

Parental Perception of Parent-Teacher Partnerships in Croatian Preschool Institutions

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Abstract

Despite considerable theoretical and policy promotion of parent-teacher partnerships in inclusive settings, pre-service teachers in Croatia generally receive little preparation for involving parents. The aims of this study were to examine parental perception of parent-teacher partnerships and to establish the relation between parents' socio-demographic characteristics and length of their child's attendance of preschool.

A total of 271 parents of early childhood and preschool age children participated in this study. The Scale of parental perception of parent-teacher partnerships was designed for the purpose of this study. Three dimensions were obtained from the factor analysis. Those are: attitude toward reciprocity in partnerships ($\alpha = .93$; $N=14$; $M=5.48$), experience of teachers' support in parenthood ($\alpha = .92$; $N=6$; $M=3.84$), and receptivity to taking advice in upbringing ($\alpha = .73$; $N=4$; $M=5.38$).

Parents perceived that partnerships with teachers are at a relatively high level. They differ in their capacity to develop and maintain partnerships with teachers because of their level of education, length of their child's attendance of preschool, and frequency of attending parent-teacher meetings.

Investing in high-quality communication and creating confidence between parents and teachers should be the main goals of preschool institutions.

Key words: *early childhood; families; inclusive education; preschool teachers.*

Introduction

Children's rights to the best available developmental environment and parental right to support are based on their human rights, which are stated in several Council of Europe conventions. Its initiative to protect the best interest of a child results with

The Recommendation Rec 19 (Council of Europe, 2006) as a fundamental policy document that describes positive parenting as “nurturing, empowering, non-violent” and which provides “the full development of the child”. According to Daly (2014), the policy of parenting support has expanded throughout European countries as critical issue in understanding parental role in child well-being. Thereby, in contemporary education, preschool institutions have a decisive role in these processes. Mutual collaboration of families, educational institutions and local community results in higher student achievement, improvement of students’ behavior and attendance, and more positive school climate (Henderson & Mapp, 2002). As Sanders (2009, p. 339) highlighted:

In order for teachers to develop the kinds of relationships with diverse student populations’ families that have been linked to enhanced achievement and school success, they must be prepared to act as border crossers. By crossing literacy, poverty, and ethnic and racial borders in order to partner with the families of all students, these teachers can create inclusive learning environments that promote positive educational outcomes. Teachers, however, must be supported in this role.

The authors of this paper point out that it is of utmost importance to provide all professionals who work with children, such as preschool teachers, caregivers, educators, child-minders, etc., with guidelines and training on how to practice and support positive parenting. Therefore, the main topic of this paper is to investigate one of the numerous aspects of institutional support for positive parenting, or, more precisely, parents’ perception of partnership between the preschool teacher and parents.

Croatian educational policy of early childhood and preschool education determines the obligation of educational institutions to foster cooperation and partnership relations with families (National Curriculum for early and preschool education, 2014; National Framework Curriculum for preschool education and compulsory general and secondary education, 2011; State Pedagogical Standard of Preschool Education, 2008). Partnership between kindergarten and parents is one of the most valuable strongholds of the new curriculum, where parents are regarded as partners, defenders and promoters of educational process in preschool (Epstein, 1986, 2001; Hall, 2016; Nenadić, Bilan, & Matov, 2015; Resman, 2000; Visković & Višnjić Jevtić, 2017). Building quality relationships between preschool teachers and parents in developing cooperation is beneficial for children, parents and preschool teachers (Vlah & Tatalović-Vorkapić, 2011).

In addition, parents’ and preschool teachers’ educational activities require mutual understanding and cooperation by which important educational goals which are in accordance with the child’s needs and abilities are achieved (National Framework Curriculum for preschool education and compulsory general and secondary education, 2011). Developing partnership requires continuity to strengthen the partnership

and increase mutual trust (Ajduković, 1997; Hackney & Cormier, 2012; Janković, 1997, 2004, 2004a; Jurčić, 2012; Nelson, 2007). Continuous communication between preschool teachers and parents about children can have beneficial effect on children and increase their appreciation and self-confidence, level of security, support, and trust (Tankersley et al., 2012). As a result, they become more successful and involved.

It is important to achieve quality, direct and supportive communication between parents and preschool teachers, joint decision-making related to development, learning and social life of children in the group as well as to enable parents to spend time in educational groups so as to learn more about their child (National Curriculum for early and preschool education, 2014). Epstein (2001) listed six types of parental involvement: helping parents in parenting, communication between parents and preschool teachers, parents volunteering in preschool institutions, helping parents to encourage child's learning at home, parental involvement in decision-making and parents' involvement in cooperation with the local community.

Preschool teachers can teach parents ways of acquiring specific parental knowledge (Slunjski, 2008), one of which is parent counseling (State Pedagogical Standard of Preschool Education, 2008, Article 29.2). During individual conferences, preschool teachers strengthen parents' competence to raise their child. Moreover, preschool teachers affirm their own power and encourage themselves to outreach their own abilities through the process of counselling (Srok & Skočić-Mihić, 2013). Although parents see teachers as experts and often ask them for help (Pećnik, 2013; Srića & Skočić Mihić, 2016; Tadić, Skočić Mihić, & Srića, 2016), preschool teachers in Croatia perceive themselves as insufficiently competent for cooperation and parent counselling (Maleš, Stričević, & Ljubetić 2010). Possible reasons for their low sense of competence could be a lack of pre-service training or even in-service training (Skočić Mihić, Blanuša Trošelj, & Katić, 2015).

Parents and teachers do not have to perceive the child in the same way since children behave distinctively in different environments (Kontoniemi et al., 2007, as cited in Vlah & Tatalović-Vorkapić, 2011). Vlah and Tatalović-Vorkapić (2011) state that mothers and preschool teachers perceive child's behavior differently. It is by development of relationship between preschool teachers and parents that the child's full growth and development is encouraged, as well as quality education and creating and sharing positive image of the child with respect to their individual characteristics (Slunjski, 2008). Young children's parents who participated in the evaluation of the program expressed a higher level of satisfaction with the program in which they were more included (Amirali Jinnah & Henley Walters, 2009).

It is highlighted in contemporary preschool programs that there is a need to respect the specificities of each family as well as to treat parents as equal partners and active participants in the program (Nenadić Bilan & Matov, 2015). Environmental factors have a direct impact on parenting success. However, political, economic and financial stability, as well as orderly housing conditions and appropriate employment

qualifications can contribute to the sense of power and security which results in the success and quality of parenting (Ljubetić, 2007). We should bear in mind that some parents, due to their economic, physical or mental disabilities, fail to get involved in their child's upbringing and education and usually those parents are considered as difficult to approach (Ljubetić, 2014).

Some parents may offer resistance to communication and cooperation with preschool teachers because of the lack of information, insecurity, vulnerability, skepticism, and caution (Hackney & Cormier, 2012). Furthermore, when parents are given tasks which are beyond their competences, time or are contrary to the interests of the family, they become frustrated and they resist the pressure (Ljubetić, 2014). Therefore, Ljubetić (2014) believes that it would be unwise for preschool teachers to generalize that parents are not interested or that they are neglectful. One way of building trust and tighter links between preschool teachers and parents is organizing individual conferences. As Närvänen and Markström (2015, p. 547) indicated, the main emphasis of parent-teacher conferences is "cooperation on issues related to children's development, learning, and well-being, and not on the assessment of an individual child". It is further stipulated that "parents and teachers should interact in everyday meetings as well as in the specific parent-teacher conferences in which the child's development and well-being is in focus". In other words, parent-teacher conferences could have an important role in building up parents' readiness for partnership with their children's teachers. Parents' higher level of education could be an important predictor of parents' involvement in preschool (Waanders, Mendez, & Downer, 2007). Therefore, it would be interesting to investigate this correlation in Croatian culture as well.

According to the introduction, the aims of this study were to examine: (i) parental perception of parent-teacher relationship, (ii) the correlation between parental perception of parent-teacher relationship and parents' age, frequency of attending parent-teacher conferences and length of their child's attendance of preschool, and (iii) differences in the parental perception of parent-teacher relationship according to parents' educational level.

Method

Participants

The study included 271 parents of early childhood and preschool aged children who attended educational institutions, 261 of whom were mothers and 10 were fathers. Parents' average age was 32 years. The youngest parent was 19, whereas the oldest was 45 years old. Most parents (86%) were married, 10% lived in cohabitation, and 4% were single parents. One third of parents (36%) had completed secondary school, 20% had undergraduate level of education, 35% had graduate level of education, 8% had a master's degree, and less than 1% of the parents had a doctorate degree. Only one parent had finished only primary school. One fifth of parents (23%) live in the

City of Zagreb, 14% in Primorje-Gorski Kotar County, 13% in Split-Dalmatia County and Zagreb County, 4% in Sisak-Moslavina County, Osijek-Baranja County and Istria County, 3% in Varaždin County and Bjelovar-Bilogora County, 2% in Šibenik-Knin County, and less than 2% in Virovitica-Podravina County, Brod-Posavina County, Zadar County, Dubrovnik-Neretva County, Karlovac County, Vukovar-Srijem County, Krapina-Zagorje County, Međimurje County, Koprivnica-Križevci County and Požega-Slavonia County, and one parent in Lika-Senj County (0.4%).

Measures

Parents' socio-demographic characteristics are described by gender, age, level of education, marital status, counties, economic status and number of children.

The *Scale of parental perception of quality partnership* consists of 33 items that examine parents' attitudes and experiences with the relationship built in parent-teacher partnerships in kindergartens in order to achieve their child's well-being. It was developed according to the theoretical background in the field of parent-teacher partnerships and legal documents in Croatian preschool education. Previous research studies (Skočić Mihić, Blanuša Tošelj, & Katić, 2015; Tadić, Skočić Mihić, & Srića, 2016) have already discussed different aspects of parent-teacher partnership.

In the first phase of the scale-development process, the original scale contained 42 items in three dimensions: (1) parents' opinions about the importance of mutual and committed parent-teacher partnerships, as well as good communication skills and forms of their cooperation in preschool institution, such as individual meetings; (2) parental experience in receiving any form of teacher's support in issues that concern them in child upbringing, such as explaining certain situations and (3) parental receptivity for teachers' advice about child upbringing. In the scale-development process the small focus group of experts discussed the specific goals: (1) clear analysis of each item that explains partnership relations from their point of view, (2) rewording or eliminating some confusing or redundant items, (3) revising the format and clarity of the instructions, (4) defining a Likert-type scale format for collecting responses on 7-point scales ranging from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 7 ("strongly agree").

As expected, three factors were obtained. Cronbach's reliability coefficients were excellent for the first two factors ($\alpha_1=.93$ and $\alpha_2=.92$, respectively), and acceptable for the third one ($\alpha_3=.72$).

Procedure

The survey was conducted via a web questionnaire. It provided instructions for use and its purpose. It was sent to 13 Facebook pages of various associations or groups of parents who represent and promote those interests. The questionnaire was posted on 10 websites of the following associations: Kangaroo, Stork – parents in action, Parents. hr, Modern parenthood, Mother's joys and worries, Mothers – future mothers from direct to anonymous questions, Mothers' and fathers' initiative of the City of Rijeka,

Advice for pregnant women and young mothers, and From Mothers to Mothers. The first part of the questionnaire shows researchers' background and purpose of the study. It was also highlighted that participation in the survey is voluntary and the results are anonymous. Parents voluntarily participated in the study and anonymity has been assured.

Data Processing Methods

The results obtained from the general information about the respondents are shown numerically (frequency) and graphically. Basic statistical data were calculated on every variable scale (Mean, Standard Deviation). Factor analysis, i.e. extraction factor of maximum similarity ("maximum-likelihood") with oblimin factor axis was used, and for the identification of significant factors the Guttman-Kaiser criterion and Catell's graphical representation of decline in the value of the characteristic roots were used. The reliability of the Scale was calculated (Cronbach's alpha $\alpha_1=.93$, $\alpha_2=.92$ and $\alpha_3=.73$) and variable scales were summed in a linear composite.

Results

The basic statistical data on the *Scale of parental perception of quality partnerships with preschool teachers* are shown in Table 1.

Factor analysis of the *Scale of parental perception of quality partnerships with preschool teachers* yielded three factors of characteristic root (10.38, 2.28 and 1.86) which explain 60.52% of the pooled variance in relation to the whole area of the manifested variables. Table 1 represents the factor structure of the *Scale of parental perception of quality partnerships with preschool teachers*.

Table 1

Basic statistical data and factor structure of the Scale of parental perception of quality partnerships with preschool teachers

Attitude toward reciprocity in partnerships (N=14; M=5.48, $\alpha=.93$)	M	SD	h ²	β
Mutual commitment and dedication is important for quality cooperation.	5.99	1.56	.89	.98
Teachers and parents have the opportunity to get to know each other through different forms of cooperation.	5.80	1.63	.82	.89
I am ready to cooperate with preschool teachers in any form.	5.83	1.61	.80	.88
I believe it is important to know what is going on with my child while he/she is in the kindergarten.	6.19	1.51	.72	.85
It is important to exchange information about the child with teachers.	5.96	1.62	.76	.82
I am willing to help teachers by supplying them with certain materials needed for education process etc.	5.64	1.70	.59	.75
I welcome teachers' advice and suggestions.	5.49	1.68	.61	.72

Attitude toward reciprocity in partnerships (N=14; M=5.48, $\alpha=.93$)	M	SD	h^2	β
I think parent counselling is an important part of teachers' work.	4.99	1.85	.54	.72
I initiate conversation with teachers related to my child.	4.94	1.83	.40	.67
The relationship with preschool teachers is primarily based on mutual trust.	5.53	1.66	.59	.57
I can observe teacher's opinion of my child through verbal and nonverbal communication.	5.43	1.65	.56	.55
I think teachers are competent to counsel parents.	4.58	1.83	.54	.49
I respect and take teachers' advice and suggestions regarding upbringing of my child.	4.46	1.61	.51	.47
I find it useful to stay with my child in preschool.	4.63	2.04	.42	.39
Experience of teachers' support in parenthood (N=6; M=3.84; $\alpha=.92$)	M	SD	h^2	β
Teacher helps me understand certain situations clearly.	4.21	1.98	.79	.83
Teacher supports my creativity and independence in parenting style.	4.09	1.99	.73	.83
Teacher encourages me to express my thoughts, feelings and needs.	3.80	1.93	.70	.82
Teacher offers different sources of literature related to a particular area of the conversation or problem, which I find useful.	2.81	1.88	.56	.82
Teacher motivates me to engage in various forms of cooperation.	4.02	1.99	.69	.81
Individual conferences help me in parenting.	3.89	2.07	.68	.75
Accepting parenting advice in upbringing (N=4; M=5.38; $\alpha=.73$).	M	SD	h^2	β
I do not need teacher's advice regarding the upbringing of my child.	5.2	1.82	.66	.81
I think teachers should take care of children without interfering in their upbringing. (R)	5.12	1.85	.53	.73
Teachers interfere in parents' private life too much. (R)	6.01	1.54	.26	.50
I cooperate with teacher in order to make sure that they raise my child the way I want it. (R)	5.22	1.77	.16	.38

h^2 – communalities; β - Factor saturation from pattern matrix (only saturation more than 0.3 is shown), M= Mean, SD= Standard Deviation

The first factor, *Attitude toward reciprocity in partnerships*, is mostly described by the following variables: Mutual commitment and dedication is important for quality cooperation; Teachers and parents have the opportunity to get to know each other through different forms of cooperation; I am ready to cooperate with preschool

teachers in any form; I believe it is important to know what is going on with my child while he/she is in the kindergarten, and It is important to exchange information about the child with teachers (Table 1). Medium saturated variables are: I am willing to help teachers by supplying them with certain materials needed for education process etc.; I welcome teachers' advice and suggestions; I think parent counselling is an important part of teachers' work; I initiate conversation with teachers related to my child; The relationship with preschool teachers is primarily based on mutual trust, and I can observe teacher's opinion of my child through verbal and nonverbal communication. The following variables are low saturated: I think teachers are competent to counsel parents; I respect and take teachers' advice and suggestions regarding the upbringing of my child; and I find it useful to stay with my child in preschool. High saturated variables in the second factor, *Experience of teachers' support in parenthood*, are: Teacher helps me understand certain situations clearly; Teacher supports my creativity and independence in parenting style; Teacher encourages me to express my thoughts, feelings and needs; Teacher motivates me to engage in various forms of cooperation, and Individual conferences help me in parenting. The most saturated variable in the third factor, *Accepting parenting advice in upbringing*, is: I do not need teacher's advice regarding the upbringing of my child; medium saturated is the variable: I think teachers should take care of children without interfering in their upbringing, and low saturated variables are: Teachers interfere in parents' private life too much and I cooperate with the teacher in order to make sure that they raise my child the way I want it. Since variables from the third factor were negatively oriented, their values have been recoded. Analyzing the variables of the *Scale of parental perception of quality partnerships with preschool teachers* individually, both minimum and maximum results were obtained, meaning that parents' opinions differ from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree". The highest result and minimal saturation of the result was obtained from the variable I believe it is important to know what is going on with my child while he/she is in the kindergarten, meaning that parents agree on this statement the most.

Ranking descriptive parameters according to variables, it is evident that (i) **parents strongly agree** that mutual commitment and dedication as well as exchange of information with teachers regarding their child are extremely important. Moreover, parents are willing to cooperate with teachers in any way. They believe they get to know each other better through different ways of cooperation and they are pleased to contribute to the quality of education process by bringing miscellaneous materials, etc. Furthermore, (ii) **parents mostly agree** that trust is fairly significant in the process of building relationship with the teachers. Advice and suggestions are welcome. They can observe the teacher's opinion of their child through verbal and nonverbal communication with the teachers. Parents believe parent counselling is a vital aspect of their work. They also initiate conversations with the teachers and they accept their advice regarding the upbringing of their child because they think they are competent

professionals. They find spending time in kindergarten together with the child quite valuable. Teachers encourage their creativity and motivate them to get included in various ways in cooperation with the institution and its staff. On the other hand, (iii) **parents partly agree** regarding the value of individual conferences and the fact that teachers encourage them to express their thoughts, feelings and needs as well as that they provide them with appropriate literature when they encounter a problem. They also partly agree when it comes to interfering in parents' private life. Lastly, (iv) **parents agree** that they do need teacher's advice, that they do not cooperate with the teachers in order to control whether their style of upbringing is in accordance to theirs, and that teachers should take care of children without interfering in their upbringing.

According to average results of linear composites of the three dimensions, all of which are reliable according to Cronbach alpha value, the attitude toward reciprocity in partnership with teachers and accepting teachers' advice are highly ranked among parents, while experience of teachers' support in parenthood is medium.

Table 2

Intercorrelation and Spearman's correlation between dimensions and variables of frequency of individual conferences, length of child's attendance of kindergarten and parents' age

	2	3	4	5	6
1 Attitude toward reciprocity in partnership	.65**	.12	.09	-.04	-.06
2 Experience of teachers' support in parenthood	1	.03	.23**	-.13*	-.15*
3 Accepting parenting advice		1	.06	.05	-.16*
4 Frequency of parent-teacher individual conferences			1	.23**	.01
5 Length of child's attendance of preschool				1	.28**
6 Parents' age					1

A significant correlation was found among certain dimensions of the *Scale of parental perception of quality partnerships with preschool teachers* reciprocally, and the set of the following variables: Frequency of parent-teacher individual conferences, Length of child's attendance of preschool, and Parents' age (Table 2). The more positive the parents' attitude toward partnership in parenthood is, the better experience of teachers' support in parenthood they express. And vice versa, the better the experience of teachers' support in parenthood, the more positive the attitude toward reciprocity in partnership. Furthermore, if parents attend parent-teacher conferences more often, they will have a more positive experience regarding teachers' support in parenthood. In other words, if parents have positive experience regarding teachers' support in parenthood, they will attend parent-teacher conferences more often. Lastly, according to the results, the younger parents express higher level of teacher's support in parenthood. Moreover, they are more prone to accept advice from teachers.

Table 3

Differences in the Scale of parental perception of quality partnerships with preschool teachers with regard to parents' education

	PS	SS	UG	G	MD	X ²
Attitude toward reciprocity in partnership	1.50	114.18	112.50	125.73	143.73	7.05
Experience of teachers' support in parenthood	5.50	133.72	119.04	126.00	147.29	5.4
Accepting teachers' parenting advice	165.00	110.16	141.34	147.62	146.45	13.33*

PS=Primary School (0.4%), SS=Secondary School (36.2%), UG=Undergraduate (20.3%), G=Graduate (34.7%), MD=Master's Degree (7.7%)

According to the Kruskal-Wallis test (Table 3), there are differences between parents with different level of education in their receptivity to taking advice regarding upbringing. Parents with the lowest level of education, i.e. only primary school, have the highest scores in this factor. It is important to highlight that there are only few of them (0.4%). Interestingly, parents with secondary educational qualification have the lowest level of receptivity to taking teachers' parenting advice.

Discussion

According to given results, parents have a positive attitude toward reciprocity of partnership between parents and preschool teachers. They are willing to accept advice, but their experience of teachers' support regarding parenthood is neither high nor low-ranked. Their attitude toward reciprocity in parenthood is positively connected to their experience of teachers' support in parenthood. These results confirm the theory presented in the introduction, according to which the development of trustful and supportive relationship between parents and preschool teachers is crucial in creating and maintaining quality partnership that supports education. Relatively high aptitude to receive teachers' advice and suggestions presupposes applying them in their upbringing because teachers provide additional information about certain issues. Therefore, all education systems strive to achieve as close cooperation with parents as possible even before going to school, as Resman (2000) also noticed. It is well-known that the sense of acceptance, welcome and equality in partnership, as well as listening, satisfying specific needs, solving dilemmas, and improving parenting skills are what attracts parents to a certain institution. Praising parents' involvement is also an important aspect (Henderson et al., 2007, as cited in Ljubetić, 2014). Therefore, the results of the present study could be useful in empowering those concepts. According to the results, the values on attitudes toward partnership and accepting parenting advice are quite high. Besides help in positive parenting, Resman (2000) states it is essential to develop the partnership in order to avoid conflict situations which show a negative impact of different parenting styles on children. The authors of this study believe that the teacher has the responsibility to evoke a sense of trust and security

to establish a meaningful relationship with parents. Moreover, the result of medium expressed experience of support in parenthood should be regarded as a reason to question the teacher's role in creating the partnership with parents. This should be the question for further research.

The findings of this research emphasize the importance of knowing each and every parent, i.e. their attitudes, values and interests, as well as some personal data, such as socio-demographic characteristics and socio-cultural context in which the family lives. As the results show, younger parents have less experience in teachers' support in parenthood than the older ones. They are also less prone to take advice from older parents. Parents with secondary education qualification have the lowest rate of accepting parenting advice. Therefore, it is evident that if the teachers have more information about the parents, their work with parents will be of greater quality. They will be able to guide them properly because they know their personality, mindset, attitudes and knowledge. Teachers tend to believe they have done everything they could have to attract parents and then they give up. But, sometimes it is not the case. It is the process of partnership development that should be critically analyzed. One should question whether the relationship between teachers and parents should be regarded as a transformable and systematic challenge that presupposes testing and changes in attitudes and beliefs, or it is not the case. If the answer is yes, then the lack of partnership, as Ljubetić (2014) highlighted, can be viewed as a challenge which only the competent professional can respond to, leaving enough time for exploring various strategies, and to reflect and choose new ones. That person should also be capable of taking proactive role and be responsible enough to constantly self-assess and raise awareness of his/her beliefs and attitudes towards the family and change it according to new findings. Most parents are open to communication and cooperation with preschool teachers because they want to know how their child spends time in preschool – what he/she does, who he/she plays with and if he/she is making progress. The only difference is in parents' openness. We agree with Resman (2000) that partnership development depends on numerous subjective circumstances. In other words, teachers will be able to develop partnership with some parents more easily. Sometimes it is difficult to begin a relationship because some parents refuse to get involved. It is of crucial importance to point out that parents are not always the ones to blame. Sometimes it is the teacher who has issues in building a relationship and communicating. Despite that fact, a motive for cooperation for most parents is the care for their child's progress (Resman, 2000). The motivation and readiness to cooperate increase if parents' suggestions and opinions are accepted. The analysis of parents' answers confirms the famous postulate that teacher can approach parents more easily if they focus on the child's individuality (Resman, 2000). Moreover, the center of their partnership should be the child's well-being, needs and capacities. That kind of relationship is highly beneficial for the child because both teachers and parents

have the same tasks, goals and interests, and therefore, they support each other in order to attain goals that are in the child's best interest (Ljubetić, 2014).

According to given results, attending individual conferences with teachers is connected to better experience of teachers' support in parenthood. Therefore, this aspect of cooperation should be planned in annual, monthly and weekly planning of assignments, as Waanders, Mendez, and Downer (2007) strongly advise. Educational institutions offer various forms of cooperation with parents throughout the academic year. During individual conferences, teachers discuss the child's progress, accomplishments, difficulties, if any, and his/her behavior. In parent-teacher conferences parents are given information about plans, programs, activities etc. Edwards and Redfern (1988, as cited in Resman, 2000) hold that non-formal forms are better because they are a result of parents' and teachers' needs to connect and associate, by which they gain trust. Similarly, Hoover-Dempsey (1997) and Henderson and Mapp (2000, as cited in Tankersley et al., 2012) indicate that parents are more involved in studying and child's development when they feel that their effort or contribution is appreciated or when they are appropriately informed, and they feel welcomed in educational institution. Thus, preschool teachers should approach each family individually because each family is special in its own way. It is the only way to develop unique relationships and jointly create preschool environment which fosters growth and improvement of their partnership, as Ljubetić (2014) recommends. It would be advisable that parents and teachers meet before the child starts attending kindergarten. In that way, the teacher would get to know the child better and cooperative relationship with parents would develop from the early start. Hence, cooperation between kindergarten and parents should be one of the priority tasks of every educational institution (Resman, 2000; Tankersley et al., 2012). Since educational partnership whose goal is child's socialization (Jurčić, 2012; Resman, 2000) implies mutual completion and intertwining of parents' and teachers' competences, the authors highlight, relying on their research findings, that institution's employees have to accept every child, include him/her in educational process, and help him/her cope and understand the world around him/her. Thus, the results of this study support previous findings and recommendations in enhancing teacher-parent partnership in child well-being.

One of the limitations of this research is the web questionnaire methodology. Possible disadvantages of this methodology such as dishonesty, lack of conscientious responses, differences in understanding and interpretation, could be avoided in the future research by applying the paper and pencil method for parents during parents' conference. According to this, further direction of the work following this study could be finding out whether preschool teachers' perception is complementary with the perception of parents. Also, it would be interesting to investigate if preschool institution culture allows and gives structuralized environment for parent counseling as recommended. It would be of interest to observe the specific needs of parents considering their socio-demographic status and their value.

Conclusion

Child, parents and preschool teachers benefit from effective and meaningful communication which should be regular and two-sided. The partnership between parents and teachers should promote positive parenting. Hence, the teacher has to meet the parents in order to show that they are welcomed, accepted and appreciated. Teachers are encouraged to use and validate different strategies of approaching parents in order to establish quality relationship. Quality teachers strive to reach these goals. They try hard and constantly contemplate and reflect on what could be done to improve cooperation with parents. They carefully choose words to show parents in a clear and concrete manner how important and meaningful their involvement in the child's educational process is.

The aims of this work were to determine (i) parents' perception of partnership with teachers, (ii) connection between parents' perception of partnership with teachers and parents' age, frequency of attending individual conferences, and length of child's attendance in preschool, and (iii) the difference between parents' perception of partnership with teachers in relation to their education. In case of some items, parents mostly agreed upon the estimation of the importance of being informed about what is happening with their child when he/she is in the kindergarten. According to the results, parents accept reciprocity in partnership and also show readiness to accept the teachers' parenting advice, whereas their experience of teachers' support in parenthood is medium. Experience of teachers' support in parenthood is higher among older parents, parents who often attend parent-teacher conferences and whose child has been attending kindergarten for a longer period of time. That experience is the lowest among parents with secondary educational qualification.

These results imply that both parents and teachers have to know themselves and their relationship with the child to effectively approach the child and improve the quality of all family members' life. The findings suggested the following recommendations: (1) ensuring that preschool teachers are prepared for and trained to be supportive of parents and that they provide support to positive parenting in practice; (2) preschool institutions should create an environment that welcomes parents' different needs for support in specific areas, such as helping parents to understand certain situations clearly, supporting their creativity and independence in parenting style, encouraging them to express their thoughts, feelings and needs, offering different sources of literature related to a particular area of conversation or problem which parents find useful, motivating them to engage in various forms of cooperation and providing individual conferences that would help them in parenting. According to European parental policy, preschool institutions and teachers have to pay attention in order to address the needs of vulnerable parents, such as those with lower socio-demographic and educational level, etc.

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Stav roditelja prema partnerstvu roditelja i odgojitelja u hrvatskim predškolskim institucijama

Sažetak

Unatoč znatnoj teorijskoj i političkoj promociji koncepta partnerstva u inkluzivnim okruženjima, hrvatski se odgojitelji oskudno osposobljavaju za partnersko uključivanje roditelja.

Cilj rada je ispitati roditeljsku percepciju partnerskih odnosa s odgajateljima te utvrditi postoji li povezanost sa socio-demografskim značajkama roditelja i duljinom djetetova pohađanja vrtića. U istraživanju je sudjelovao 271 roditelj djece rane i predškolske dobi. Konstruirana je Skala roditeljske percepcije kvalitetnih partnerskih odnosa. Faktorskom analizom dobivene su tri dimenzije: stav o uzajamnosti u partnerstvu ($\alpha = ,93$; $N=14$; $M=5,48$), iskustvo da su odgojitelji pružili podršku u roditeljstvu ($\alpha = ,92$; $N=6$; $M=3,84$) i prihvaćanje savjeta odgojitelja u odgoju djeteta ($\alpha = ,73$; $N=4$; $M=5,38$). Roditelji percipiraju kako je partnerstvo s odgojiteljima na relativno visokoj razini i razlikuju se u svojim kapacitetima da razviju i održe partnerstvo s odgojiteljima u odnosu na razinu obrazovanja roditelja, duljinu djetetova pohađanja vrtića i učestalost roditeljskog prisustvovanja individualnim informacijama o djetetu. Ulaganje u kvalitetnu komunikaciju i stvaranje povjerenja između roditelja i odgojitelja trebalo bi biti glavni cilj u predškolskim ustanovama.

Ključne riječi: rano djetinjstvo; obitelj; inkluzivno obrazovanje; predškolski odgojitelji.