# Views of Teachers, School Counsellors and Parents on the Importance of Their Mutual Co-operation

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## Abstract

In this paper we focus on the role of some factors of quality co-operation between the school and the home, particularly on the views of parents, teachers and counselling workers on the quality of their mutual co-operation. The empirical research was carried out on a representative sample of primary school teachers together with primary and secondary school counsellors and parents of children who attended the third, fifth/sixth and ninth primary school grades in Slovenia. One of the main findings is that teachers, counselling workers and parents are aware of the importance of their mutual co-operation. In general, most schools exhibit great readiness and a favourable atmosphere for co-operating with parents. Parents also experience a high level of the school's or teachers' readiness to co-operate with them. However, at the same time, the data warns that co-operation could be improved in many cases. It is up to schools, teachers and counsellors to find what to improve and how.

**Key words:** teachers, counselling workers, parents, factors of co-operation

## Introduction

One of the fundamental questions of the relationship between the school and the home or teachers and parents and of establishing (un)co-operative relations is the question how competences and responsibilities for a child's/pupil's learning and learning achievements as well as personal development are distributed. Although rational thinking and professional justification clearly argue that both institutions (the family and school) are responsible for the child's/pupil's development, the actual shared responsibility and assigning of tasks between the family and the school/teachers remain an open question, which depends on a number of objective and subjective factors that either bring parents and teachers closer together or divide them. Although the objective (normative and organisational) factors that make the framework of this co-operation should not be underestimated, it seems that at a more specific (school and individual) level, the co-operation is more influenced by subjective factors, such as teachers' and parents' attitudes, values including the school and family culture, teachers' and parents' motivation as well as personal characteristics, traditions, experiences and ambitions of both (cf. Kalin et al., 2009; Mrvar and Šteh, 2011; Šteh and Mrvar, 2011).

The value and advantage of subjective factors of co-operation are based on the fact that co-operation between the school and the home or teachers and parents is

stronger if it is not limited to some official forms of communication and formalised relations. On the contrary, the relationship between teachers and parents becomes increasingly "individualised" if there is not only a one-way exchange of information on the child's/pupil's work, but rather if they try, when the need occurs and readiness and willingness are present in both, to establish more informal ways of co-operation that open the door to a closer relationship and co-operation.

The purpose of this discussion is to test this theoretically and empirically established hypothesis and to present teachers', counsellors' and parents' views of the importance of mutual co-operation in detail.

## Why should the school and the home co-operate in the first place?

Co-operation between the school and the home is so taken for granted that we often forget to wonder about the value of these contacts. Thus the question of co-operation between the school and the home or teachers and parents is constantly underestimated (cf. Pribil, 1906, p. 98). This finding, although made more than 100 years ago, remains valid today.

The numerous benefits of the active involvement of parents in the school have been confirmed by various studies and at various levels with all involved (see for example Booth and Dunn, 1996; Epstein, 1995; Esler et al., 2002; Gonzalez-DeHass et al., 2005; Henderson in Berla, 1994; Hornby, 2000; Olsen and Fuller, 2003; Pomerantz et al., 2007). Quality co-operation between the school and the home positively affects the child's development, motivation and achievement at school and his or her attitude towards it, while the benefits of such co-operation are also evident at the level of parents, teachers and the school in general.

– Studies point out that pupils have better learning achievements and more motivation for work at school, show a more positive attitude towards school, have better attendance rates, and invest more energy in school work. A decrease of improper behaviour is evident and mutual relations improve.

– Quality school-home co-operation positively affects the family (parents): at school they get ideas how to help their children at home, become more self-confident in helping their children with learning, are more active in supporting the children, mutual relations and communication in the family improve, parents get familiar with the school system and educational programmes and in general have a more positive attitude towards teachers and the school.

– Advantages for teachers or the school are evident in increased satisfaction and a higher level of morals in teachers, teachers gain parents' support, co-operation between teachers is improved and also, last but not least, the school or class climate improves.

The nature and extent of the effects this mutual co-operation will depend on its intensiveness and quality, which in turn depend on a range of various factors and their mutual interactions.

Based on their thorough review of research dealing with co-operation between the school and the home, Eccles and Harold (1996) quote the following factors:

– *Characteristics, relationship and attitude of parents or family towards school*; the authors include sex, age, education, cultural background, number of children, family status, employment status, socio-economical status, psychological support in the family among *characteristics of parents or the family*; they include values, the parental role, self-satisfaction, the attitude towards school, towards one's own education, expectations regarding the child's education and success, perception of the child's capabilities and interests, the attitude towards the child's skills, relationship with the child, and educational goals among *relation and attitude of parents or family*.

– *The child's characteristics* include: sex, age, cultural background, capabilities, interests, previous experiences and the child's temperament.

– *Characteristics, relation and attitude of school staff:* the authors include sex, age, cultural background, socio-economical status, and years of working experience among *characteristics of school staff;* while values, parental role, stereotypes, self-satisfaction, objectives they set themselves concerning pupils, the attitude towards pupils and knowledge and skills related to co-operation with parents are included among *the relationship and attitude of the school staff.*

– *School characteristics* are the school type and level, its size, socio-economical status, the school climate and the attitude towards co-operation with parents.

– *Broader environment features* include possibilities of co-operation with other institutions within the school and the home environment, support from other institutions, as well as safety and encouragement of the area surrounding the school and the child's home.

– According to Epstein (1996) these factors include *time*, which is available for co-operation to school and to parents as a lack of time negatively affects the relationship and mutual co-operation.

A series of subjective and objective factors may encourage or hinder the co-operation between school and the home. The more teachers, counsellors and parents are aware of and understand the characteristics (particularities) of each other, as well as the relationship and attitude towards mutual co-operation, the more successful the co-operation will be.

## Obstacles of Co-operation between School and the Home

Due to the abovementioned factors and their mutual interaction, establishing a confidence-based relationship and co-operation with parents may be difficult. Liontos (1992, in Esler et al., 2002) quotes obstacles to co-operation between school and the home referring to parents, teachers and school.

– *The following obstacles in parents are pointed out:* A feeling of a lack of success and low self-esteem; a negative attitude and bad experience with one's own education; a feeling that school or teachers do not respect them and do not accept them like other parents; the conviction that the child's school work is a school matter; cultural and linguistic barriers; socio-economical or emotional embarrassment; logistic problems, such as lack of time, problems with child care, transport, working hours, etc.

– *The following obstacles in teachers and school are mentioned:* Schools consider parents' involvement an "unpleasant" obligation; teachers are confused about their role in relationship with parents; teachers feel they are not capable of co-operating and dealing with distressed families; they have insufficient knowledge to work for example with divorced parents, families where violence takes place, families from other cultural and linguistic background etc.; stereotypes on deprived, marginal families, e.g. they do not care about their child, they do not want to participate in school work; the consequent low expectations teachers have of children with various difficulties; a lack of interest and passive role of school in getting parents involved in its activities in a manner that would make them feel welcome; school communication with parents focuses on bad, negative news; the school presents itself as unapproachable and superior towards parents; lack of financial means and time.

Possible obstacles within classes have to be identified, accepted, understood and systematically eliminated by the school. This is possible through evaluating the existence of a practice of co-operation with parents, as this serves as the means of evaluating the school's own positions, handling and effectiveness or ineffectiveness of existing co-operation with parents. Evaluation, which should include all co-operating participants, enables, at the institutional and personal level, reflection on the established relationship and existent practice of mutual co-operation, as well as clarification of mutual expectations. This is a sound basis for further planning of quality co-operation.

## The Purpose of the Research

In empirical research performed as part of the project entitled Levers of Successful Co-operation Between the School and the Home (Modern Solutions and Perspec-

tives), our main purpose was to determine the goal of co-operation between school and the home from the point of view of teachers, counsellors and parents, the expectations and experiences of all groups, their basic attitude towards co-operation, their limits and where they see possibilities for improvement. In this paper we present primarily the experience of parents, teachers and counsellors with mutual co-operation and how they cope with the various forms of co-operation. Findings in relation to the following research questions are presented in more detail:

– How do teachers and parents evaluate their mutual co-operation?
– Do teachers differ in this evaluation in relation to their job experiences?
– Do parents differ in this evaluation in relation to their achieved education level?
– Do parents differ in this evaluation in relation to their income level?
– How do counsellors experience and evaluate co-operation with parents?

## Method

Descriptive and causal non-experimental method was used in the research. In the part of the research carried out on teachers and parents, the basic population consisted of all primary schools in Slovenia (N = 448), which were split into two strongly expressed strata, namely urban (N = 237) and rural schools (N = 211). 20 urban and 20 rural schools from both strata were randomly picked up and questionnaires about co-operation between school and the home were sent to all teachers of these schools. Moreover, the teachers of these schools were asked to distribute a version of the questionnaire to parents of pupils attending the third, fifth or sixth and ninth grade. We received 467 completed questionnaires from teachers and 1690 from parents.

For the part of the research carried out on counsellors, we sent questionnaires to 450 counsellors in kindergartens, primary and secondary schools (according to the records of the National Education Institute - Zavod RS za šolstvo). The questionnaire was completed by 165 (36.7%) counsellors. Considering the share of basic population included in the sample we estimate it to be highly representative, although the choice was not randomized. In the present paper we will, in order to compare them with those of teachers and parents, show only results of counsellors from primary and secondary schools (n = 156).

Anonymity was assured to all teachers, parents and counsellors.

The data was processed using the statistical package SPSS statistic programme package for Windows, using the following statistical procedures: descriptive analysis of variables, $\chi^2$ test or Kullback test, when more than 20% of theoretical frequencies were lower than 5.

In this paper only findings concerning the above-mentioned research questions will be presented.

# Results and Interpretation

In our theoretical introduction, we noted that school-home co-operation is specifically influenced by the general orientation of teachers (teachers' staff room) that is visible through the school's and teachers' attitudes and readiness for co-operation. Individual teachers can have very different value-related attitudes towards parents: from very negative (destructive, unkind regarding relations) to very positive (constructive, co-operative, parent-friendly) attitudes. School-home or parent-teacher co-operation will thus first depend on attitudes of the former and latter, and these will, after all, serve as the basis for planning. Teachers and parents can perceive a greater or lesser need or usefulness of such co-operation.

## Teachers' and parents' attitudes on the usefulness and necessity of school-parent co-operation

**Table 1.** Teachers' and parents' attitudes on the usefulness and necessity of school-parent co-operation

|  |  | Co-operation of parents and school is necessary and useful. | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
|  |  | I absolutely disagree | I disagree | I partly agree | I agree | I absolutely agree | Total |
| Parents | f | 1 | 8 | 114 | 789 | 692 | 1604 |
|  | f % | .1 | .5 | 7.1 | 49.2 | 43.1 | 100.0 |
| Teachers | f | 0 | 0 | 6 | 98 | 345 | 449 |
|  | f % | 0 | 0 | 1.3 | 21.8 | 76.8 | 100.0 |
| Total | f | 1 | 8 | 120 | 887 | 1037 | 2053 |
|  | f % | .0 | .4 | 5.8 | 43.2 | 50.5 | 100.0 |

Table 1 shows that 92.3% of parents and 98.6% of teachers agree or absolutely agree with the statement. Details however show a statistically significant difference between teachers and parents ($2\bar{I}$ = 173.369; g = 4, p = 0.000). Parents are not as convinced as teachers of the necessity and usefulness of co-operation, which can be deducted from the fact that half (49.2%) of the parents merely agree with the statement, while only one fifth (21.8%) of the teachers agree. No teacher disagrees that co-operation is necessary and useful, while there are a few parents who think so.

We also gathered data on how the value and usefulness of co-operation are perceived by parents of different education levels.

**Table 2.** Parents' attitudes on usefulness and necessity of co-operation with school depending on their education level

| | | | Co-operation of parents and school is necessary and useful. | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | I absolutely disagree | I disagree | I partly agree | I agree | I absolutely agree | Total |
| Education | PS + VS | f | 1 | 6 | 44 | 222 | 174 | 447 |
| | | f % | .2 | 1.3 | 9.8 | 49.7 | 38.9 | 100.0 |
| | SS | f | 0 | 2 | 45 | 353 | 314 | 714 |
| | | f % | .0 | .3 | 6.3 | 49.4 | 44.0 | 100.0 |
| | HE | f | 0 | 0 | 24 | 198 | 192 | 414 |
| | | f % | .0 | .0 | 5.8 | 47.8 | 46.4 | 100.0 |
| | Total | f | 1 | 8 | 113 | 773 | 680 | 1575 |
| | | f % | .1 | .5 | 7.2 | 49.1 | 43.2 | 100.0 |

Legend: PS = Primary School, VS = Vocational School, SS = Secondary School, HE = Higher Education

In reference to the statement on the usefulness of their co-operation with school, parents show a statistically significant difference ($\chi^2$ = 20.915; g = 8, p = 0.007) in relation to their achieved education level.

The calculated shares indicate that better educated parents are more aware of the importance of co-operation with school than parents with completed primary and vocational school. One half (49.7%) of parents with primary school education merely agree with the statement. Could this be interpreted that less educated parents more often entrust schools with their child's learning achievement and development? These findings actually imply that at class meetings at the beginning of the school year, school teachers should together with parents analyse the value of mutual co-operation in order to perceive, within the theoretical principle, also concrete benefits of the former and the latter and thus try to raise the level of actual co-operation. At the same time the role of both parties in mutual co-operation should be clarified. Epstein (1990 in Hornby, 2000) establishes that most parents are interested in the education of their children, but fail to understand what schools expect of them and how they can contribute to the schooling of their children.

## Parents and teachers on the general readiness of schools for mutual co-operation

In spite of the varying findings and very individual experiences of teachers, a general opinion and attitude is formed about parents, their roles and duties in their children's personal formation and learning. The prevailing opinion is part of the school's (teaching staff's) culture.

How do teachers perceive parents' relation to personal development and learning of their children as well as school and their work in general?

– Teachers may first perceive parents and family as the school's and teachers' service. Since the school attempts to give pupils maximum knowledge and shape them into model citizens in line with school legislation and proclaimed values, parents and family life are seen as a barrier, as a factor that (may), through improper behaviour and disordered matrimonial life at home, harm the child and his/her progress, thus causing difficulties for teachers. Such an *authoritarian* or even hostile attitude gives no positive contribution to reconciling the school with parents; on the contrary, it deters parents from co-operating and participating in school life.

– And vice versa, based on unpleasant experiences, some teachers may perceive themselves and the school as a service to parents. Teachers feel that parents attribute all their failures to the school and teachers; it is the school and themselves to whom parents address their complaints if all is not developing as planned, if not all that has been promised is provided. For example, teachers hear parents' comment: "What do we pay them for?". Such teachers often feel that they are consumables, "marketed" by parents. Such positions provoke teachers' unfriendly, defensive, hostile, even aggressive attitudes towards parents.

– Teachers see parents as a source of support, a complementary factor. Parents can essentially contribute to their child's successful learning and progress by, for example, helping with home learning and homework. Although such an attitude is more parent-friendly, it separates school and home work. It requires that all parties fulfil their work, that parents at home are engaged in efforts for pupils' good learning achievements. Such an attitude can be defined as a paternalistic attitude of the school and teachers towards parents.

– Teachers can also see parents as partners. This means that they behave democratically towards them, allowing dialogue and being aware that parents know more about their children than teachers, which can help them get better learning achievements and put less effort in managing pupils during class. Therefore teachers should decrease their professional-client relationship towards parents.

Extremely undesirable teachers' value-related attitudes towards parents (and vice versa) are rarely a prevailing characteristic of teachers and the staff room culture; they can be detected only in separate teacher groups or if such a culture is supported only by individuals in a collective. If it is a case of individuals with an authoritarian and hostile relationship towards parents, then the headmaster or counselling service should not find it too difficult to "neutralise" such opinions. Such opinions can be modified in various ways. Sometimes, a word with the headmaster or consultation between counsellor and teacher will suffice, while at other times, the teacher will change his/her thinking and attitude towards parents under the (prevailing) influence of other teachers' different opinions and relations to parents. The question is how often such unwanted extremes are present in school and who the teachers who developed negative opinion of parents and co-operation with them are.

Because of the tradition embedded in school and teachers to assume a superior, authoritarian or paternalistic position towards parents, it should be emphasised that the culture developed by the school or teachers in relation to parents *also depends on parents*. If teachers develop a certain attitude to parents, this is also a consequence of teachers' prior experiences and parents' attitudes to school and to them. For example, above we explained that, owing to certain parents' positions, teachers develop a defensive attitude. How do parents perceive this relationship? Do schools and teachers open their doors to them? In their care for the child, whom they entrust to the school and teachers for several hours a day, parents are sensitive of teachers' attitudes to them and are aware that the teachers' relationship with them as parents also reflects the teachers' relationship with their children as pupils. Thus parents quickly notice favourable or unfavourable attitudes and feel welcome or redundant when they appear in school or in front of teachers.

They will feel welcome if the school is "pupil-focused", meaning that it does not neglect individuality or children's peculiarities. Parents need to feel that teachers are not simply "curriculum-focused", interested only in implementing their curriculum, but that teachers are perceptive of the personal, social and cultural differences between children and that the individuality of their children is not overlooked. When they realise this, they are more ready for a tighter connection with teachers and school.

How do teachers themselves estimate the readiness of the school for co-operation with parents and how do parents estimate the readiness of teachers for co-operation with them? Do opinions differ between them? What do the trends of individual groups of teachers and of individual groups of parents show?

Verifying whether there were differences between teachers and parents in their estimations of teachers' readiness for co-operation, we found that they are statisti-

**Table 3.** How do parents and teachers estimate the general atmosphere (culture, climate), in which the school's co-operation with parents takes place?

| General co-operative atmosphere | Parents | | Teachers | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | f | f % | f | f % |
| Great readiness and will for co-operation | 1002 | 61.2 | 282 | 60.9 |
| Parents should preferably only be involved in activities they are directly related to, and not interfere with teachers' work. | 569 | 34.8 | 170 | 36.7 |
| Most teachers find even consultation hours a nuisance. They avoid co-operation with parents. | 50 | 3.1 | 8 | 1.7 |
| Other | 16 | 1.0 | 3 | 0.6 |
| Total | 1637 | 100.0 | 463 | 100.0 |

cally insignificant, as both parents and teachers share similar attitudes on the general atmosphere in which their co-operation takes place.

More than 60% of both parents and teachers state that there is a lot of will and readiness for co-operation. Slightly more than a third of both note a certain distance of the teaching staff towards parents. In various ways, teachers send parents messages limiting their co-operation as equal partners, implying that parents should therefore only participate in activities directly linked to them, that they should ensure that the child's domestic life is properly managed, prepare for school at home, etc. Teachers probably do not think that parents interfere with their work if they get involved in pupils' optional school activities, if they accompany pupils at excursions, participate as volunteers in collecting various funds, in fundraising activities, etc. Although we do not have their direct statements, we assume that teachers avoid parents because they do not want parents to interfere with issues of organisation and implementation of the teaching process in particular subjects, arrangement of assessment, grading, etc.

## How do teachers estimate the school's readiness (culture, climate) for co-operation with parents?

Below we will attempt to establish how individual groups of teachers estimate school's co-operation with parents through the perspective of their years of experience. Are there differences between younger and older teachers? A rational reason for establishing or assessing possible statistically significant differences in evaluating general attitude (culture, climate) of the teaching staff towards parents would be that younger teachers have a different value system than older teachers who have a

different view of school, teachers' work and the parents' role in preparing children for school.

**Table 4.** How do teachers with different periods of employment estimate the atmosphere among colleagues regarding co-operation with parents

| | | | How would you assess the general atmosphere among teachers regarding co-operation with parents? | | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| | | | Great readiness | Parents only co-operate in activities of their concern | Even consultation hours are redundant | Total |
| Period of employment | 1 - 5 y. | f | 36 | 30 | 1 | 67 |
| | | f % | 53.7 | 44.8 | 1.5 | 100.0 |
| | 6 - 15 y. | f | 77 | 58 | 4 | 139 |
| | | f % | 55.4 | 41.7 | 2.9 | 100.0 |
| | 16 - 25 y. | f | 102 | 57 | 2 | 161 |
| | | f % | 63.4 | 35.4 | 1.2 | 100.0 |
| | > 26 y. | f | 63 | 24 | 1 | 88 |
| | | f % | 71.6 | 27.3 | 1.1 | 100.0 |
| | Total | f | 278 | 169 | 8 | 455 |
| | | f % | 61.1 | 37.1 | 1.8 | 100.0 |

Although statistically significant differences cannot be proved, the sample data show that younger teachers are more 'critical' towards their colleagues, since only a good half (53.7%) estimate that teachers have the preparedness and will to co-operate with parents, while almost three quarters (71.6%) of those with more than 25 years of employment agree. Younger teachers more often answer that most teachers at school would prefer if parents were involved only in activities they are directly related to, and not interfere with teachers' work. These are signs of a paternalistic or even authoritarian attitude of school and teachers towards parents.

Why is this so? Is this a case of projection, namely that younger teachers attribute their own positions to other teachers? Younger teachers may indeed prefer parents not to interfere in teachers' work. There may be some rational reasons for that. Generally speaking, younger teachers are more insecure in their communication with parents and pupils, which is a consequence of the fact that their undergraduate studies prepare them poorly for co-operation with parents. Further reasons may be age differences between them and parents, and their experience. Younger teachers also display more insecurity in their work in class and fear unexpected parents' criticism. These teachers would prefer if parents were only involved in activities directly

relevant to them. According to another possible interpretation, younger teachers are more willing to defend their autonomy than experienced teachers who have already consolidated their professional reputation and position in relation to parents.

## How do parents with different levels of education and monthly income estimate the general atmosphere of co-operation with school?

The theoretical part presented our separate description that the social and economic position of parents can influence their expectations and relation towards school and teachers.

**Table 5.** How do parents with different education levels estimate the atmosphere among teachers regarding their co-operation with parents?

| | | | How would you assess the general atmosphere among teachers regarding co-operation with parents? | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | Great readiness of teachers for co-operation | Teachers would prefer parents not to interfere | They avoid co-operation | Other | Total |
| Parents' education | PS + VS | f | 345 | 111 | 13 | 1 | 470 |
| | | f % | 73.4 | 23.6 | 2.8 | .2 | 100.0 |
| | SS | f | 415 | 282 | 22 | 8 | 727 |
| | | f % | 57.1 | 38.8 | 3.0 | 1.1 | 100.0 |
| | HE and above | f | 226 | 163 | 13 | 7 | 409 |
| | | f % | 55.3 | 39.9 | 3.2 | 1.7 | 100.0 |
| | Total | f | 986 | 556 | 48 | 16 | 1606 |
| | | f % | 61.4 | 34.6 | 3.0 | 1.0 | 100.0 |

When verifying how parents with different education levels assess teachers and their readiness for co-operation with them, we found that the differences between parents with different levels of education are statistically significant ($\chi 2 = 44.280$; g = 6, p = 0.000). The table shows that less educated parents estimate teachers' readiness for co-operation much better than parents with higher education levels. Naturally, a significantly higher share of educated parents (almost 40%) estimated that teachers would prefer parents to get involved only in activities directly related to them and not to interfere with teachers' work, while less than a quarter of parents in the less educated group shared this opinion. Do these parents perhaps feel that their comments on the work of school and teachers are unwanted or even that teachers avoid them?

**Table 6.** How do parents with different monthly income estimate the general atmosphere among teachers regarding their co-operation with parents?

| | | | How would you assess the general atmosphere among teachers regarding co-operation with parents? | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | Great readiness of teachers for co-operation | Teachers would prefer parents not to interfere | They avoid co-operation | Other | Total |
| family's monthly income | Up to 1000 | f | 425 | 182 | 20 | 5 | 632 |
| | | f % | 67.2 | 28.8 | 3.2 | .8 | 100.0 |
| | From 1000 to 2000 | f | 385 | 249 | 24 | 7 | 665 |
| | | f % | 57.9 | 37.4 | 3.6 | 1.1 | 100.0 |
| | From 2000 to 3000 | f | 104 | 75 | 2 | 2 | 183 |
| | | f % | 56.8 | 41.0 | 1.1 | 1.1 | 100.0 |
| | More than 3000 | f | 36 | 33 | 3 | 1 | 73 |
| | | f % | 49.3 | 45.2 | 4.1 | 1.4 | 100.0 |
| | Total | f | 950 | 539 | 49 | 15 | 1553 |
| | | f % | 61.2 | 34.7 | 3.2 | 1.0 | 100.0 |

Parents' assessments of the general atmosphere among teachers were also verified in reference to the achievement of their child, the grade attended and whether the child attends an urban or non-urban school. Although no statistically significant differences were found in these variables, they did appear in the "family's monthly income" variable, where the value of $\chi^2$-test was statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 22.929$; g = 9, p = 0.006). This is similar to the case of education: lower income parents (up to EUR 1000) more frequently (67.2%) view that teachers display greater readiness for co-operation with parents, while this share decreases in line with the family's socio-economic status. It is lowest in well-off (and most often better educated) parents.

The obtained results are connected to our previous findings, as there is a certain correlation between parents' education and their monthly income. Even today, education remains a factor of social and economic promotion for an individual and a family. This means that today, on average, better educated parents have higher monthly income. The last two tables lead us to the conclusion that parents with higher education and monthly income view the school's and teachers' readiness for co-operation less favourably.

## How do schools and teachers prepare themselves for co-operation with the home or parents?

If the first question aimed to research the general atmosphere regarding co-operation between the school and home, we now attempted to establish the state of planning and strategy of school's preparations for co-operation with the home. We were interested in how much this co-operation is planned in advance by the school and how individual teachers prepare for it.

*Planning school-home co-operation?*

We wondered whether schools prepared a long term plan of co-operation with parents or if co-operation is more sporadic and spontaneous; how teachers are satisfied with it in general, and how co-operation could be improved.

**Table 7.** How do you estimate the school's planning of co-operation with the home (of teachers with parents)

|  | Parents | | Teachers | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
|  | f | f % | f | f % |
| Good, well thought; the school has prepared a special long-term plan. | 420 | 25.5 | 208 | 45.0 |
| Good, but without a special plan. |  |  | 114 | 24.7 |
| Many things could be improved. | 733 | 44.5 | 118 | 25.5 |
| Schools pay too little attention to this matter. Only the prescribed forms are developed. | 487 | 29.5 | 19 | 4.1 |
| Other | 9 | 0.5 | 3 | 0.6 |

We were interested in whether parents and teachers differ in their overall assessment of school-home co-operation, and verified this with the $\chi^2$-test. The calculated $\chi^2$ value has a high statistical significance ($\chi^2 = 181.2$; g = 3, p = 0.000) since the sample data show that parents' and teachers' opinions of this question vary considerably. 44.5% of parents think that much can be improved and that schools or teachers deal too little with this question (29.5%), while in contrast, only a quarter of teachers estimate that co-operation is good but that much could be improved. Only slightly more than 4.1% of teachers answered that they deal too little with this area and participate only within the frame of what is prescribed.[3]

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[3]  In verifying statistically significant differences between teachers' and parents' answers to this question we omitted the answer category 'My opinion is that the school has

The data leads to the conclusion that almost a quarter of teachers think that school-parent co-operation is good despite them having prepared no special programme. If the school has no co-operation plan it is difficult to raise co-operation to a higher level. Without a well considered, purposely prepared long-term annual plan, improvement can only be sporadic and evident only in isolated cases.

What conclusions can be drawn from this? Parents, but not teachers, feel that this area is neglected. It seems that teachers are considerably more satisfied with the present situation.

Schools should take these differing opinions of teachers and parents into consideration. Do teachers think that the school co-operates well if they are well prepared and co-operation takes place regularly through the prescribed forms? If the quality co-operation criterion that all parents are enabled equal access to information on work and development of their child at school is sufficiently important for teachers, this is probably not true for parents. Parents estimate quality co-operation through the attention the teacher dedicates to them and their child. Where else could the feeling of almost half the parents originate from, namely that co-operation could be much improved, and the feeling of almost a third of them, namely that this area is not dealt sufficiently with and that co-operation is only exercised within the prescribed framework?

After teachers and parents provided their general opinions on school-home co-operation, teachers also assessed their own preparedness for co-operation with parents.

## How do teachers prepare for co-operation with parents?

**Table 8.** Do teachers make special plans for co-operation with parents in their annual work plan?

| Planning co-operation with parents | f | f % |
|---|---|---|
| Each year, special forms of co-operation in addition to those prescribed. | 298 | 63.9 |
| I do not foresee special forms of co-operation; I plan them as necessary. | 167 | 35.8 |
| Other | 1 | 0.2 |

well considered school-home co-operation, however, the school has no specific programme for co-operation with parents. Co-operation with parents is an integral part of other plans'. This option, presented in the table, was included in the questionnaire for teachers, because we assumed that parents did not know other school plans and thus could not know whether these plans integrated contents related to co-operation with parents.

By verifying the equal probability hypothesis ($\chi^2 = 285.25$, g = 1; p = 0.000) we established that those teachers who plan specific forms in addition to standard forms of co-operation with parents, such as class meetings and consultation hours, prevail in the basic multitude of teachers.

The answers show that 63.9% (298) of teachers prepare specific forms of contacts in addition to consultation hours and class meetings, while 35.8% (167) of teachers state that they do not plan special forms of co-operation with parents in advance, but as needed. Naturally, we were interested in the types of these special forms of co-operation between individual teachers and parents:

Teachers prepare the following specifically for parents:
– Activity days, such as cultural days, sports days, natural sciences days, meetings at festival days, excursions;
– Open days; open classes, the School Day;
– Participation in school events, performances, exhibitions, plays, various meetings, etc., such as trips, picnics, concluding social events, tea parties, cycling tours, etc.; various workshops: workshops with parents and children;
– Inclusion of parents in other official forms of school work, such as lessons, expert teams, conversational hours, optional school activities;
– Lectures, round tables, education for parents;
– School for parents;
– Participation in projects, fund-raising and community work.

Teachers' answers indicate that these special forms of connecting the school or teachers with parents are organised outside officially regulated forms. They also show that some of these forms are organised by teachers (class teachers) themselves for parents of individual classes, some are organised for larger groups of parents, for example for parents at the grade or school level.

As already mentioned, such forms of informal co-operation have certain advantages: they are more connected to interests and needs, they form better working connections, and it is quicker to establish personal relations and trust.

The data also show that more often special forms of work and co-operation that give parents the 'passive role of onlookers' are prepared by teachers (for example almost 30% of teachers prepare various events, performances, meetings for parents), while less than 10% of teachers also prepare forms in which parents actively participate (such as participation in projects, in classes, conversation hours, etc.).

## School counsellors and co-operation with parents

We were further interested in how school counsellors view their co-operation with parents and how they prepare for it.

## General attitudes counsellors have towards co-operation with parents

**Table 9.** General attitudes counsellors have towards co-operation with parents

| General attitudes counsellors have towards co-operation with parents | f | f % |
|---|---|---|
| I regularly include parents in my work with pupils. | 135 | 81.8 |
| I think there is no need to constantly co-operate with parents. | 30 | 18.2 |
| What happens to the child at school is mainly the school's matter. | 0 | 0.0 |
| Total | 165 | 100.0 |

According to the table, 81.8% of counsellors regularly include parents in their work with pupils. This is as expected. Counsellors who perform counselling work with pupils and who attempt to help them change their attitudes and behaviour should actually not work without parent support. Moreover, changing pupils' attitudes and behaviour can only be effective if parents are involved in some way. The manner of this involvement depends on the actual case at hand. In some cases this will only imply seeking parents' consent, while in other cases this will involve regular consultations in order to ensure effective counselling.

Slovenian legislation also stipulates that counsellors must obtain the parents' or guardians' consent for working with children. Of course, some tasks can be considered as not interfering with pupils' privacy and thus parents' consent is not necessary. These tasks actually refer to the pupils' level of information. A fifth (18.2%) of counsellors is thus of the opinion that parents need not always be included.

*How do counsellors prepare themselves for co-operation with parents?*

Our findings on planning and the lack of teacher-parent co-operation planning also apply to counsellors' co-operation with parents. Our question is: How do counsellors prepare themselves for co-operation? Do they have special long term and annual plans ready for co-operation with parents or do they act as needed?

Counsellors' answers to the question whether they have a special section in their work plan for co-operation with parents are congruent with the responses above. Almost 70% of counsellors have a special section for co-operation with parents in their work plan, which seems to be very important for the professional operative

**Table 10.** Special section on co-operation with parents

| Special section on co-operation with parents | f | f % |
|---|---|---|
| Each year I make specific plans for co-operation with parents. | 114 | 69.5 |
| I don't have a special section on co-operation with parents. I include this in other parts of my work plan. | 39 | 23.8 |
| I plan co-operation with parents promptly, as needed. | 8 | 4.9 |
| Other | 3 | 1.8 |
| Total | 164 | 100.0 |

work. A special analysis of these plans could establish how much this planning refers to co-operation with parents in general (from the school's and class's point of view) and how much to co-operation with individual (specific) parents. 23.8% of counsellors have no special section on co-operation with parents, but plan such co-operation elsewhere in their work plans. Finally, some counselling workers plan co-operation with parents promptly, as needed. Under "Other", one counsellor wrote that he did not have a special column as he was an assistant, another planned co-operation promptly, but another included parents in each pupil treatment – this is a matter of systematic approach.

## Personal experiences obtained in co-operation with parents

We also established how counsellors experience their co-operation with parents. Positive experiences in co-operation with parents are linked to good results in advisory work with pupils and good experience with parents through discussions and their personalities. They evaluated statements from 1 – I absolutely disagree to 5 – I absolutely agree. (Table 11)

The results illustrate the relatively good personal experience of counsellors co-operating with parents, meaning that such co-operation can be one of the sources of motivated counselling work with pupils. Counsellors feel that parents are on their side and that parents are their allies, which means that it is not difficult to harmonise their goals and the way of helping the child, ensuring effective counselling to pupils. Realizing that a pupil has overcome learning problems or personal (developmental) troubles is a great reward for any counsellor, and such success motivates their further work. If in any way, directly or indirectly, they see an expression of gratitude or reward from parents or even if they only feel it, they are highly satisfied with their work. Such realisation or experience of success raises their personal and professional self-confidence and provides new energy for (and pleasure with) work. In reality, no

**Table 11.** Experiencing co-operation with parents

| Experience of co-operation with parents | N | min. | max. | x̄ | SD |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Parents are my allies. I feel parents are on my side. | 160 | 1 | 5 | 3.34 | .72 |
| Parents' approval means to me more than approval of teachers and the headmaster. | 164 | 1 | 5 | 2.76 | .93 |
| Parents with lower socioeconomic status (SES) get less involved in work and co-operation with school than parents with higher SES. | 164 | 1 | 5 | 2.64 | .98 |
| Less educated parents get less involved in work and co-operation with school than parents with higher education. | 163 | 1 | 5 | 2.64 | .92 |
| Parents with lower education have worse attitude towards their children and their education than parents with higher education. | 161 | 1 | 5 | 2.41 | .93 |
| Parents with lower SES have worse attitude towards their children and their education than parents with higher SES. | 164 | 1 | 5 | 2.41 | .91 |
| Teachers do not know how to establish connection with parents. | 161 | 1 | 5 | 2.32 | .76 |
| I notice that every year parents less often seek connections with a counsellor. | 163 | 1 | 5 | 2.22 | .82 |
| Parents' respect of counsellors has decreased in the last years. | 162 | 1 | 5 | 1.90 | .82 |
| Parents are indifferent towards my work, endeavours, successes, etc. | 163 | 1 | 4 | 1.78 | .75 |
| I feel as if parents treated me as their employee. | 163 | 1 | 4 | 1.64 | .68 |

praise from their superiors or monetary reward can replace this. And this is something counsellors are aware of. It would be appropriate to further foster good experiences with parents, as counselling workers work to help pupils in the first place and not to service the system.

As the data shows, less educated and lower income parents assess the school's and teachers' readiness for co-operation more favourably. However, the question is whether they actually make use of such co-operation. According to the data, counsellors have more difficulties getting in contact with poorer and less educated parents. Therefore it would be necessary to dedicate special attention to these parents by trying to adapt organizational options to establish special contacts, taking their life situations into account and trying to show that we are on their side and on the

side of their children. Although we are aware that such an approach to parents would represent an additional burden to counsellors, this can be less burdening than realizing that a pupil has not succeeded because he/she did not receive help despite it being available.

# Conclusion

The rare statements of teachers and parents who find that teachers avoid co-operation with parents and that even consultation hours are too much for them are evidence of extreme (exceptional) cases. The total number of parents who establish that teachers avoid co-operation with them does not exceed 50, representing only 3% of the sample population, yet in absolute numbers this number is not negligible. What can be done to change these unfavourable experiences or unsuitable positions?

The most effective method of changing unfavourable positions and teachers' attitudes towards parents or school culture that is disinclined to parents is searching for such forms of establishing contacts and getting to know each other that are suitable to parents. We believe that the cause of such positions is often a lack of familiarity with the work of both groups. Certainly, the most effective way of changing positions and practices would be to include parents in various school bodies where both groups would be able to become familiar with each other. The positions of both parties would change effectively only in the case both had good experiences with mutual co-operation.

How can the general relation of school staff towards parents be improved? Two levels need to be improved:
- The personal and human perspective (to work on subjective factors of both teachers and parents),
- The development of the organisational perspective of co-operation.

These two levels are interconnected. Good organisation of co-operation offers more opportunities for meeting and co-operating, which results in both getting to know and getting closer to each other.

Analysis of teachers', counsellors' and parents' answers showed that all are aware of the importance of mutual co-operation. Moreover, detailed analysis indicated that such awareness or need is more pronounced in teachers and stronger in more educated than in less educated parents. Referring to counsellors, the results show their relatively good personal experience in their co-operation with parents.

Our empirical research confirmed that schools in general exhibit a prevailing readiness and favourable atmosphere for co-operation with parents. A high level of

the school's or teachers' readiness to co-operate with parents is found (experienced) also by parents.

Our data show that schools and teachers are more satisfied with co-operation than parents. This fact should trigger self-critical reflection. Namely, if teachers think that co-operation is good, that we can be satisfied with it, this can reduce our need to develop better programmes and relations. Ultimately, the assessment of satisfactory co-operation includes the point of view of parents. And parents believe that co-operation could often be improved. Again, it is the schools', teachers' and counsellors' task to find what to improve and how.

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# Mišljenje učitelja, stručnih suradnika i roditelja o važnosti njihove suradnje

## Sašetak

U članku se usmjeravamo na ulogu nekih čimbenika dobre suradnje između doma i škole, osobito na mišljenja roditelja, učitelja i stručnih suradnika o njihovoj međusobnoj suradnji. Istraživanje je provedeno na reprezentativnom uzorku učitelja osnovne škole, stručnim suradnicima u osnovnim i srednjim školama te roditeljima čija djeca pohađaju treći, peti/šesti i deveti razred osnovne škole u Sloveniji. Jedan od glavnih nalaza jest da su svi oni svjesni važnosti te suradnje. Općenito, većina škola iskazuje veliku spremnost za suradnju s roditeljima. I roditelji osjećaju dobru volju škole i učitelja da surađuju. Međutim, rezultati ukazuju na to da bi se ta suradnja u mnogim aspektima mogla i popraviti. Na školama je da iznađu što i kako u tom smislu trebaju unaprijediti.

**Ključne riječi:** učitelji, stručni suradnici, roditelji, čimbenici suradnje