area of partnership and parenthood education.

Based on research findings of foreign authors and lack of specific research in our context, the aim of the present research study was *to explore the quality of the coordination of family and school partnership and parenthood education*. We embrace the perspective of partnership and parenthood education teachers and coordinators in the present study.

Methods

Sample

During March – June 2014 the teachers of primary schools in Nitra region were approached and asked to participate in the data collection. The final sample consisted of 48 teachers and 6 coordinators of partnership and parenthood education. Selection of participants was nonrandom and based on availability.

Data collection methods

Participants were administered a questionnaire with questions related to partnership and parenthood education. First they were explained the object and purpose of the study. Then they had to fill in the instrument which addressed the research aim (example of a question: “What do you think can affect the cooperation of school and parents?”). As an additional method we used semi-structured interviews (only with partnership and parenthood education coordinators) which were recorded and then transcribed.

Data analysis methods

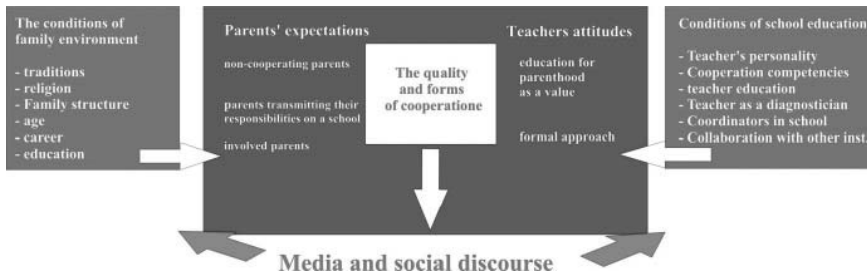
Qualitative data were categorized and the statements of the respondents were assessed by two independent evaluators. Our aim was to create

key categories and subcategories for each observed area. Procedures and principles of grounded theory methods were applied for the analysis (Strauss, A. – Corbin, J., 1999).

Results and Discussion

Through a qualitative analysis the main categories and subcategories were found. We present a view of the main categories and subcategories in the following model. The descriptions and illustrations of the main categories and subcategories are given below.

Figure 1: The conditions of cooperation between schools and families in partnership and parenthood education



The quality of the coordination of family and school education and its forms are determined by:

- Expectations of parents and their behavior patterns (based of the family environment – values, attitudes, etc.)
- Attitudes and values of teachers (the quality of partnership and parenthood education, affected by moral and professional characteristics of teachers, school opportunities and cooperation with supporting institutions)

Attitudes and values of parents, teachers, school directors, school psychologists, educational counselors and coordinators are affected also by social discourse on the issue of partnership and parenthood education.

The conditions of the family environment

The family value orientation, religious beliefs and cultural traditions of families are the fundamental determinants from the teachers perspective. The quality of cooperation is also decreased by increasing rate of single-parent families. The attitudes of parents are affected by the increasing rate of divorces – parents who have negative personal experience with marriage do not

believe it is important to have partnership and parenthood education or that it can be useful. We can illustrate the finding with the following statement:1

„There are missing models of complete family. Many families are divorced, children grow up in incomplete family. The parents in these families are often disappointed, they often do not believe it is possible to have quality relationships. Parents often avoid this topic at home and they do not communicate with the school in this area.14“

Socio-economic status of the family, parents' employment and age are another factors. Younger parents are more open-minded compared to the older generation. Young parents and parents with higher education are more flexible and they believe quality partnership and parenthood education is important. Our previous research findings provide support for these results (Kurincová, V. – Turzák, T. 2012).

„Unfortunately, there are only a few parents nowadays, who would like to engage in school education. Many parents focus on their careers only. They do not understand the importance of partnership and parenthood education. 14“

„Younger parents tend to be more involved and they ask how they can help. One mom knows a good gynecologist and once she helped us to organize a discussion for girls. 27“

Place of residence (town or village) is another factor determining attitudes of parents. The results confirm previous findings about higher openness of parents in cities compared to parents living in the villages.

Parents' expectations and their typology

Based on the level of involvement of parents three different groups of parents can be suggested:

1. *Non-cooperating parents* – parents do not expect the school to do anything related to partnership and parenthood education. They do not address the topic of sexual education in the family environment. Parents refuse to communicate with the school. They do not want their son/daughter to attend ethics education classes, where this issue is discussed and they do not approve any way children may learn about these topics.

¹ Identification data of the of the respondents were replaced by numbers (referred as a superscript)

2. *Parents passing their responsibilities on a school* – parents do not feel the need for coordination of family and school partnership and parenthood education. Family life education in a family environment is usually only formal and often fails, parents expect that schools provide children with the basic information. They expect the school also to protect children from undesirable influence of the mass media.
3. *Involved parents* – parents recognize the need to coordinate family and school partnership and parenthood education. School cooperation with other institutions is also very important from their view, e.g. organization of discussions with experts from medical facilities, counseling centers, etc. and they emphasize the importance of quality partnership and parenthood education based mainly on moral values.

Conditions of school partnership and parenthood education

The teachers are the facilitators of communication between family and school. Also class teachers, educators, coordinators for school partnership and parenthood education and ethics teachers have an important role. Teachers believe that it is important for parents to cooperate with a teacher who is able to assess the family environment. The teacher should recognize and respect the individual characteristics of families and choose the appropriate approach to each family considering its uniqueness. The attitudes of teachers are influenced not only by their personal qualities but also by the program of school partnership and parenthood education which may vary in every school (various positions of coordinators for partnership and parenthood education at school, various management attitudes, context of available financial resources and options of schools to cooperate with other professionals (Turzák, T. 2012).

Another important factor are opportunities for lifelong teacher training in communication skills:

„It is important to involve the other experts who help teachers learn how to talk with parents about these issues. For many teachers it is unfortunately still a taboo³³“

„The lifelong education is important. Professionals in partnership and parenthood education should be younger teacher who want to learn and are able to create a friendly, safe relationship with the pupils and their parents.²⁷“

Presented findings are also supported by several foreign studies (e.g. McCall, D. S. 2012). The most common factors that determine the process of cooperation between schools and families in this issue are:

- insufficient coordination between schools and other professionals,
- formal approach of teachers,
- concerns related to communication with parents about sensitive topics,
- weak support from school management,
- lack of time and financial resources for the implementation of joint projects between family and school (McCall, D. S. 2012).

Conclusion

Nowadays, family life education becomes less and less effective and the influence of complete family models is weakened (high rate of divorces, single-parent families, troubled families, unsuitable educational models, mass media). Partnership and parenthood education is also threatened by the negative way it is presented by the mass media. Cooperation between family and school is one of the fundamental issues in this context. In our country mostly methodical aspects of the issue are systematically addressed, less attention is given to the problem of school and family education coordination. This results in poorly covered topic in the research and low interest of teachers and parents in practice.

According to our results we recommend:

- to define the responsibilities of coordinators for partnership and parenthood education in primary and secondary schools,
- to define the responsibilities of teachers for school partnership and parenthood education and to promote the cooperation competences of teachers,
- to address these topics on the meetings with parents in school environment,
- to support the participation of school psychologists at the meetings with parents in school,
- to create opportunities for lifelong learning of teachers targeted on social and communication skills,
- to involve parents in joint projects between family and school (communication with experts, participation in activities).

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Family life education takes place gradually in various stages of human life. It proceeds in different educational environments and it is an irreplaceable aspect in creating human identity. Every educational environment has its own specifics. The quality of family life education is influenced by many factors. One of the most important factors is mutual continuity of family and school education. The study presents results of qualitative research. The main goal of the study was to identify the most important determinants involved in quality of coordination of family and school education.