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Building Partnerships in Parent – Teacher Relations on the Basis of Traditional and Modern Forms of Cooperation

Budowanie partnerstwa w relacji rodzic – nauczyciel
z odwołaniem do tradycyjnych
i współczesnych form pracy¹

KEYWORDS ABSTRACT

cooperation with
parents, forms of
cooperation, teacher-
-parent relations,
partnership of school
and family, subjectivity

Two environments where the process of upbringing and education takes place are crucial for the correct development of a child. The family and the school should be mutually complementary and should strive for the accomplishment of jointly determined objectives. Their relations have a positive impact on the multilateral development of a child, with better learning results and proper functioning in social relations. Good cooperation between the school environment and the family contributes to a decreased risk of educational problems and creates an atmosphere of mutual trust and understanding. It is also beneficial for adults, i.e. teachers and parents who, whilst building partner relations, are becoming more open towards themselves and the child's needs.

In this article, the authors attempt to provide an answer to the question about the partnership of school and parents, the factors influenc-

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ing good relations between the school and the family home. They also discuss traditional forms of cooperation that are used in educational practice, indicating their positive aspects for building the meeting space. Forms of cooperation between teachers and parents also include the ones that rely on modern tools of information and communication technology. In this respect, special attention was paid to the use of Internet tools. On the basis of analysed literature on the subject, the significance of interaction was shown, along with the need of undertaking extensive activities in the area of improvement of relations between teachers and parents. The text of the article indicates factors that are conducive to an increase in the efficiency of the entire educational process and shows that they are beneficial for all of the entities taking part in it.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE ABSTRAKT

współpraca z rodzicami, formy współpracy, relacje nauczyciel – rodzic, partnerstwo szkoły i rodziny, podmiotowość

Dla prawidłowego rozwoju dziecka kluczowe są dwa środowiska, w których przebiega proces wychowania i edukacji. Rodzina i szkoła powinny się wzajemnie uzupełniać i realizować założone wspólnie cele. Ich relacje dodatkowo wpływają na wielostronny rozwój dziecka, osiąganie lepszych wyników w nauce oraz prawidłowe funkcjonowanie w relacjach społecznych. Dobra współpraca pomiędzy środowiskiem szkolnym i rodzinnym przyczynia się do zmniejszenia ryzyka powstania problemów wychowawczych, kreowania atmosfery wzajemnego zaufania i zrozumienia. Jest ona również korzystna dla osób dorosłych: nauczycieli i rodziców, którzy budując relacje partnerskie, stają się bardziej otwarci na siebie i potrzeby dziecka.

W artykule autorki starają się udzielić odpowiedzi na pytanie, czym jest partnerstwo szkoły i rodziców oraz jakie czynniki wpływają na dobre relacje szkoła – dom. Omawiają również, jakie tradycyjne formy współpracy są wykorzystywane w praktyce edukacyjnej, wskazując ich pozytywne aspekty dla budowania przestrzeni spotkania. Wśród form współdziałania pomiędzy nauczycielami a rodzicami zostały uwzględnione także te, które bazują na współczesnych narzędziach technologii informacyjno-komunikacyjnych. W tym zakresie zwrócono szczególną uwagę na wykorzystanie narzędzi internetowych. Na podstawie analizowanej literatury przedmiotu ukazano znaczenie współdziałania i potrzebę podjęcia szerokich działań w zakresie poprawy relacji pomiędzy nauczycielami a rodzicami. W tekście artykułu wskazano czynniki, które sprzyjają podniesieniu efektywności całego procesu edukacyjnego, ukazano, że są one korzystne dla wszystkich podmiotów biorących w nim udział.

Introduction

Relations between families and schools are subject to constant transformations resulting from new challenges brought about by the modern world. Nowadays, the school plays an auxiliary role for the family, supporting it in the process of children's education. "Parents and teachers have common liability with respect to the child's development. The view on division of liability is unjust and simplified. Liability for the results of school education and upbringing of children does not exclusively burden the teachers"². A family is not always fully aware of the tasks that encumber it and it does not always perform its functions in a satisfactory manner. "Teachers possess proper competences and experience and they should take care of contacts with the family and nourish close cooperation along with development of teamwork with the child's home environment"³. Both the family and the school should instil the child with a basic system of values, with culture, should shape relevant stances and teach proper attitudes, as well as equip the child with knowledge indispensable in his/ her later life. Educational theoreticians and practitioners share the view that the child's school success is determined, in a significant degree, by the harmonious cooperation of both these institutions. They have a common objective which is the education and upbringing of children.

This article is going to provide an answer to the question concerning the nature of partnership between the school and parents, forms of cooperation between teachers and parents that are usually applied in educational practice and perspectives for building cooperation that are offered by information and communication technologies.

In the course of the direct performance of tasks in the area of teaching, educating and taking care of children, as well as the establishment of optimum conditions for educational process at school and at home, it is possible to differentiate various traditional and innovative forms of cooperation of these two environments. The article presents some of them which are conducive to mutual cooperation.

Cooperation, Interaction, Partnership, Involvement: Analysis of Terms

The problem of relations between a family home and a school, as well as ties between parents and teachers, constitutes an object of discussions for many pedagogues. When describing this issue, the authors focus on showing its significance and weight for the correct development of the child, analyse forms and methods of mutual con-

² W. Segiet, *Rodzice – nauczyciele*, Poznań 1999, p. 45.

³ M. Parlak, *Współpraca przedszkola z rodzicami i środowiskiem lokalnym*, [in:] *Wybrane zagadnienia z pedagogiki przedszkolnej*, ed. E. Zyzik, Kielce 2009, p. 179.

tacts and share advice and guidelines for the purpose of maintaining and deepening the relation between these two basic educational environments. Publications focusing on the above-mentioned subject most often feature the following terms: cooperation and interaction, which are used interchangeably and treated as synonyms.

The common meaning of these terms is shown by T. Pilch. According to this author, cooperation and interaction are, “generally speaking, common, simultaneous and complex activities organised according to a social formula of division of work between at least two entities – these may be individuals, social groups, organisations and associations, institutions and authorities, local environments. Interaction in the area of social pedagogy is characterised by the fact that it is manifested by harmonious and voluntary operation of several entities (individuals, social groups, entities) forming a part of the local environment; this activity focuses on implementation of common, identical objectives in the area of education, upbringing and care. In a great degree, it consists in harmonious (synchronised) operation of entities during implementation of partial tasks, taking into account jointly adopted objectives; it takes place in conditions of complete egalitarianism and equality of participating entities”⁴.

The definition of W. Okoń is in a similar vein; this author also indicates the basic significance of objective in implementation of joint activities. However, the discussion on the above-mentioned terms contains new elements such as trust, loyalty and subordination, which are very important in the course of undertaking communal relations. According to this author, cooperation consists in the interaction of “individuals or groups of people who perform their partial tasks in order to accomplish some common objective; cooperation is based on mutual trust and loyalty and subordination to the objective, which is properly internalised by all individuals or groups”⁵.

A definitely narrower definition is found in “Mały słownik języka polskiego” (“Abridged Dictionary of the Polish Language”), which refers to the term of cooperation and explains it as work performed together with somebody; assistance, share in common work or activity⁶.

The issue of cooperation and interaction in relations between the family and the school was also analysed by A.W. Maszke and T. Kotarbiński. The former describes interaction as “a certain social relation between individuals and social groups among which mutual reinforcement of activities performed by one party takes place, aimed at accomplishment of a common objective in the same time”⁷. On the other hand,

⁴ *Elementarne pojęcia pedagogiki społecznej i pracy socjalnej*, ed. T. Pilch, Warszawa 1999, p. 345-346.

⁵ W. Okoń, *Słownik pedagogiczny*, Warszawa 1987, p. 346.

⁶ *Mały słownik języka polskiego*, ed. E. Sobol, Warszawa 1993, p. 1042.

⁷ A.W. Maszke, *Współpraca i partnerstwo rodziców i nauczycieli*, [in:] *Edukacja w dialogu i reformie*, ed. A. Karpińska, Białystok 2002, p. 75.

T. Kotarbiński indicates that “interaction among many entities on account of their specific activities and on account of the specific objectives of such activities only takes place when each of such entities helps another entity from the same group or when it is assisted by another entity from this group”⁸. When creating their definitions, the authors indicate the purposefulness of undertaken activities; furthermore, T. Kotarbiński emphasises assistance offered by members of the group undertaking interaction.

When analysing the term interaction, B. Kozuch indicates its broader significance as compared to cooperation and shows the differences existing, in her opinion, within the scope of understanding of both terms. Interaction offers benefits irrespective of its range, form or intensity, as well as irrespective of the relations that it refers to – formal or informal. However, interaction has two forms:

- cooperation: activities related to cooperative attitude and expectation of reciprocity;
- confrontation: activities consisting in rivalry or struggle, in practice assuming various forms of competition⁹.

To summarize, not every interaction is understood as cooperation. If persons participating in the common task are competing, harmonious cooperation is not possible.

The terms interaction and cooperation contain elements of partnership in them. This is another term that is going to be an object of analysis. Partnership, according to the dictionary, is “being somebody’s partner: a co-participant of some enterprises; partnership consists in treating somebody as an equal partner”¹⁰. In the area of education, this refers to “equality of rights and obligations of parents and teachers towards children. The objective of partnership is the pupil, the pupil’s education, as well as shaping the pupil’s personality”¹¹. I. Nowosad also points out that “partner-like relations between teachers and parents consist in exercise of almost equal rights and obligations within the scope of the undertaken cooperation”¹². Educational partnership contains the mutual agreement of the family and the school, whose entities pursue a common objective and are able to go beyond the roles imposed on them from above: the teacher, the parent, the headmaster, in order to undertake a dialogue devoid of orders, requirements or pressure¹³.

⁸ T. Kotarbiński, *Traktat o dobrej robocie*, Wrocław – Warszawa – Kraków 1975, p. 89-90.

⁹ B. Kozuch, *O współdziałaniu. Dlaczego trzeba i warto współdziałać*, <http://www.isp.uj.edu.pl/documents/2103800/58f23e0d-4f68-413f-b947-9f86f31691da> (access: 30.11.2015).

¹⁰ *Wielki słownik wyrazów obcych i trudnych*, ed. A. Markowski, R. Pawelec, Warszawa 2001, p. 565.

¹¹ A.W. Maszke, *Współpraca i partnerstwo rodziców i nauczycieli*, op. cit., p. 75.

¹² I. Nowosad, M. Szymański, *Nauczyciele i rodzice. W poszukiwaniu nowych znaczeń i interpretacji współpracy*, Zielona Góra – Kraków 2004.

¹³ M. Banasiak, *Współpraca rodziców ze szkołą w kontekście reformy edukacji w Polsce*, Toruń 2013, p. 65.

A. Sobolewski¹⁴ indicates that people involved in partnership constitute its core. The success of a planned initiative depends primarily on them and on their involvement. Already at the beginning of entering into partner relations, we encounter several questions: what will we get out of this? What do we want to accomplish for ourselves in a partnership? If we fail to answer these questions in line with the principle of trust and openness, according to A. Sobolewski, we have no chances for building a good partnership.

When analysing the words of A. Sobolewski, we can see that the foundation of partnership is the involvement of people in a joint initiative. This is yet another term that should be defined and it is contained in the terms of cooperation and interaction. It is a certain connector that unites and consolidates all the terms analysed before. It is not possible to talk about cooperation, interaction or partnership without human involvement in what is being done.

The term involvement derives from the verb “to involve”, which means to hire, to accept for work, to conclude a work contract with somebody (e.g. an actor), to agree, to arrange work, but also to become liable, to become a part of something, to become encumbered, to accept a task, an obligation; liability also encompasses emotional, active participation in social facts and processes¹⁵. To become involved means to “take part in something, to become a part of something, contributing emotions and undertaking certain obligations”¹⁶. In the discussed context, the term refers to involvement of parents and teachers in joint education, teaching and upbringing of children.

Summing up, it is only possible to build cooperation among various entities on the basis of joint expectations by implementing jointly agreed objectives. The determination of joint objectives is related to the involvement of partners in the relation. On the other hand, fruitful and creative cooperation, interaction or partnership is not possible without involvement¹⁷. The observed multitude of terms regarding the family-school relations may reflect changes and tendencies that are observed in the currently formulated opinions with respect to the discussed issue. The critical orientation, indicating absence of correctly understood cooperation between parents and teachers is dominant.

¹⁴ *Przez współpracę do sukcesu*, ed. A. Sobolewski, Warszawa 2007, p. 29.

¹⁵ *Słownik wyrazów obcych i zwrotów obcojęzycznych Władysława Kopalińskiego*, (<http://www.slownik-online.pl/kopaliniski>) (access: 30.11.2015).

¹⁶ *Wielki słownik wyrazów obcych i trudnych*, ed. A. Markowski, R. Pawelec, op. cit., p. 36.

¹⁷ M. Płocińska, H. Rylke, *Czas współpracy i czas zmian*, Warszawa 2002, p. 70-75.

Premises for Cooperation Between School and Parents

The cooperation of teachers and parents entails mutual assistance and interaction of entities in pursuance of a common objective. It relies on mutual trust, loyalty and subordination to the objective that has to be properly internalised by parents and by teachers.

Every type of cooperation between institutions requires unification of assumptions that will both support and guarantee its success. The main premises for cooperation of school with parents include:

- building cooperation based on positive experiences and good emotions;
- solving conflicts by applying the principle of substituting fight with cooperation;
- fulfilling the assumption that both parents and teachers are responsible for cooperation;
- adoption of a principle that high quality of cooperation with parents is one of the most important aspects of managing a school by a headmaster¹⁸.

Objectives of cooperation between parents and school focus around the facilitation of the work of teachers' and parents', the work of individual pupils, mutual acquaintance and understanding, making parents aware that the comprehensive development of a child depends on tasks jointly implemented by the school and by the family home, reinforcing the emotional bond between teachers and parents during jointly performed tasks, enabling bi-directional communication of teachers and parents upon the principle of democracy and partnership, exchange of opinions and remarks between teachers and parents regarding the child's development, suggesting specific forms of educational impact for the parents which they could use to help their children improve learning and behaviour and making it easier for teachers to understand the pupils' attitudes to their families and the family's expectations with respect to the pupil¹⁹.

In the course of cooperation between schools and parents, it is possible to distinguish several principles that will be governing their mutual contacts:

- principle of partnership (equal rights and obligations);
- principle of multilateral flow of information;
- principle of impact uniformity (the necessity of implementing uniform educational objectives);
- principle of positive motivation (voluntary participation in interaction of both groups);

¹⁸ E. Zyzik, *Współpraca szkoły z rodzicami dzieci w młodszym wieku szkolnym*, [in:] *Wczesna edukacja dziecka wobec wyzwań współczesności*, ed. I. Adamek, Z. Zbróg, Kraków 2011, p. 168.

¹⁹ Ibidem.

- principle of active and systematic cooperation;
- educating the parents.

Parents: School Partners

Education is most efficient when it is consistent, i.e. when all parties involved in the child's upbringing act in a similar manner. The requirement "parents: school partners"²⁰ belongs to the key expectations of the state with respect to schools. These requirements constitute a set of most important activities and directions that a school should pursue, acknowledged by the state. Without partnership and cooperation between a home and a school, it is not possible to build a modern society, whose members would be aware of their rights and have experiences related to cooperation with immediate environment and acceptance of liability. The school, as a social institution, where each of the parties has the right to speak and to influence decisions, encourages parents to interaction and cooperation. Nothing mobilises better than a feeling of influence on the surrounding reality²¹.

Reports from internal evaluation of schools provide an interesting source of information concerning various aspects of school life. Their analysis leads to interesting conclusions²²:

- teachers and other school employees are open to parents' suggestions;
- cooperation of parents and the school is manifested in quite a narrow range: it primarily refers to school events and financial support for school facilities;
- parents have influence on the school's activities, yet it is limited to the above-mentioned narrow aspects of cooperation;
- ¼ of parents evaluate their direct impact on what takes place in a school as slight or non-existent.

These results suggest that parents play an auxiliary function in school; potentially, they are passive participants of events organised by the school. This type of co-participation between parents and institutions is called instrumental by M. Karwowska-Struczyk. It entails using parents to increase the efficiency of curriculum via activities undertaken for its benefit, e.g. provision of various materials, organisational

²⁰ <http://men.gov.pl/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/zalacznik.pdf> (access: 15.11.2015).

²¹ S. Bobula, *Rodzice partnerami szkoły. Partnerstwo, czyli co?*, <http://www.npseo.pl/data/various/files/bobula.pdf> (access: 15.11.2015).

²² J. Kołodziejczyk, H. Cieślak, *Analiza wyników ewaluacji zewnętrznych w odniesieniu do wymagania „Rodzice są partnerami szkoły”*, [in:] *Ewaluacja w Nadzorze pedagogicznym. Refleksje*, ed. G. Mazurkiewicz, Kraków 2011, p. 238-240; J. Kołodziejczyk, *Partycypacja uczniów i rodziców w zarządzaniu szkołą*, [in:] *Ewaluacja w Nadzorze pedagogicznym. Refleksje*, op. cit., p. 190-196.

assistance, ordering assistance. The second type, called decision-making by the author, means that parents participate in making decisions regarding the functioning of the institution; they can participate in it on equal principles, as active entities in a democratic relation of co-participation relation²³. Therefore, it is worth defining the causes of limited involvement of parents in school life and the manner in which cooperation between parents and the school could be repaired, so that it has a more partner-like dimension.

Barriers preventing the involvement of parents in the life of school may be as follows:

- lack of teachers' time;
- incorrect assumptions of teachers regarding the parents' knowledge and skills;
- misunderstanding of the parents' communication styles by teachers;
- parents' lack of feeling of safety at school;
- lack of space (place) in a school assigned for meetings with parents;
- tension between parents and teachers;
- absence of clearly defined parents' rights²⁴.

The establishment of mutual cooperation and its maintenance on a proper level is not an easy nor a quick process. The mutual cooperation of both environments that are closest to the child depends on multiple factors. These factors include the degree of involvement and inventiveness of teachers, openness of teachers to children's problems, stances of teachers that should express interest in opinions and views of parents, treating parents as partners in the educational and didactic process, involvement of parents in active participation in the complex educational and didactic process and involvement of parents in participation in various forms of mutual cooperation in the school and outside of it²⁵.

The most important joint objective of both environments – the school and the family environment – is accomplishment of maximum developmental potential by the child. In order to undertake efficient activities in this area, it is necessary to have cooperation that is satisfactory for both sides. Advantages resulting from it benefit both the teachers and the parents.

The parents provide the teachers with knowledge about the child, the history of the child's development to date, the position of the child in the family, knowledge about family life, lifestyle, their system of values, determinants of behaviour, reactions of the child to everyday situations, knowledge about the social and cultural context

²³ M. Karwowska-Struczyk, *Rodzice w przedszkolu – balast czy koło ratunkowe?*, [in:] *Środowiskowe i językowe konteksty edukacji dziecka w rodzinie, przedszkolu i szkole*, ed. E. Jaszczyszyn, J. Górnikiwicz, Warsaw 2013, p. 72.

²⁴ S. Bobula, *Rodzice partnerami szkoły. Partnerstwo, czyli co?*, op. cit.

²⁵ E. Zyzik, *Współpraca szkoły z rodzicami dzieci w młodszym wieku szkolnym*, op. cit., p. 178.

of a child's development, e.g. individual and family habits, expectations regarding the child, its development and education and expectations with respect to the school.

On the other hand, teachers may increase parents' knowledge with information concerning the child's development and education, the child's position in the group, in relation to other children and to adults, methods for supporting development and dealing with difficult situations, information concerning various institutions assisting parents and institutional activities, educational objectives, methods of school operation, expectations towards the child, progress in development²⁶.

A true partnership, i.e. equal relations between the institution and the parents, starts when strong sides of each partner are recognised, when the role played by each partner is known and accepted, when there is mutual learning, extension of knowledge about the child and determinants about the child's development. As a result, we receive a comprehensive, in-depth picture of the child.

Forms of Cooperation Between Teachers and Parents in the Light of Literature on the Subject

The family and the school are two basic, mutually supplementary educational environments. Their mutual cooperation should be obvious, as it is beneficial for all entities participating in this process. Its multilateral significance for the child is frequently emphasised, along with indication of better results in learning, proper functioning in social relations, limited educational problems and accelerated moral development. Good cooperation, according to M. Łobocki²⁷, allows the parents to understand the secrets of the didactic and educational work of teachers better, contributes to increasing mutual trust and understanding, is conducive to the sharing of remarks regarding the issues related to teaching and upbringing. It is possible to observe that positive contacts of these two environments mutually enrich, improve and supplement each partner that undertakes the effort of cooperation.

In the literature on the subject, we can find numerous classifications of forms of cooperation between teachers and parents. Dichotomous typologies that divide cooperation into two basic groups, individual and collective, are presented most often. This classic division of forms of cooperation between parents and teachers was made by M. Łobocki. Individual contacts with parents include:

- pedagogical consultations;
- home visits;

²⁶ M. Karwowska-Struczyk, *Rodzice w przedszkolu – balast czy koło ratunkowe?*, op. cit., p. 72.

²⁷ M. Łobocki, *W trosce o wychowanie w szkole*, Kraków 2007, p. 181.

- correspondence contacts;
 - telephone calls.
- On the other hand, collective meetings encompass:
- working meetings (parent/ teacher meetings)
 - social meetings;
 - meetings with an expert²⁸.

Pedagogical consultations consist of a talk between a parent and a teacher. They seem to be the most valuable out of all individual forms of contacts between parents and teachers, due to the fact that they ensure mutual exchange of thoughts and a conversation where both parties are trying to find the causes of difficulties that emerged and make effort to find a solution. This is a good form of contact, which is also conducive to exchange of positive information about the child. Another individual form of cooperation mentioned by M. Łobocki is a home visit. Currently, this form of relation is encountered relatively rarely, yet it is necessary to emphasise its positive aspects: it allows for becoming better acquainted with the pupil and the parents, and help to understand the conditions in which they function and make the teacher acquainted with the child's immediate surroundings. In correspondence contacts, most often a pupil's daily record is used, in which the teacher informs the parents about the child's behaviour, as well as provides ongoing information concerning the life of the school. For the purpose of sharing opinions about the pupil's progress in learning, teachers most often use the pupil's daily record from specific subject and write down information there. Such information includes praises, as well as mistakes made by a child in the course of homework or during class. On the other hand, sending letters to parents is a very rare form of contacts these days. It is used as a last resort when, due to objective reasons or lack of the parents' interest in the child's situation, there is no other way to encourage them to direct contact. The last individual form of cooperation with parents, listed by M. Łobocki, includes telephone calls. This is an easy and often used manner of contacts between parents and teachers. As emphasised by M. Mendel²⁹, apart from notifying absences and exchange of official information, telephone calls are an important manner of building mutual relations. On account of their nature, these are individual talks that ensure intimacy and facilitate the possibility of opening towards another person.

Among most popular collective forms of cooperation are meetings of parents and teachers at school. They belong to the traditional and most frequent forms of interaction between a school and a family home. During such meetings the parents are informed, usually publicly, about school results of their children and are notified about

²⁸ M. Łobocki, *ABC wychowania*, Lublin 1999, p. 112.

²⁹ M. Mendel, *Rodzice i nauczyciele jako sprzymierzeńcy*, Gdańsk 2007, p. 83.

most important class and school issues. Unfortunately, school meetings are not a form of cooperation that is conducive to building partner-like relations. As justly noted by M. Mendel, “during a school meeting, the teacher usually preserves altar-like arrangement of his/ her position, with parents sitting on small chairs and the teacher speaking from above”³⁰. Another collective form of cooperation that appears in the typology of M. Łobocki is a social meeting. This type of relations takes place during important class ceremonies (e.g. Christmas Eve) or school ceremonies and may take place outside of school. An important element of social contacts is cordial atmosphere that allows for looking at teachers and parents from a different, less formal, perspective. Meetings with experts are the last collective form of cooperation analysed by M. Łobocki. They take place in situations that exceed professional competences of a teacher and also go beyond the teacher’s knowledge and skills. They most often refer to educational difficulties of a pupil.

E. Gawel-Luty presents a similar classification of cooperation forms between the school and the family in comparison to the proposal of M. Łobocki³¹. We can find almost identical manners of relation between the school and the family; however, they were assigned to separate groups. The author divided the forms of cooperation in the following manner:

- group meetings with parents;
- social meetings;
- meetings with expert (two sub-categories are indicated: meetings regarding educational difficulties are regarding teaching of parents);
- individual forms of interaction (pedagogical consultations, home visits, correspondence contacts, telephone calls).

Authors of a publication entitled “Nauczyciel. Wychowawca. Pedagog”³² present cooperation of school and home in the categories of three groups. The first one includes individual forms and, apart from traditional pedagogical consultations, home visits and correspondence contacts (pupil’s grade record, letters, telephone calls), also some more innovative forms of communication, i.e. e-mails or electronic grade record. The second group are collective forms, which feature traditional manners of contacts, i.e. working meetings, social meetings, meetings with an expert and meetings that have not yet been mentioned in prior typologies: meetings devoted to the teaching of parents (lectures, workshops), meetings as part of the so-called open doors or open days. Mixed forms, among which the authors of the publication include mu-

³⁰ Ibidem, p. 68.

³¹ E. Gawel-Luty, *Optymalizacja współdziałania nauczycieli klas początkowych z rodzicami uczniów*, Słupsk 1992, p. 25-28.

³² J.M. Łukasik, K. Jagielski, R. Solecki, *Nauczyciel. Wychowawca. Pedagog. Szkolne wyzwania*, Kielce 2013, p. 112.

tual provision of specific services constitute the third and, at the same time, the last type of cooperation of the school environment with the home environment.

An interesting proposal in the area of mutual relations of school/ home is presented by Austrian researchers. They attract attention to return to the neglected forms of cooperation, i.e. lesson observation by parents, teachers' visits at pupils' family homes, making parents involved in solving problems at home with the child that appear during classes at school³³.

Furthermore, Polish classifications feature a frequently neglected form of cooperation which is very important and usually implemented by teachers. It is the support for teachers via the parents' work with children at home which has the form of assistance during homework or positive attitude towards the teacher and the school. Taking this aspect into account, it is possible to divide forms of cooperation into two main categories: involvement in the school's work, which is performed in the educational facility and involvement in the school's work by assisting the child at home³⁴.

E. Beresford³⁵ proposes six main areas of cooperation with parents. Their implementation is analysed by the school, which enables evaluation of the actual degree of cooperation with the pupils' carers. This type of cooperation includes the following categories:

- 1) Communication with parents. This area includes almost all communications reaching the parents in general in written form (reports concerning the pupils' progress, brochures, letters, leaflets) or in the form of personal contacts (meetings with parents).
- 2) Parents as educators. With respect to this category of cooperation, it is important that the school perceives parents as one of the most important teachers of children. Appreciating this role, the school authorities should inform parents about the school curriculum, encourage them to discussion and to making joint decisions. The school may also help parents in acquiring and mastering their own pedagogical skills by organising courses, training sessions and lectures (teaching of parents).
- 3) Parents as school helpers. In this aspect, the school tries to provide an answer to the following questions: in which degree does it use the knowledge and the skills of parents in its work? Is it an institution that makes it easier for the parents to organise trips, extra classes, etc.? It is worth activating the parents who, as a rule, are less active and willing to undertake mutual relations?

³³ B. Śliwerski, *Możliwości rozpoznawania sensu współdziałania szkoły, rodziców i uczniów w społeczeństwie wolnorynkowym*, [in:] *Nauczyciele i rodzice. W poszukiwaniu nowych znaczeń i interpretacji współpracy*, op. cit., p. 52-53.

³⁴ M. Banasiak, *Współpraca rodziców ze szkołą w kontekście reformy edukacji w Polsce*, op. cit., p. 53.

³⁵ E. Beresford, *Rola władz lokalnych we wspieraniu współpracy rodziców i szkoły*, [in:] *Ku partnerstwu szkoła – rodzice*, ed. J. Kropiwnicki, Jelenia Góra 1999, p. 24.

- 4) Support for parents. This area is related to orientation in parents' needs and providing them with support in fulfilling them. Each school is characterised by different needs that are to be satisfied, for example: opening a school canteen or taking care of children during meetings with parents. It is important that specific needs are recognized and parents are supported by direct activities or by notifying such needs to competent institutions.
- 5) Parents Have Their Say. In this category of cooperation, the author of the discussed concept proposes participation of parents in making specific decisions, contributing to work of school councils, parental committees, etc.
- 6) School and local community. This aspect attracts attention to the local community, which may provide support for the operation of school. Parents, in a natural way, are connectors between the school and the broader environment. The school may procure support from a local community by organising open days (procurement of funds, exhibitions of pupils' works) or by involving volunteers.

Each range of cooperation between the school and the family presented above shows the proposals that are most often used in practice. However, the list of areas and problems that such cooperation should encompass is much broader. Technological progress forces the teachers and also the parents to use more modern means of communication, e.g. electronic grade records, e-mail contacts, blogs or video-conferences³⁶.

New Tools in the Area of Information and Communication Technologies Used to Build Cooperation Environment Between Teachers and Parents in Digital Space

The quality of cooperation between teachers and parents translates, to a significant degree, to the efficiency of the entire educational process. Support from the home environment and school environment clearly increases the child's motivation to make effort and encourages the child to accomplish new objectives. A person responsible for creating the cooperation environment is primarily the teacher. If the teacher cares about frequent mutual contacts and close interaction, he/ she should foresee potential expectations of parents and meet them half-way³⁷. A carefully designed space where parents, teachers and children can meet has to assume diversified forms and be sufficiently attractive to instil its participants with the willingness to act.

Nowadays, as a result of dynamic development of information and communication technologies, in particular the Internet, prospects have emerged for building a new vir-

³⁶ M. Banasiak, *Współpraca rodziców ze szkołą w kontekście reformy edukacji w Polsce*, op. cit., p. 53.

³⁷ B. Oelszlaeger-Kosturek, *Studia o aktywnym uczeniu się dzieci. Wybrane problemy edukacji wczesnoszkolnej. Materiały dla studentów i nauczycieli*, Katowice 2013, p. 93-95.

tual space of cooperation between teachers and parents. Individual talks or consultations no longer require physical presence of parents at school – this is enabled by network services. Traditional forms of cooperation, still important today, do not have to be replaced, but can be enriched with new communication tools available in the digital environment.

These days, almost every school has its own Internet site which functions as its showcase. Usually, such sites contain basic information concerning contact data, recruitment terms, extra class offers, manner of work organisation, etc. More and more educational facilities also have a virtual notice board – a website where current communications are placed, related to the functioning of the facility. Parents who often take their children to school and pick them up from school in a rush do not have enough time to browse the contents of an actual notice board carefully. Due to this reason, the main advantage of the Internet notice board is easy access and possibility of frequent updates of information published there. Interested parents have access to it from any place and at any time – the only requirement is Internet access.

Another convenient tool that may be used by teachers to inform parents about what is going on in the class, which subjects are discussed during classes, is a blog. Cyclical posts, supplemented by photos or short films of children during classes would definitely be approved by parents. They may also encourage them to visit the blog often, and to follow, on an ongoing basis, information that is placed there and comment on the published content.

Teachers can also upload extra tasks and didactic aids to blogs, along with links to interesting sites and educational games. On the other hand, thanks to virtual galleries, children can show their works to a broader audience. Works that are presented solely in school corridors or rooms can be viewed by a limited number of parents, whereas photos of works presented on blogs can be seen by the entire family, siblings and grandparents. Today, when parents are forced to work far away from the place of child's residence due to material situation, such form of presentation may be attractive, useful and may tighten family ties.

Blogs are also useful on account of safety of information presented there, as they offer a possibility of establishing a closed group of readers, limited only to children attending a given class and their parents. In certain cases parents do not want to agree for publishing information about their children in generally accessible Internet resources.

An alternative for websites and blogs are profiles on social networking media, mainly Facebook. The popularity of Facebook has resulted in the fact that teachers use this form of reaching a broad group of parents more and more willingly. Facebook has a specific advantage that stems from the nature of social networking sites: it encourages parents to follow and to comment on posts published there, to present their own remarks and to share the content with others. Thanks to this, the teacher can have ongoing and frequent contact with parents.

Another manner of popularising information about current events in the life of a given class, that is currently losing its significance and popularity, are school newspapers. Such cyclically published bulletins, which may be prepared both by parents and pupils, may also be an interesting form of cooperation. It is important that their content features information about current school events, invitations for parents and encouragement to take part in them³⁸. In this respect, digital tools allow for the easy editing of content and limit the costs related to distribution. A newsletter may be distributed only in electronic form, e.g. in the form of a PDF document.

Other tools useful for teachers that are available free-of-charge on the Internet are electronic questionnaires. They allow for collection of remarks and opinions among parents and guardians. Questionnaires can be easily prepared with the use of Google forms. Generally available online tools currently offer a lot of possibilities for designing closed-end questions (single or multiple choice) or open-end questions that allow for inclusion of more extensive answers. Thanks to them, a teacher can easily create a contact form and upload it on a website or a blog; parents can use it at any moment. In certain cases, anonymity of questionnaires is also important: it may be conducive to obtaining honest feedback from parents, allow for disclosure of existing problems in a school group and identification of potential irregularities.

New digital technologies may also be very helpful in streamlining individual contacts of parents and guardians with a teacher. Thanks to their potential, physical presence at school is no longer required. A teacher, during the office hours, may contact parents not only via telephone, but also use Internet communication tools (voice or text-based, e.g. Skype). Nothing can replace a direct talk, but in multiple situations such a form of contact may be sufficient.

A tool that particularly contributes to the tightening of cooperation between teachers and parents is the electronic grade record. The growing popularity of such solutions results, in a significant degree, from needs voiced by the parents. Many schools have introduced various systems of monitoring pupil's progress at the instigation of parents. Apart from paid grade records, there are also many simpler free-of-charge services that perform similar functions. J. Okuniewska³⁹ described in detail her positive experiences with an avatar class; in her every-day didactic work, she uses the ClassDojo platform. It allows for setting up virtual classes and each pupil has their own avatar which can be created on the basis of templates. The platform offers the teacher significant flexibility with respect to grading; a separate grading system can be prepared for a given class and pupils can receive points and distinctions. Both pupils

³⁸ R.I. Arends, *Uczymy się nauczać*, Warszawa 1995, p. 410.

³⁹ J. Okuniewska, *Zarządzanie awatarową klasą*, Super Belfrzy, <<http://www.superbelfrzy.edu.pl/pomyslodajnia/zarzadzanie-awatarowa-klasa/>> (access: 27.11.2015).

and parents have their accounts on the platform. Thanks to this, they can review grades received by their child on a daily basis. The teacher also has the possibility of sending individual or collective notifications to parents via the site. Additionally, the site provides an option for maintenance of “class history” for each group: a blog where posts and photos can be published.

Summing up the hitherto discussion on the use of new technologies supporting and enriching mutual relations between parents and teachers, it is necessary to emphasise that building such an environment requires a considerable amount of work and time, especially on the part of teachers. It is related not only to having proper competences in the area of information and communication technologies, but also to ongoing involvement and meeting specific needs of a given class half-way. Maintenance of a blog or a profile on a social networking site requires systematic activity; entries have to be sufficiently frequent to encourage children and parents and make them involved. When building a virtual space of cooperation, it is also worth remembering that the parents of children currently attending primary schools belong to a generation that grew up in the world of new electronic media and usually use them skilfully. Parents are accustomed to this form of cooperation e.g. through their professional experiences.

Final Part

Nowadays, if the school is to be called a “friendly school”, it has to work out such model of cooperation with parents where both parties, cooperating consciously, will have a feeling of making joint decisions in issues that are important for the upbringing and education of a child. The most important element of efficient cooperation is mutual trust. It is built by a number of various factors and the most important in this respect is the willingness for interaction between parents and teachers. First of all, the teacher should treat the parent as an equal partner and should be cordial and warm in contacts with the child’s legal guardians. On the other hand, the parent should remember that he/ she is the most important educator. The teacher should not be burdened with the effort of upbringing a child. If teachers and parents fulfil the principles listed above, their cooperation will be fruitful and will offer quantifiable benefits for the child whom they care for. In order to meet the requirements above, it is necessary to apply various forms of cooperation with parents. It is worth emphasising that nobody challenges the viability of cooperation between school and home; both parties are aware of its necessity and importance. It is also necessary to introduce new forms of cooperation, so that it is attractive and efficient. With respect to the above, it is necessary to actively and systematically include parents in performance of care, didactic and educational tasks of the school and constantly show the benefits of such cooperation.

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