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Peculiarities of the Collaboration between the Family and the Pre-school Educational Institution: the Qualitative Aspect

Charakterystyka współpracy pomiędzy rodziną a instytucjami
wychowania przedszkolnego w aspekcie jakościowym

Streszczenie

We współczesnym społeczeństwie współpraca uznawana jest za wartość oraz inspirację, a zatem jednym z najważniejszych składników współczesnej organizacji edukacji jest działalność oparta na współpracy. Jest to szczególnie ważne w wieku przedszkolnym, aby z powodzeniem można było rozwinąć umiejętność socjalizacji u dzieci i zapewnić im edukację wysokiej jakości. A zatem niezbędne jest wzmocnienie interakcji między dzieckiem, rodziną i instytucją edukacyjną, to jest: rozwinięcie partnerstwa między rodziną a instytucją przedszkolną. Niewiele jest badań naukowych na Litwie dotyczących cech charakterystycznych znaczących i aktualnych dla badania i analizy procesu współpracy pomiędzy rodziną a instytucją przedszkolną, poprzez dyskusję czynników wpływających na współpracę, jak również formy współpracy i sposobów jej realizacji, które zapewniają wysoką jakość tego procesu. Celem badań jest analiza współpracy pomiędzy rodziną a instytucją przedszkolną z perspektywy jakości. Metodami badań są: analiza literatury naukowej, kwestionariusz, statystyczna analiza danych. Analiza wyników wykazała, że jakość współpracy pomiędzy rodziną a instytucją przedszkolną może być oceniana poprzez następującą działalność: mikroklimat instytucji przedszkolnej; wychowanie i naukę dziecka; osiągnięcia wychowania (nauki) dziecka; wsparcie i wspomaganie dziecka i rodziny; zarządzanie zasobami i instytucją. Większość respondentów wskazała, że pozytywny mikroklimat instytucji i pracy ze-

spolowej poprawił wydajność pracy oraz że efektywna współpraca jest podstawą pomyslniej działalności instytucji przedszkolnej.

Słowa kluczowe: rodzina, instytucja przedszkolna, jakość współpracy.

Abstract

The attitude of family members towards the process of collaboration, as well as its peculiarities in the pre-school educational institution, is analysed in the article. The most efficient ways and forms that allow one to ensure the quality of this process are distinguished. It was revealed by the the analysis of scientific literature that recently it discussed more and more often about children's successful socialization and high-quality self-development which can be achieved through sustainable collaboration between the members of the pre-school educational institution. In recent years high-quality collaboration in the pre-school educational institutions is considered valuable and aspirational. The results of empirical study showed that the most effective forms of collaboration in pre-school educational institutions distinguished by the family (parents) of a pupil encompass individual conversations, teacher-parent meetings, various festive and afternoon get-togethers organized by pre-school educators as well as consultations with specialists. According to parents, a positive microclimate in a pre-school educational institution combined with the cooperative work of the staff provides favourable conditions for the establishment and development of a sufficient collaborative process in the pre-school educational institution.

Keywords: family, pre-school educational institution, collaboration quality.

Introduction

One of the essential features of the modern organization of education is its activity's being based on collaboration in seeking for pupils' successful socialization and quality in their self-development which is particularly significant in pre-school education. Therefore, it is crucial to improve the child-family-educational institution interaction, ie. to aim at a collaboration between families and pre-school institutions.

Recently there has been a growing interest among both Lithuanian and foreign scholars in collaboration issues. Considerable attention to the process within an organization (which is, in the case of our study, a pre-school educational institution) was paid by scholars M. Fullan, L. Stoll, D. Fink and A. Hargreaves¹, who have treated collaboration as the strategy and an innovation of the

¹ M. Fullan, *Pokyčių jėgos*, Tyto alba, Vilnius 1998; L. Stoll, D. Fink, *Keičiame mokyklą*, Margi raštai, Vilnius 1998; A. Hargreaves, *Keičiasi mokytojai, keičiasi laikai: mokytojų darbas ir kultūra postmoderniajame amžiuje*, Tyto alba, Vilnius 1999.

organization which influences the development of humanistic education; the scholars discuss in their works the human abilities of generating and communicating ideas, working together, being able to take responsibility for their actions and to lead themselves as well as others in the context of the constant development and improvement of the organization itself.

It is pointed out in the studies by Lithuanian scholars² as well as in the documents regulating the system of education (Law on Education of the Republic of Lithuania: 2011; National Education Strategy Regulations for the year 2013–2022, 2013; Pre-school Development 2011–2013 Programme, 2011 et al.) that collaboration between the members of pre-school educational institutions guarantees a welcoming atmosphere of mutual relations which conditions pupils development and socialization.

However, when assessing the topic being investigated from the scientific perspective, one could claim that little research has been carried out in Lithuania where the qualitative peculiarities of collaboration in pre-school education are taken into consideration; therefore, it is particularly meaningful and relevant to examine and analyse the process of collaboration between the family and the pre-school educational institution by discussing the factors that influence their collaboration as well as its ways and forms, which guarantee the quality of this process.

Hence *problematic issues* arise: 1) In what ways and forms is the collaboration in the pre-school educational institution carried out? 2) How does the family of a pupil treat collaboration in the pre-school community? 3) Which factors, from the family's point of view, have significance on the quality of the collaboration process in the pre-school educational institution?

The object of the study: the collaboration between the family and the pre-educational institution.

The aim of the study: to examine the qualitative aspect of collaboration in the pre-school educational institution.

Objectives of the study:

1. To define collaboration in the pre-school educational institution on the theoretical level.
2. To assess the family's attitude towards collaboration as well as its peculiarities in the pre-school educational institution.

² A. Juodaitytė, R. Gaučaitė, A. Kazlauskienė, *Informavimas apie ikimokyklinį, priešmokyklinį ugdymą ir švietimo pagalbą*, Lucilijus, Šiauliai 2009; R. Kontautienė, *Bendradarbiavimo sistema ir jos valdymas mokykloje*, Klaipėdos universiteto leidykla, Klaipėda 2006; L. Jovaiša, *Edukologijos įvadas*, Technologija, Kaunas 2002; S. Dapkienė, *Klasės auklėtojo vaidmuo kuriant mokinių ir tėvų bendruomenę. Socialinis ugdymas: mokyklos ir šeimos bendradarbiavimas II*. Scientific Articles in the National Database, Šiaulių universiteto leidykla, Šiauliai 2002; J. Litvinienė, *Šeima – vaiko ugdymo institucija*, Klaipėdos universiteto leidykla, Klaipėda 2002; L. Ušėckienė, *Tėvų ir ikimokyklinio ugdymo pedagogų bendradarbiavimo nuostatos (Regulations on Collaboration between Parents and Pre-school educators)*, "Pedagogika", Vilnius 2002, № 4., pp. 187–191 et al.

Methodology of the study: the research was based on the Social Communication Paradigm, which emphasizes social relations, interaction and membership within a community as well as collaboration, communication and partnership³. The equality of value of the collaborating members (the family and the pre-school educational institution in the case of our study) is emphasized through this paradigm.

According to the Social Communication Paradigm, people are communicating via messages in which the addresser is encoding information and the addressee is decoding it as well as using communication channels and means. Successful communication is determined by the positivity and availability of the content and the choice for effective communication channels and means, which guarantee feedback⁴.

Methods of the study:

- Theoretical: analysis of scientific, educational and legal texts.
- Empirical: mixed-type questionnaires for parents.
- Statistical: descriptive statistics were employed for the quantitative data analysis. The data of the study was statistically treated by using Microsoft Office Excel 2010 and SPSS 17.0 for Windows software.

The sample and the organization: considering the aim of the study, one of the most popular quantitative methods for the analysis of the problem, namely the survey, was chosen. The study was carried out from October to November in 2013 in five pre-school educational institutions of Panevėžys city. 112 parents of pupils' participated in the study. Verbal permissions of both the managers of the pre-schools educational institutions and the parents were obtained. The findings of the quantitative study were encoded and recorded into the SPSS statistical software data package for the data processing and analysis.

Results of the study. Theoretical background for the collaboration between family and the pre-school institution

The issues regarding collaboration have always been the object of studies in various fields. However, various scholars interpret the essence of collaboration differently – while for some it means working with other representatives of the community, others consider it an interaction or regard it as a sub-type of communication. Meanwhile, the Dictionary of Contemporary Lithuanian⁵ defines

³ C. Barnes & G. Mercer, *Implementing the Social Model of Disability: Theory & Research*, The Disability Press, Leeds 2004, pp. 18–31.

⁴ J. Fiske, *Įvadas į komunikacijos studijas*, Baltos lankos, Vilnius 1990.

⁵ *Dabartinės lietuvių kalbos žodynas* (Dictionary of Contemporary Lithuanian), Faculty of Communication of Vilnius University, Vilnius 2006.

collaboration as the mobilisation of shared intellectual knowledge in operating together with the intention of achieving a common goal.

Scholars J. Bruce and K. Ricketts⁶ claim that once collaborating individuals start working sustainably and moving towards a collectively agreed goal, one can start talking about the process of collaboration. The authors emphasize that collaboration can be described as a social process the success of which relies on the efficiency of the participation of those involved in the process and their satisfaction with the final result.

Scholars A. Juodaitytė, R. Gaučaitė and A. Kazlauskienė⁷ noticed that in contemporary society the roles of parents are being shaped as they are transforming from passive consumers to active participants who offer various ideas and support as well as being ready to negotiate effective ways of the child's development.

Collaboration within the pre-school educational institution as a partnership between the educator and the educated, collaboration as the interaction between members of the pre-school educational community and collaboration as communication between educators and other participants of the social environment in the field of education is notable for its wide-ranged effectiveness. Educators, pupils and their parents are the main and most significant participants of the collaboration process in a pre-school educational institution (see Fig. 1).

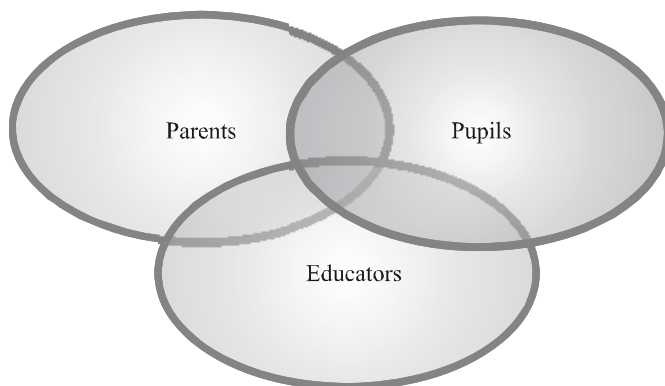


Fig. 1. Participant groups of the collaboration process in the educational institution (prepared by the authors). Source: Prepared by the authors.

Rys. 1. Grupy współpracujące w instytucji edukacyjnej. Źródło: Opracowanie własne autora.

⁶ J.A. Bruce & K.G.Ricketts, *Where's All the Teamwork Gone? A Qualitative Analysis of Cooperation between Members of Two Interdisciplinary Teams*. Available from: http://leadershipeducators.org/Resources/Documents/jole/2008_summer/JOLE_7_1_Bruce_Ricketts.pdf [Accessed on: 15.09.2013].

⁷ A. Juodaitytė, R. Gaučaitė and A. Kazlauskienė, *Informavimas apie ikimokyklinį...*, op. cit.

Scholars J. Ruškus, D. Žvirdauskas, R. Žvirdauskienė, I. Eskytė et al⁸ have described six forms of the family's involvement into the life of the educational institution as distinguished by Epstein:

1. Parenting which enables families to create a homely atmosphere in supporting children as participants of the process.
2. Communication as the creation of effective forms, due to which parents learn more of the educational programmes of an institution as well as of their children's progress.
3. Voluntary activities, i.e. the organization of support and help for parents.
4. Home teaching/learning. Provision of information to parents on how they can help their children in doing homework as well as in carrying out other activities related to the process of education; various decisions and planning.
5. Decision-making. It involves the participation of parents in making decisions at school as well as in educating parents as leaders and representatives.
6. Collaboration with the community. Resources and services in the community are identified in improving educational programmes as well as family practices and children's education.

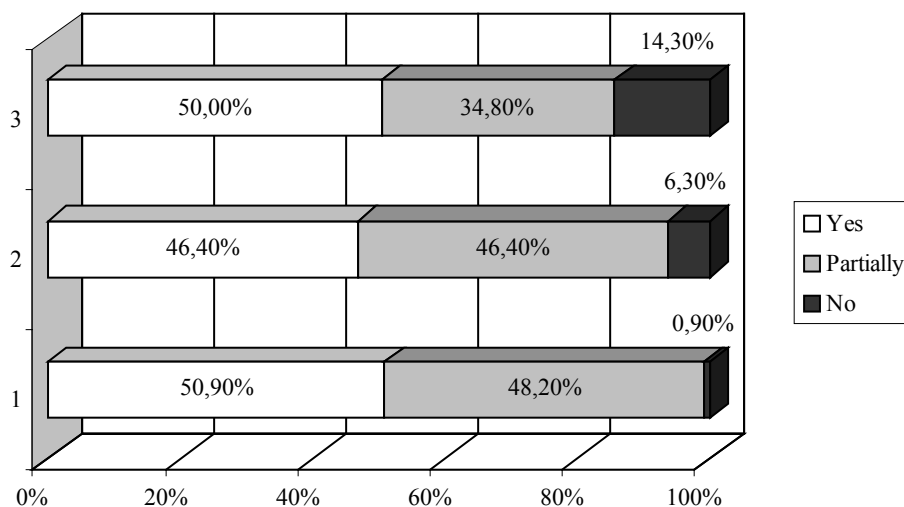
There are a variety of ways and forms that allow the family and the pre-educational institution to maintain and develop their process of collaboration. Together with traditional ways and forms of collaboration such as parent meetings, individual conversations, consultations with education specialists, various festive occasions, afternoon get-togethers, trips etc., modern means of collaboration are employed in modern pre-school educational institutions that comply with the needs of the contemporary society, such as e-mails, project activities, charity events and open days. A pre-school educational institution may choose the ways and forms of collaboration with families that fulfil its expectations best in guaranteeing the quality of the present collaborative process in the pre-school educational institution.

We might conclude that in seeking to compete successfully in contemporary society pre-school educational institutions need to develop a system which would allow them to combine a variety of interrelated processes as well as to orientate them towards a common goal. One of the main systems is the process of collaboration between the family and the pre-school educational institution.

⁸ J. Ruškus, D. Žvirdauskas, R. Žvirdauskienė, I. Eskytė et al., *Ikimokyklinio, priešmokyklinio ugdymo vadybos kokybės vertinimas*. Study report. Available from: <http://www.upc.smm.lt/projektai/pletra/Tyrimai/J.%20Ruskaus%20tyrimo%20ataskaita/Ikimokyklinio.%20priesmokyklinio%20ugdymo%20vadybos%20kokybes%20vertinimas%20Tyrimo%20ataskaita2009%2008%2031.pdf> [Accessed on: 5.09.2013].

Analysis of the results of empirical research on the attitude of family (parents) towards collaboration and its quality in the pre-school educational institution

Having carried out the analysis of scientific literature it turned out that the pre-school educational institution and the family are united by the subject of the intended education, namely, the pupil. A child is being appropriately educated when there is harmonious agreement between the pre-school educational institution and the family and the education of a child in a nursery school adds to that received in the family. Therefore, it was important to find out in the course of the study what opportunities the family (parents of the educated) has for developing the process of collaboration between all the members of pre-school community and whether they are sufficient. The distribution of parents' attitudes is illustrated in figure 2.



1. Being equal members of the society; 2. Possibility of making use of ideas and skills;
3. Encouraging creativity between family members by managers.

Fig. 2. Parents' opinions about participation in pre-school activities (N = 112). Source: Prepared by the authors.

Rys. 2. Opinie rodziców o udziale w pracy przedszkolnej (N = 112). Źródło: Opracowanie własne autora.

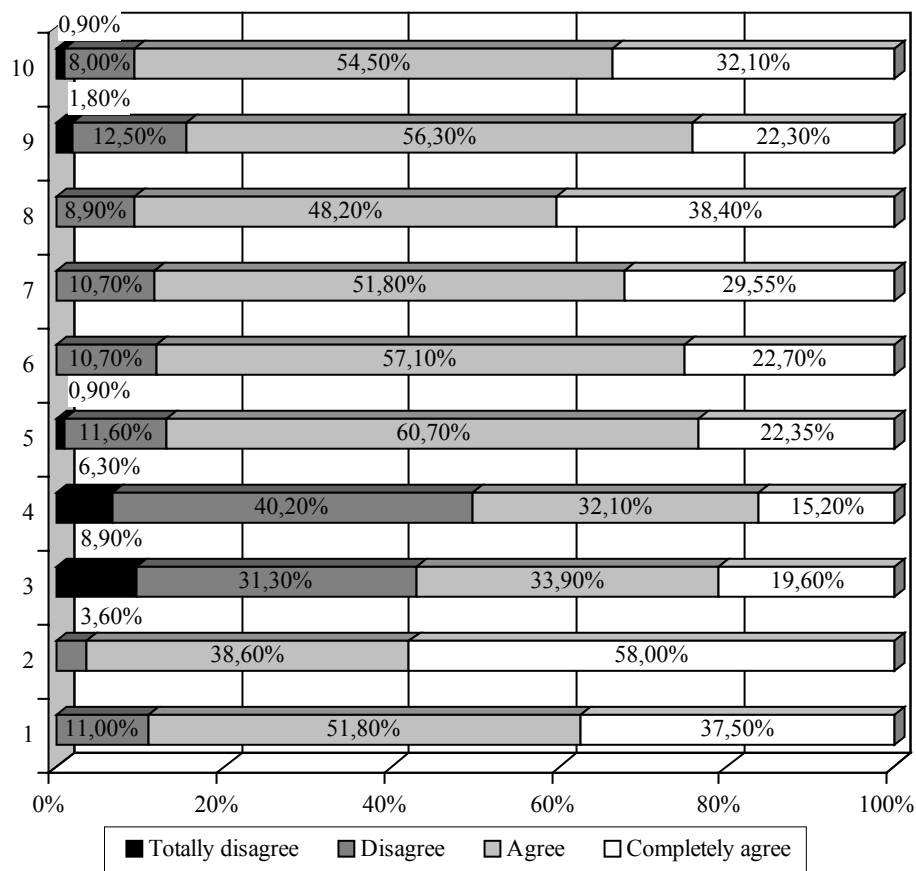
The results of the study showed that more than half of the parents (50.9%) consider themselves equal pre-school community members, nearly a half (46.4%) consider themselves having the opportunity to make use of their ideas and abilities in advantageously contributing to the organization of the successful activity of the pre-school educational institution, half of the respondents (50.0%) indicate that the managers of the institution are encouraging the innovativity and creativity of the family in the activities of the institution. However, more than one tenth of the parents (14.3%) do not consider themselves equal members of the pre-school community, less than one tenth of the respondents (6.3%) do not have the opportunity to contribute to the collective activities of the institution with their ideas and abilities, while some of the parents involved in the study indicate that they are not encouraged by the managers of the institution to make use of their creativity in the activities of the pre-school educational institution.

According to J. Litvinienė⁹, support to the family and collaboration with the family in educating their child in the pre-school educational institution should be regarded as two prioritised tasks of the pre-school educational institution. Collaborative relations between the family and the pre-school educational institution can be maintained by means of communication which is demonstrated via both formal and informal interaction and cooperation. In pre-school educational institutions, collaboration is carried out in various ways and forms. The number of ways and forms that lead to maintenance and development of partnership in pre-school educational institutions is sufficient. What is needed is merely to choose the one which is most valuable in guaranteeing a high-quality process of collaboration in a pre-school educational institution. Therefore, it was important to find out in the course of the study which ways and forms are considered to be the most effective by the family (parents) of the educated in the community of the pre-school educational institution (see Fig. 3).

The results of the study showed that over a half of the parents involved in the study (58.0%) completely agree that the most effective form of collaboration is individual conversations with the educators. Over one third of the respondents (37.5%) pointed at parent meetings and over one third of the parents (38.4%) also chose feasts and afternoon get-togethers. While answering this question the respondents had the opportunity to select more than one answer.

Having carried out the study it turned out that over 40% of the respondents (40.2%) disagree that communication via e-mail may result in a successful process of collaboration between the members of the community of the pre-school educational institution.

⁹ J. Litvinienė, *Šeima – vaiko ugdymo institucija...*, op. cit.



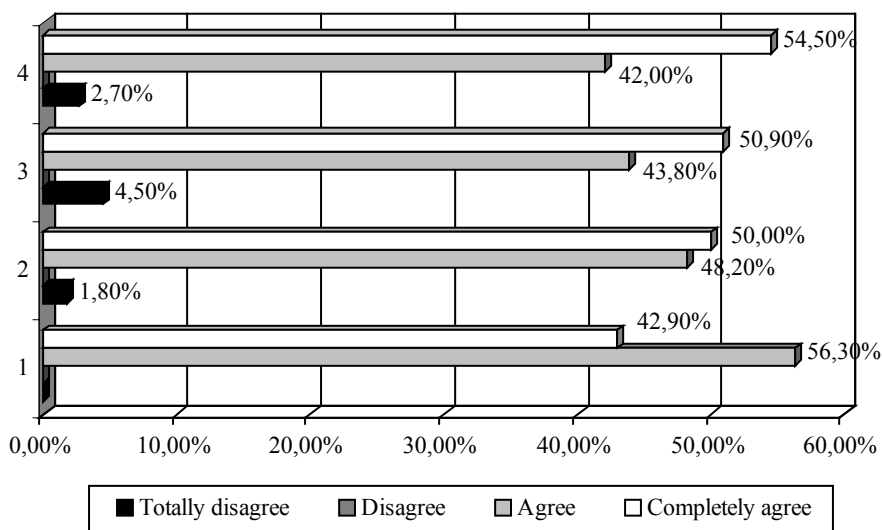
1. Parent meetings; 2. Individual conversations; 3. Phone conversations; 4. E-mails; 5. Consultations by educators; 6. Consultations by specialists; 7. Team activities; 8. Feasts and afternoon get-togethers; 9. Project activities; 10. Trips and excursions.

Fig. 3. The most effective forms of collaboration in the pre-school community according to pupil's parents (N = 112). Source: Prepared by the authors.

Rys. 3. Najskuteczniejsze formy współpracy we wspólnocie przedszkolnej według rodzin dzieci (N = 112). Źródło: Opracowanie własne autora.

It might be concluded that the majority of parents of the educated regard individual conversations, parent meetings, festive occasions and afternoon get-togethers as the most effective forms of collaboration. The parents of the educated also appreciate consultations by specialists and educators. The least effective way is, according to the parents, communication via e-mail.

According to scholars¹⁰, shared responsibilities on the issues of children's education between the family and the educational institution guarantee collegial relations based on a constant and constructive dialogue, mutual trust, understanding, respect and the sharing of information and expert knowledge. Therefore, it is useful to address factors that determine successful collaboration between the members of the pre-school educational institution (see Fig. 4).



1. Good staff relations result in a positive microclimate; 2. Positive microclimate – better achievements; 3. Team work – better quality of work; 4. Effective collaboration as the basis for successful performance.

Fig. 4. Factors that guarantee successful collaboration in the pre-school educational institution (N = 112). Source: Prepared by the authors.

Rys. 4. Czynniki gwarantujące skuteczną współpracę w instytucji edukacji przedszkolnej (N = 112). Źródło: Opracowanie własne autora.

Having carried out the study it turned out that more than half of the parents (54.5%) completely agree that effective collaboration provides the basis for the successful performance of pre-school educational institution, around one half of the respondents (50.9%) completely agree with the statement that team work conditions better quality of work and one half of the respondents (50.0%) completely agree that a positive microclimate of the pre-school educational institution leads to better results of the overall activities of the pre-school educational institution.

¹⁰ J. Ruškus, D. Žvirdauskas, R. Žvirdauskienė, I. Eskytė et al., *Ikimokyklinio, priešmokyklinio ugdymo vadybos kokybės vertinimas...*, op. cit.

Conclusions

1. The analysis of scientific texts as well as that of Lithuanian documents on education revealed that collaboration is an interaction between team members based on cooperation, sharing of experience and aiming at a common goal where each member of the team is satisfied with the collective activities. It is the basis for the human activities which enables us to create and sustain a strong community of the pre-school educational institution.
2. The results of the quantitative study showed that many parents who took part in the study shared the opinion that the possibilities of developing the process of collaboration in the pre-school educational institution were sufficient.
3. The results of the study revealed that among the most effective forms of collaboration in the pre-school community the parents of the pupils distinguished individual conversations, parent meetings, various festive occasions and afternoon get-togethers organised by pre-school educators as well as consultations by specialists.
4. The study showed that the majority of the parents completely agree with the claim that a positive microclimate in the pre-school educational institution and collective work of the staff provide favourable conditions for the establishment and development of a high-quality collaborative process in the pre-school educational institution.

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