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## **EDUCATORS' STANCE ON COOPERATION BETWEEN PARENTS AND THE KINDERGARTEN**

### **Summary**

Cooperation between parents and the kindergarten is an important precondition for the optimum development of children and their kindergarten education. educators play an important role in initiating that partnership.

The goal of this research is to find out what are the stances of educators in Radost Crikvenica on cooperation between parents and the kindergarten.

The results of the research show that educators in Radost have a positive attitude and expectations towards the cooperation and partnership between parents and the kindergarten. Their stances differ depending on the level of education of the educator and their work place (central or local kindergarten).

**Key words:** kindergarten, educators, parents, cooperation

## **STAVOVI ODGAJATELJA O SURADNJI RODITELJA I VRTIĆA**

### **Sažetak**

Suradnja obitelji i dječjeg vrtića vrlo je važan preduvjet optimalnog razvoja i odgoja djeteta u vrtiću. Upravo odgojitelji imaju važnu ulogu u poticanju razvijanja partnerstva.

Cilj je ovog istraživanja ispitati stavove odgajatelja Dječjeg vrtića *Radost* iz Crikvenice o suradnji dječjeg vrtića i roditelja.

Rezultati provedenog istraživanja upućuju na zaključak da odgajatelji Dječjeg vrtića *Radost* imaju pozitivan stav i očekivanja prema suradnji i partnerstvu roditelja s predškolskom ustanovom. Stavovi odgajatelja o suradnji roditelja i dječjeg vrtića razlikuju se ovisno o razini obrazovanja odgajatelja i mjestu rada (centralni ili područni vrtić).

**Glavne riječi:** dječji vrtić; odgajatelji; roditelji; suradnja

## Introduction

Constructive cooperation between parents and the kindergarten is an important precondition for the optimum development of children and their kindergarten education, but also one of the quality standards of preschool institutions. The cooperation between the family and preschool institutions occupies a significant place in the Croatian National Curriculum for Kindergartens (2014). “Parents, guardians of the child should be accepted and respected as equal members of kindergarten- partners who enrich the institution with their individual particularities and their culture, which also contributes to the quality of the preschool institution as a whole.” (National Curriculum for Early and Preschool Education, 2014, 10). According to Slunjski, this contribution serves the higher goal of the cooperation - appropriate responses to the individual and developmental needs of the child and providing support for his or her overall development” (Slunjski et al., 2014, 14).

A number of authors (Jurčević Lozančić and Golik Homolak, 2020; Valjan-Vukić, Čeko Jurišić, Miočić, 2011; Visković and Višnjić Jevtić, 2016; Nenadić-Bilan and Zloković, 2015; Vlah and Tatalović-Vorkapić, 2011; Amatea, Mixon and McCarthy, 2013; Berčnik i Devjak, 2017; Maleš, 1996, 2015; Maleš, Kušević, Širanović, 2014; Epstein et al., 2001; Epstein and Sanders, 2006) point out the significance of achieving collaborative relations between the family and the preschool institution as an encouragement of child’s development and well-being in general. The cooperation between parents and the educator is an important factor of the child’s development because it enables the child to feel accepted, secure, satisfied and happy in an environment that stimulates the development of all of its skills (Jurčević Lozančić and Golik Homolak, 2020). A good cooperation with the kindergarten can also improve the quality of family impact and, in the long term, relate to better academic achievements and developed socio-emotional competence of children (Epstein, 1995, 2001; Henderson and Berla, 1994, according to Berčnik and Devjak, 2017; Cox, 2005; Desforges and Abouchaar, 2003; Fan and Chen, 2001; Mrvar, 2008; Lau, Hui and Rao, 2011; Henrich, 2013; Castro and et al., 2015; Sheridan, Smith and Kim, 2019; Maleš, 2015; Ljubetić, 2014; Mlinarević, Tomas, 2010). The cooperative relationship should result in mutual trust and respect, which contributes to all

participants in the relationship (Višnjić Jevtić, 2018). According to Valjan-Vukić, Čeko Jurišić and Miočić (2011), cooperation is a precondition for better parental and professional competence. It depends on the personality of each child, the educator's expertise and parental expectations. The positive effects of this partnership are "reflected in parental behaviour and their feeling of self-competence, the child's achievements, the educator's competence and his/her perception of the child and his family" (Nenadić-Bilan and Matov, 2015, 129).

In contemporary pedagogical literature, the term partnership often appears instead of cooperation because it points out the importance of equal communication, agreement and respect between parents and professionals in the process of education. According to Ljubetić (2014) and Maleš (2015), partnership is the highest rank of collaboration relations between family individuals (mostly parents or guardians) and the kindergarten (educators and non-teaching expert staff) focused on reaching the same goal (well-being of the child). Wit (2005, according to Mohorić and Nenadić-Bilan, 2019) defines partnership as meaningful cooperation between parents and institution in which both parties advise each other and give support to others. Jurčević Lozančić, Basta and Šerbetar (2017) consider partnership with parents to be a multidimensional process of joint interaction between the family and educators based on participation, interaction and equal relations. Partnership includes sharing responsibilities, showing affection, setting common goals, and working together (Devjak and Berčnik, 2009). Partnership refers to the relationship between educator and parent in which both sides share responsibility, knowledge and skills as well as decisions regarding the child (Ljubetić, 2014). It should include mutual respect and acceptance, sharing information, feelings and skills together with joint decisions and appreciation of the individuality of the family. Partnership is based on even distribution of power and emancipation, along with strengthening individual competence, learning and changing parenting.

A prerequisite for successfully established partnerships is the mutual readiness of parents and educators for quality communication and exchange, "which is manifested in open, supportive and equal communication in which each of the interlocutors, inherently to their knowledge and responsibilities, contributes

to quality partnership” Mohorić and Nenadić-Bilan (2019, 253). Ivaštanin and Vrbanec (2015) point out that there are some preconditions that must be satisfied to create and nourish partnership with the parents. One of the preconditions is certainly building trust, but also the acceptance of the value of everyone involved, with the same goal (well-being of the child). Besides, constructive partnership should be based on knowing and understanding the expectations from their individual roles. The authors believe that clear expectations and joint goals together with educators stances towards parental competences and the importance of their inclusion are the preconditions of partnership.

The merit of partnership is the equality of all parties. Nevertheless, the equality in relations doesn't include equality in educational factors (Ljubetić, 2014). Mohorić and Nenadić-Bilan (2019) agreed that although partnership implies equality of subjects, it does not mean equal starting positions, knowledge, interests, skills, expectations, nor equal responsibility. According to Višnjić-Jevtić (2018), educators are responsible for establishing this relationship because it is part of their professional activities. Oostam and Hooge (2013) agreed that the primary responsibility of an educational institution is in taking responsibility, in motivating parents, as well as in establishing rules related to partnership. They also emphasize the difference in the emotional involvement of co-workers. While parents are more emotionally involved than educators, educators exhibit a higher degree of professionalism. Likewise, they agreed that “equal status in a partnership should not obscure the fact that parents and schools have different expectations regarding their responsibilities, and their opinions on the optimal conditions for a child's development and learning may differ significantly.” (Oostdam and Hooge, 2013, 343).

Educators play an important role in encouraging parents to involve and develop partnership along with giving them support in upbringing. “When trying to accomplish partnership, it is important that the educator has an individual approach with proper recognition of parental and children's needs for joint actions and tries to find creative ways of satisfying them. We must emphasize that this is a continuous process, which requires severe engagement and good will from both parents and educators” (Kanjić, Boneta, 2012, 10).

Stevanović (2003; according to Antonović, 2019) points out that there are different forms of cooperation between the kindergarten and parents: parent-teacher meeting, parent-teacher conference, informing by means of fliers, parent's corner, parental workshops, parental inclusion in direct work etc. The most representative forms are parent-teacher conference and individual informing. Speaking of models of cooperation, Ljubetić (2001) separates them by the level of engagement and interrelationship. According to this author, these are the possible modalities: everyday exchange of information, parent-teacher conference, educational and creative workshops for parents, individual conversations with parents, direct parental participation in education, open days, get-togethers and field trips plus a visit to child's family. The results of the study made by Mavračić Miković (2019) show that individual conversations are the most adequate modality of cooperation between educators and parents. They also show that standard forms of communication are mostly used (info corners, parent-teacher conference, etc.), whereas parents wish for a more modern approach (communication by social networks, groups, etc.) The results of another study (Merčep, 2016) indicate that both parents and educators point out parent-teacher conferences as the most common form of cooperation, followed by parent-teacher meetings and finally ceremonies, raising funds and materials, internet, e-mail, workshops and lectures. According to research conducted by the authors Skočić Mihić and Srića (2016), parents participate in traditional forms of cooperation (parent-teacher meeting and parent-teacher conference) twice a year.

The partnership between educators and parents is conditioned by knowledge, skills and beliefs of the educator, which he/she acquires during professional education and continuous professional development (Maleš, Kušević, Širanović, 2014). Visković and Višnjić Jevtić (2017) also believe that the cooperation between kindergartens and families depends primarily on the stances and competences of educators. Visković and Višnjić Jevtić (2017) point out that studies prove that professional education itself is not sufficient for development of professional competences of educators. Thus, they emphasize the importance of development of these competences in practice, by means of informal and formal education. Numerous other authors (Epstein and Sanders, 2006; Hornby and Witte 2010; Miller et al., 2013; Amatea, Mixon and McCarthy,

2013; Bingham and Abernathy, 2007, according to Sheridan, Smith and Kim, 2019) observed that educators are not always adequately prepared to counsel and work with parents, and are considered unprepared for effective communication with the family. Similarly, Srića and Skočić Mihić (2016) indicate that, even though parents see educators as professionals and frequently ask for their help, Croatian educators consider themselves insufficiently competent to cooperate with and counsel parents (Ljubetić, M. and Mandarić Vukušić, A., 2011; Maleš, Stričević and Ljubetić, 2010; Ljubetić and Zadro, 2009). The results of the research conducted by Živčić-Bečirević and Smojver-Ažić (2005) show that “partnership with parents” is the second highest cause of stress for educators, regardless of the number of years of working experience.

Educators should develop and refine their competences through different areas of work during their initial education so they can prepare as best as they can for practical needs, especially for partnership with parents (Ljubetić, 2014). Jurčević Lozančić and Golik Homolak (2020) consider that educators’ competences for cooperation encompass establishing and maintaining satisfying professional and cooperative relations with the parents for the purpose of increasing the child’s educational well-being. Ivaštanin and Vrbanec (2015) point out that strengthening a educator’s professional competences provides a higher quality of support to the child’s development, as well as advancement of parental competences and the curriculum in general. In Šagud’s (2011) opinion, a higher level of intrinsic motivation of the educator is a necessity for professional development. They should focus on continuous learning and progression so that they may improve their educational practice. Jurčević Lozančić, Basta and Šerbetar (2019) conclude that a positive attitude in educators is the imperative for their professional work in establishing cooperation with parents.

The goal of this research is to find out about the stances of educators in Radost Crikvenica on cooperation between parents and kindergarten.

## **Method**

### *Purpose*

The purpose of this study was to research:

- a) the stances of educators in Radost Crikvenica on cooperation between parents and the kindergarten,
- b) the differences in the stances of educators in Radost Crikvenica on cooperation based on the educator's age, work experience, qualifications and workplace.

### *Research method*

For the purpose of this research, we chose the correlation approach and analysed the data obtained through closed-ended questions with multiple choice answer options using quantitative methods.

### *Sample*

25 educators from Kindergarten Radost participated in the study. 48% (12) of educators work in the central kindergarten and 11 of them (44%) work in one of the branches.

All participants were female. Age ranged from 23 to 58 years ( $M=37.71$ ,  $SD=10.82$ ). 8 educators (32%) are in their twenties, 7 (28%) are in their thirties, 4 (16%) are in their forties and 5 (20%) are in their fifties. 10 educators (40%) are younger than 35 and 14 educators (56%) are older than 35 years of age.

Educators' working experience varied from a couple of months to 34 years ( $M= 13.78$ ,  $SD=10.87$ ). 9 educators (36%) have 5 or less years of work experience, 7 (28%) have 6-19 years of work experience and 7 educators (28%) have 20 or more years of work experience. 7 of 25 educators (28%) have a master's degree.

### *Instrumentation*

Participants were asked to assess their agreement with items in the questionnaire measuring educators' attitudes about parents' cooperation and partnership with the kindergarten using a scale from 1 to 7 (1 meaning I do not agree at all, and 7 meaning I agree completely). The questionnaire was made specifically for the purpose of this research and consists of 23 items. Information about their work place (central kindergarten or one of the branches), sex, age, work experience and qualifications were recorded. The data was collected in one session.

### *Data analysis*

Statistical analysis was performed using IBM® SPSS® Statistics V20. The data was analysed by means of descriptive and inferential statistics. Frequencies, arithmetic mean and standard deviation were calculated for each item. The independent sample t-test was used in order to determine statistical differences in agreement with items on the questionnaire in correlation with age, qualifications and workplace, and a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to determine the differences in terms of work experience. The data is shown in a tabular form.

## **Results**

Table 1. shows the percentage of agreement with items in the questionnaire.



**Table 1.** Percentage of agreement with items

<b>Item</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>SD</b>
1. Informal parents', children's and educators' get-togethers contribute to the development of cooperative relationships.	/	/	/	4	4	4	88	6.72	.89
2. Creative workshops contribute to the development of a cooperative relationship between the family and the kindergarten.	/	/	4	/	4	36	56	6.40	.91
3. Educators should include parents (guardians) in making decisions about their child's development, learning and social life in their educational group (excursions, visitations, educational plan, activities etc.).	/	/	/	8	16	36	40	6.08	.95
4. Parents should volunteer (actively participate in activities) in their child's educational group at least once a year.	/	/	/	/	12.5	25	62.5	5.60	.72
5. It is important to enable participation in the educational group's programme for the parents who want to participate.	/	/	/	/	8.3	16.7	75	6.67	.64
6. Parental participation in parent-educator conferences is necessary for the establishment of quality cooperation between the family and the kindergarten.	/	/	/	4	/	16	80	6.72	.68
<b>Item</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>SD</b>

7.	Parental interest in cooperation and participation in the educational group's programme is an important factor in establishing a parent-kindergarten partnership.	/	/	/	/	/	24	76	6.76	.44
8.	Educators' professionalism is very important for their work with children and their parents.	/	/	/	/	/	24	76	6.76	.44
9.	Parents should participate in additional children's activities (such as visitations, excursions, get-togethers, events).	/	/	/	4	4	24	68	6.56	.77
10.	It is important to keep the parents informed about activities their child gladly participates in.	/	/	/	/	/	8	92	6.92	.28
11.	Parents should show the initiative for participation in the programme of their child's educational group.	/	4	/	28	16	24	28	5.40	1.38
12.	Educators should inform parents about their child's developmental progress.	/	/	/	/	/	24	76	6.76	.44
13.	Open and honest communication between parents and educators is the key for quality cooperation.	/	/	/	/	/	16	84	6.84	.37
14.	The quality of cooperation with parents depends entirely on the educators.	8.7	17.4	17.4	8.7	17.4	17.4	13	4.13	1.96
15.	Parents and educators are equally responsible for the quality of the cooperation between parents and the kindergarten.	4	4	/	8	12	16	56	5.92	1.66

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Item	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	M	SD
16. Educators' openness and accessibility is a prerequisite for the realisation of quality cooperation with parents.	/	/	/	4	4	32	60	6.48	.77
17. Parental involvement in the educational group's programme is not necessary.	36	12	8	12	20	4	8	312	2.07
18. Parents volunteering in their child's educational group contributes to their better understanding of the educational process and the educational group's programme.	/	/	4	/	4	28	64	6.48	.92
19. Educators' professionalism is of utmost importance for establishing quality cooperation with parents.	/	/	/	4	/	20	76	6.68	.69
20. Parent-educator meetings contribute to the development of parents' trust in their child's educators.	/	4	/	/	4	8	84	6.64	1.07
21. One of a kindergarten's quality indicators is the possibility of parents' participation and engagement in the educational process.	/	/	4	4	8	32	52	6.24	1.05
22. Parent-educator meetings are necessary for the establishment of closer relationships between parents and educators.	/	4	/	/	8	16	72	6.48	1.22
23. The quality of cooperation between parents and kindergarten depends entirely on the parents.	36	24	12	8	4	8	8	2.76	2.00

As is shown in Table 1., all educators agree that parents should actively participate and volunteer in their children's educational group at least once a year,

and that it is important to enable participation for the parents who show their interest. Also, all educators agree that parental interest in cooperation and participation is important factor in establishing partnership. All educators agree that their professionalism is very important for their work with children and parents. All educators acknowledge the importance of informing parents about activities their child enjoys and believe they should inform parents about their child's developmental progress. All educators believe that open and honest communication between parents and educators is the key for quality cooperation.

There is a high variability in answers for some of the items. 20% of educators believe that the responsibility for the quality cooperation of and parents rests on the parents, and 72% of educators do not agree. 47.8% of educators believe that the educator is responsible for the quality of cooperation, and 43.5% educators disagree. 84% of educators believe that the parents and educators are equally responsible for the quality of cooperation. 32% of educators think that active parental participation in educational group's programme is not important, and 56% of educators disagree.

### *Differences*

#### *Differences related to age*

There were no statistically significant differences in agreement with items in the questionnaire in terms of the educators' age.

Table 2. shows the differences in agreement with items in terms of educators' age

**Table 2.** Differences related to age

Item	Educators' age				Levene's test		t – test results		
	34 and under		35 and older		F	p	t	df	p
	M	SD	M	SD					
Item 1.	7.00	.00	6.57	1.16	7.02	.015	1.38	13	.189
Item 2.	6.60	.52	6.29	1.14	1.90	.181	.81	22	.426
Item 3.	6.50	.71	5.93	.92	.13	.726	1.65	22	.114
Item 4.	6.67	.71	6.43	.76	.68	.417	.75	21	.458
Item 5.	6.80	.42	6.69	.63	1.15	.296	.46	21	.647
Item 6.	6.90	.32	6.64	.84	3.47	.076	.92	22	.370
Item 7.	6.90	.32	6.71	.47	6.07	.022	1.16	21.96	.259
Item 8.	6.90	.32	6.71	.47	6.07	.022	1.16	21.96	.259
Item 9.	6.80	.42	6.50	.85	3.12	.091	1.02	22	.319
Item 10.	7.00	.00	6.93	.27	3.31	.082	.84	22	.410
Item 11.	5.50	1.35	5.36	1.50	.00	.961	.24	22	.813
Item 12.	6.80	.42	6.79	.43	.03	.872	.08	22	.936
Item 13.	6.90	.32	6.86	.36	.37	.548	.30	22	.767
Item 14.	3.70	2	4.67	1.87	.13	.717	1.17	20	.257
Item 15.	6.50	.85	5.64	1.98	4.03	.057	1.28	22	.215
Item 16.	6.50	.71	6.64	.50	2.19	.153	.58	22	.566
Item 17.	3.60	2.50	2.64	1.69	4.58	.044	1.05	14.74	.311
Item 18.	6.60	.52	6.43	1.16	1.77	.197	.44	22	.667
Item 19.	6.90	.32	6.57	.85	5.04	.035	1.32	17.56	.203
Item 20.	6.90	.312	6.57	1.34	2.40	.136	.75	22	.458
Item 21.	6.60	.70	6.14	1.10	.42	.526	1.15	22	.261
Item 22.	6.80	.42	6.36	1.39	3.29	.084	.97	22	.343
Item 23.	2.80	2.15	2.79	2.04	.03	.872	.02	22	.987

*Differences related to work experience*

There were no statistically significant differences in agreement with items in the questionnaire in terms of the educators' work experience.

Table 3. shows the differences in agreement with items in terms of educators' work experience

**Table 3.** Work experience

Item	Differences related to work experience						Test of homogeneity of variance			ANOVA / Welch results		
	5 or less		6 - 19		20 or more		Levene statistics	df	p	F	df	p
Item 1.	7.00	.00	6.71	.76	6.43	1.51	4.34	2, 20	.027	.75	2, 20	.484
Item 2.	6.44	.53	6.29	.76	6.43	1.51	1.24	2, 20	.310	.06	2, 20	.943
Item 3.	6.56	.53	5.86	.90	6.14	1.07	.76	2, 20	.481	1.42	2, 20	.265
Item 4.	6.44	.88	6.57	.79	6.57	.53	1.04	2, 20	.373	.08	2, 20	.927
Item 5.	6.78	.44	6.71	.76	6.67	.52	.35	2, 19	.710	.07	2, 19	.933
Item 6.	6.89	.33	6.43	1.13	6.86	.38	4.35	2, 20	.027	.510	2, 11.036	.375
Item 7.	6.89	.33	6.71	.49	6.71	.48	2.29	2, 20	.127	.45	2, 20	.646
Item 8.	6.78	.44	6.86	.38	6.71	.48	.81	2, 20	.460	.19	2, 20	.831
Item 9.	6.78	.44	6.14	1.07	6.86	.38	2.39	2, 20	.118	2.38	2, 20	.118
Item 10.	7.00	.00	7.00	.00	6.86	.38	6.68	2, 20	.006	1.16	2, 20	.334
Item 11.	5.56	1.33	4.57	1.62	6.29	.76	2.01	2, 20	.160	3.11	2, 20	.067
Item 12.	6.78	.44	6.86	.38	6.71	.48	.81	2, 20	.460	.19	2, 20	.831
Item 13.	6.89	.33	6.86	.38	6.86	.38	.09	2, 20	.917	.02	2, 20	.979
Item 14.	3.89	1.83	4.86	1.46	4.60	2.51	1.67	2, 18	.216	.55	2, 18	.583
Item 15.	6.44	.88	5.71	1.80	5.57	2.30	2.08	2, 20	.151	.63	2, 20	.545
Item 16.	6.56	.53	6.43	.79	6.71	.48	2.13	2, 20	.145	.39	2, 20	.682
Item 17.	3.67	2.50	2.71	2.06	2.71	1.70	1.18	2, 20	.326	.53	2, 20	.594
Item 18.	6.33	.71	6.71	.49	6.43	1.51	1.48	2, 20	.251	.31	2, 20	.736
Item 19.	6.78	.44	6.71	.49	6.57	1.13	1.39	2, 20	.271	.16	2, 20	.853
Item 20.	6.89	.33	6.86	.38	6.29	1.89	4.15	2, 20	.031	10.83	10.83	.557

Item	Differences related to work experience						Test of homogeneity of variance			ANOVA / Welch results		
	5 or less		6 - 19		20 or more		Levene statistics	df	p	F	df	p
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD						
Item 21.	6.44	.88	6.43	.53	6.00	1.41	.61	2, 20	.554	.47	2, 20	.633
Item 22.	6.78	.44	6.57	.79	6.14	1.86	2.60	2, 20	.099	.62	2, 20	.549
Item 23.	2.89	2.03	2.57	1.90	3.14	2.48	.24	2, 20	.788	.13	2, 20	.883

### *Differences related to level of qualification*

There were statistically significant differences in agreement with item 6, item 7, item 8, item 9, item 13, item 15, item 19 (Table 4.).

All educators who have a master's degree completely agree that parental interest in cooperation and participation in the educational group's programme is important for the partnership, that parents' participation in parent-educator meetings is necessary for establishing quality cooperation, that parents should participate in activities (such as visits, excursions, manifestations etc.), and that open communication between parents and educators is the key for quality cooperation. All educators with a master's degree completely agree that educators' professionalism is very important for working with children and parents, and that professionalism is of the utmost importance for quality cooperation with parents. Educators who have a master's degree believe strongly that parents and educators are equally responsible for quality cooperation compared with educators who have a bachelor's degree (Table 4).

**Table 4.** Differences in level of qualification

Item	Educators' level of qualification				Levene's test		t – test results		
	Bachelor's degree		Master's degree		F	p	t	df	p
	M	SD	M	SD					
Item 1.	6.56	1.09	7.00	.00	5.25	.032	1.60	15	.130
Item 2.	6.44	1.03	6.29	.76	.09	.760	.35	21	.731
Item 3.	5.94	.99	6.71	.48	1.42	.246	1.94	21	.066
Item 4.	6.40	.74	6.86	.38	7.87	.011	1.92	19.66	.069
Item 5.	6.67	.62	6.86	.38	2.60	.123	.75	20	.463
Item 6.	6.56	.81	7.00	.00	8.92	.007	2.15	15	.048
Item 7.	6.63	.50	7.00	.00	95.87	.000	3.00	15	.009
Item 8.	6.63	.50	7.00	.00	95.87	.000	3.00	15	.009
Item 9.	6.44	.89	7.00	.00	12.55	.002	2.52	15	.023
Item 10.	6.88	.34	7.00	.00	4.97	.037	1.46	15	.164
Item 11.	5.63	1.41	5.14	1.46	.40	.534	.75	21	.463
Item 12.	6.69	.48	6.86	.38	3.79	.065	.83	21	.417
Item 13.	6.75	.45	7.00	.00	19.17	.000	2.24	15	.041
Item 14.	4.07	1.98	4.00	2.31	.64	.434	.07	19	.942
Item 15.	5.44	1.89	6.86	.38	9.06	.007	2.87	17.49	.010
Item 16.	6.25	.86	6.86	.38	3.81	.065	1.78	21	.089
Item 17.	3.19	2.01	3.00	2.38	.44	.516	.19	21	.847
Item 18.	6.38	1.09	6.71	.49	1.73	.203	.78	21	.442
Item 19.	6.56	.81	7.00	.00	8.92	.007	2.15	15	.048
Item 20.	6.50	1.32	7.00	.00	4.37	.049	1.52	15	.150
Item 21.	6.00	1.21	6.86	.38	3.98	.059	1.81	21	.084
Item 22.	6.31	1.30	7.00	.00	5.54	.028	2.11	15	.052
Item 23.	3.19	2.32	2.00	1.00	9.65	.005	1.72	20.98	.101

*Differences related to place of work (central and branch kindergarten)*

There were statistically significant differences in agreement with the item claiming that parental interest for cooperation and participating in the educational group's programme was important for partnership between educators who work in the central kindergarten and educators who work in one of the branch



kindergartens (Table 5.). All of the educators who work in branch kindergartens completely agreed with the item.

**Table 5.** Differences related to place of work

Item	Work place		Levene's test		t – test results				
	Central	Branch	F	p	t	df	p		
Item 1.	6.67	1.15	6.82	.60	.75	.396	.39	21	.701
Item 2.	6.50	1.17	6.27	.65	.63	.436	.57	21	.575
Item 3.	5.92	.90	6.55	.68	.05	.826	1.87	21	.076
Item 4.	6.33	.78	6.73	.65	1.76	.199	1.31	21	.203
Item 5.	6.67	.49	6.80	.63	.30	.590	.56	20	.584
Item 6.	6.50	.90	7.00	.00	14.61	.001	1.91	11	.082
Item 7.	6.58	.51	7.00	.00	351.52	.000	2.80	11	.017
Item 8.	6.67	.49	6.91	.30	10.38	.004	1.44	18.44	.168
Item 9.	6.50	.90	6.73	.47	2.13	.159	.75	21	.464
Item 10.	6.92	.29	7.00	.00	4.42	.048	1.00	11	.339
Item 11.	5.67	1.50	5.27	1.35	.09	.765	.66	21	.516
Item 12.	6.67	.49	6.91	.30	10.38	.004	1.41	21	.174
Item 13.	6.75	.45	7.00	.00	30.13	.000	1.91	11	.082
Item 14.	4.45	1.97	4.30	1.83	.23	.638	.19	19	.855
Item 15.	5.50	2.11	6.45	.82	6.67	.017	1.45	14.49	.168
Item 16.	6.58	.51	6.55	.69	.91	.350	.15	21	.882
Item 17.	3.00	2.13	3.18	2.18	.00	.997	.20	21	.842
Item 18.	6.25	1.14	6.73	.65	1.17	.291	1.22	21	.236
Item 19.	6.50	.90	6.91	.30	7.09	.015	1.48	13.61	.162
Item 20.	6.50	1.45	6.91	.30	3.52	.075	.92	21	.369
Item 21.	6.08	1.16	6.55	.69	.46	.504	1.14	21	.265
Item 22.	6.25	1.42	6.82	.60	2.30	.144	1.23	21	.234
Item 23.	2.42	2.06	3.36	2.01	.06	.815	1.11	20.91	.278

## **Discussion**

The success of the partnership between parents and preschool and its quality depend on characteristics, knowledge, skills and competencies of educators (Jurčević Lozančić and Golik Homolak, 2020; Sewell, 2012). Hence, it is understandable that all educators recognize the importance of professionalism in their work with children and parents. All educators consider open and honest communication between parents and educators as an important factor of quality cooperation. Both parents and educators view honest and open communication as one of the most important factors of cooperation and partnership between kindergarten and parents (Mavračić Miković, 2018). Nenadić Bilan and Matov (2014) see mutual readiness for communication and information exchange as a prerequisite for efficient partnership. Mutual open communication between educators and parents, with the child's well-being as a goal, is an indicator of partnership in an educational setting (Petrović-Sočo, 1995). Almost all educators consider professionalism, openness and approachability of educators as an important factor in achieving quality cooperation with parents. Approachability, sensitivity, flexibility and reliability are listed as important educators' personal qualities for partnership between the kindergarten and parents (Swick, 1991).

All educators view parental interest in cooperation and participation in the educational group's programme as the key component for developing a partnership. Educators want the parents to actively participate in preschool activities and view themselves as active participants of the educational process (Gaspar, 2013). Parental interest and comprehension of their role in education of their child are predictors of their active, self-initiated participation in the preschool's educational programme (Russell, 1991). Showing interest is important to educators because it confirms parents' motivation for further cooperation and partnership.

20% of educators place the responsibility for quality of cooperation on parents, and 47.8% on educators. The responsibility for initiation of partnership is often assigned to educators because the partnership itself is achieved in the kindergarten (Visković and Višnjić Jevtić, 2017). The educators seem to think they have greater responsibility for quality of cooperation, compared to parental responsibility (Mavračić Miković, 2018). However, 84% of educators

believe in equal responsibility for quality cooperation. Cooperation is actually most efficient when it is based on principles of mutual respect and complementing roles (Vukin, 2016). This type of equal responsibility is a characteristic of partnership (Petrović-Sočo, 1995). Partnership is a mutual process and as such requires active parental involvement (Visković and Višnjić Jevtić, 2017).

Most educators believe they should include parents in making decisions related to development, learning and social lives of the children in their educational group (such as excursions, educational plan and activities). Although parents and educators agree that mutual planning and decision making are important factors of parents' and kindergartens' cooperation (Mavračić Miković, 2018), only a small number of parents actually gets involved in decision making and planning (Nenadić-Bilan and Zloković, 2015; Visković and Višnjić Jevtić, 2017).

Most educators claim that individual parent-teacher meetings contribute to establishing trust and a close relationship between parents and educators. All educators believe that they should inform parents about their child's developmental progress and activities their child enjoys. Parents acknowledge the importance of individual parent-teacher meetings. Parents perceive the educator primarily as an informant (Mavračić Miković, 2018). Informing parents about their child is the most common reason for cooperation with kindergarten (Visković and Višnjić Jevtić, 2017), specifically in regard to child's developmental progress (Petrović-Sočo, 1995).

Most educators see ger-togethers (for children, parents and educators), creative workshops and parent-teacher conferences as important factors which contribute to a cooperative relationship between parents and the kindergarten. Most educators think that parents should participate in excursions, visits, get-togethers, events and other similar activities. Parents most often define cooperation and partnership with the kindergarten through get-togethers for parents and educators, individual parent-teacher meetings and occasional participation in educational group's programme (Merčep, 2016).

All educators think parents should volunteer in their child's educational group at least once a year, and that it is important to enable the participation for parents who show interest. Most educators believe that parental volunteering

in educational groups contributes to better parental understanding of the educational process and educational group's programme. Although educators and parents want to enable parents to volunteer in their child's educational group, it seems that they are both reluctant in the realization of this type of cooperation (Merčep, 2016; Petrović-Sočo, 1995). Volunteering is the rarest type of cooperation with the kindergarten (Skočić Mihić and Srića, 2016), Kanjić and Boneta (2012) found that less than one third of parents volunteer in their child's educational group.

Although most educators see the possibility of parental participation and involvement in kindergarten as one of the quality indicators, 32% of educators claim that parental participation is not necessary. Similar results were found in research with parents. Although 97.9% of parents believe they should volunteer in their child's educational group, 50% of them claim that their participation is not necessary. 89.7% of parents believe it is important to enable parental involvement in educational group's programme, and 75.7% of parents see the parental involvement possibilities as one of the quality indicators (Car Mohač and Kuretić, 2020). educators recognize the importance of parental involvement in child's education (Merčep, 2016). They acknowledge partnership with parents as an important quality indicator of the kindergarten (Cortier and Palletier, 1995).

It seems that Kindergarten Radost's educators have a positive attitude and expectations towards cooperation and partnership between parents and the institution. This is of importance because researchers have found a strong correlation between educators' attitudes towards cooperation with parents and parental involvement (Swick, 1991). Furthermore, research shows a positive correlation between parental involvement and participation in the educational group's programme and positive outcomes for the child, child's family, kindergarten and the whole community (Dor, 2013; Jurčević Lozančić and Golik Homolak, 2020; Mavračić Miković, 2019). The situation is further complicated with different factors related to the parents and family which affect parental involvement in the preschool institution's program (sex, racial and national affiliation, health condition, socioeconomic status, educational status, parental competencies, earlier cooperation experience and other parental beliefs and attitudes)

(Jurčević Lozančić and Golik Homolak, 2020; Nenadić Bilan and Matov, 2014; Visković and Višnjić Jevtić, 2017).

### *Differences related to work experience and age*

There were no statistically significant differences in terms of age and work experiences. Other researchers have found differences in terms of work experience, showing that more experienced educators attribute less importance to parental involvement (Visković and Višnjić Jevtić, 2017). All participants in our study demonstrated a positive attitude and expectations for cooperation and partnership with parents, so it seems that cooperation and partnership with parents have become part of the core values shared by all educators in Kindergarten Radost.

### *Differences related to level of qualification*

All educators who have a master's degree completely agree that parental interest in cooperation and participation in the educational group's programme is important for the partnership, that the parents' participation in parent-educator meetings is necessary for establishing quality cooperation, that parents should participate in preschool activities such as visits, excursions, events etc., that communication between parents and educators is the key for quality cooperation. All educators with a master's degree completely agree that educators' professionalism is very important for working with children and parents, and that professionalism is of the utmost importance for quality cooperation with parents. Educators who have a master's degree believe strongly that parents and educators are equally responsible for quality cooperation. It is important to mention that, although there are statistically significant differences, the educators who have a bachelor's degree are also in agreement with these items. A higher educational degree is generally correlated with positive attitude towards partnership between the kindergarten and parents (Gu, 2006). Educators who are recognized as quality practitioners give more importance to parental involvement in the kindergarten's programme (Corter and Palletier, 1995). Almost all educators perceive professionalism, openness and availability as important educators' qualities which affect quality cooperation with parents.

### *Differences related to place of work (central and branch kindergarten)*

Educators who work in branch kindergartens put more importance on parental interest in cooperation and participation in the educational group's programme. A possible explanation might be in the characteristic of branch kindergartens - they function like a family environment. In such a family atmosphere, all participants are more relaxed and connected with each other. Preschool institutions have a special role in small communities: they can become a cultural centre and a centre for other happenings (Levak, 2017). So, it is possible that there are bigger expectations for parental cooperation and involvement.

## **Conclusion**

Cooperation between the family and the kindergarten is a highly important precondition for the optimum development and upbringing of children in kindergarten. Educators are the ones that play the most important role in encouraging this partnership.

The fact that good cooperation is one of the quality standards in preschool a institution, as well as the roles that educators play in educating parents and motivating them for cooperation, imposes the need for questioning educators' stances on cooperation between the kindergarten and parents.

This research provided insight into how the educators of the Radost Kindergarten perceive cooperation with parents. The research sought to find out what the factors that affect the existence of differences (in kindergarten teachers' stances) are. The small sample in our research cannot be used for generalization, but it has allowed us to make some changes within our kindergarten. The aim was to further educate our kindergarten teachers, and to plan internal education within the institution to further improve the quality of the teachers' cooperation with parents. The obtained results were compared with the already existing theoretical framework and the results of similar research in other countries.

The results of the conducted research point to the conclusion that educators in Radost have a positive stance and expectations from the cooperation and partnership between the parents and the preschool institution. All educators

consider open and honest communication with parents to be an essential factor for constructive cooperation. They also view the expertise of educators as very important for quality work with children and their parents. In addition, all of them think of parental interest in cooperation and engagement in kindergarten and group activities as a key component in creating partnership between the kindergarten and the family. Almost all of the educators regard professionalism, openness and accessibility of educators as an important factor in achieving constructive cooperation with parents. It's interesting that 20 percent of the educators imply that the quality of cooperation depends on the parents, while 47.8 percent of them believe that it depends on educators. However, 84 percent of them think that both parents and educators are equally responsible for the quality of cooperation. The results of other studies (Visković and Višnjić Jevtić, 2017; Mavračić Miković, 2018) also confirm that educators are held responsible for initiating partnership. Interestingly, educators even assess their level of responsibility for the quality of relations as higher than parental.

Educators have recognized the importance of individual informing, and the majority believes that parents should be engaged in making decisions about the development, education and social life of children in the group (for instance: field trips, work plan and activities in group). They mostly believe that interaction between children, parents and educators combined with creative workshops and parental meetings are relevant factors that contribute to the creation of a partnership between the kindergarten and parents. All educators consider that parents must engage in volunteer work at least once a year and that they should interact with the group if they are interested. Even though the majority of educators sees the possibility of engaging parents in their work as one of the quality standards of the institution, 32 percent of them consider that this is not necessary.

The results obtained by the research indicate that educators' stances on cooperation between parents and kindergarten differ depending on their level of education and work place (central or local kindergarten). Educators with a higher education mostly believe that both parents and educators are equally responsible for constructive cooperation. Educators working in local kindergartens emphasize the importance of parental interest in cooperation and engagement

in work of the group and kindergarten. There were no statistically significant differences in their claims considering their age or work experience.

It is interesting that the results of research on parental stances on cooperation with the kindergarten (Car Mohač and Kuretić, 2020) show that almost all parents indicate educators' expertise combined with an open and honest communication as the key to cooperation. 34.6 percent of the parents consider that the quality of cooperation depends exclusively on the educator, but the majority thinks that both parents and educators are equally responsible for constructive cooperation. Parents show the need to cooperate with kindergarten. Therefore, we can conclude that both parents and educators have positive stances on cooperation. Taking into account that there are no data about the implementation of this cooperation in practice, future research should explore the characteristics of educators and parents that have a direct effect on fulfilment and quality of cooperation.

The results obtained by this research show that educators in Radost have positive stances on the kindergarten's cooperation and partnership with parents, and that they understand the importance of collaborative relations, which represents an important precondition to constructive cooperation and partnership.

The limitation of this research is a small sample, and further research is where a different, more representative sample would be selected is recommended.



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