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Parents' perspectives on the (non)presence of educational partnership in parent-teacher relationships: Research report

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Abstract

Research objectives and problems: Guided by the belief that recognizing parental subjectivity is essential for students' effective functioning in school, this qualitative study sought to examine how parents of early school-aged children conceptualize educational partnership with teachers and how they experience it in practice. The research focused on identifying factors such as the types of communication between teachers and parents, teachers' perceptions of parents' competencies, areas of shared parent-teacher interaction, and both parties' attitudes toward educational support. In parents' view, these factors shape—and often determine—the quality of their educational partnership with teachers.

The main research questions guiding the study were:

1. What meanings do parents attribute to the concept of educational partnership in early school education?
2. How do parents experience educational partnership in the school setting?

Research methods: The study is situated within an interpretive qualitative paradigm and employs individual, open-ended interviews with parents of early school-aged children. Analysis of the research material involved identifying and describing thematic categories emerging from the statements of the respondents to illustrate how parents understand the essence of parent-teacher educational partnership and how it is enacted in practice.

Process of argumentation: The article begins with an analysis of theoretical concepts and empirical studies concerning the participation of educational stakeholders, demonstrating the importance of educational partnership in the parent–teacher relationship for enhancing the effectiveness of teaching and upbringing. The need for pedagogical support and parent education is emphasized. The issue of educational partnership is examined from a subjective and constructivist perspective, according to which partnership interactions should involve knowledge exchange, negotiation, collaborative problem-solving, and the joint optimization of educational and developmental processes in both school and family environments.

Research results and their impact on the development of pedagogical sciences: The findings indicate that parents are well aware of the importance of their participation in their children's school education. In their view, the presence and quality of an educational partnership depend primarily on how teachers build and shape relationships with parents. The response categories identified during the analysis reveal varying conceptualizations of educational partnership, as well as diverse ways in which parents experience such partnerships in practice. This article contributes to a line of research aimed at transforming early childhood education practices to create space for parents' full participation in their children's learning—supported by both teachers and the school.

Conclusions and/or recommendations: The analysis allowed for formulating several actions that schools and teachers must undertake to create conditions for an effective educational partnership with parents. The study underscores the importance of teachers adopting a dialogical, open, and creative stance when shaping communication with parents. The conclusions presented here may support efforts to develop new solutions to implementing the idea of teacher and parent subjectivity in the education of young children.

Introduction

Contemporary life is characterized by great diversity, complexity, instability, and relativity. As Monika Miczka-Pajestka (2013) notes, “the pluralization of the socio-cultural sphere reveals more and more possibilities for functioning and ‘being’ in the world, along with new styles and ways of living, which together pose a significant challenge for individuals as subjects” (p. 59). Such a reality generates daily difficulties, uncertainty about the future, and a constant need to manage ongoing changes and make constant choices.

This also applies to parents, who face a number of challenges, problems, and questions. The socio-cultural space absorbs a wide range of ideas and values, which are constantly reshaped through interaction. Both parents and teachers encounter a pluralized vision of reality in which they form relationships and communication patterns based on the values that they have learned and embraced. In a culture lacking a stable paradigm and marked by diversity, this process becomes especially difficult.

There is no doubt that “contemporary families reflect the changes in the world, and because reality is difficult and complicated, these difficulties also occur in families” (Kochanowska, 2007, p. 145). For this reason, families require professional, multi-level educational support. From the earliest stages of schooling, teachers play a pivotal role in providing such support. The effectiveness of teaching and upbringing depends largely on teachers’ ability to build strong relationships with students’ parents and their willingness to engage in mutual cooperation.

Theoretical studies and empirical research on the participation of educational stakeholders—namely parents and teachers—in various aspects of school and family life underscore the need for the democratization of the school environment (Gawlicz et al., 2014; Śliwerski, 2014; Tłuczek-Tadla, 2022), as well as the need to strengthen student, parent, and teacher participation in school life (Kołodziejczyk, 2011). These studies also highlight the importance of raising awareness among parents and teachers about shared responsibility and cooperation in supporting children’s educational achievements (Loughran, 2008; Suryani, 2013). The expectations of parents and teachers regarding collaboration constitute a frequently investigated area of research (Cankar et al., 2023).

Research aimed at capturing the scope of cooperation, the nature of parental involvement in children’s education, and the forms in which such involvement occurs usually reflects a positivist trend in studies on the family–school relationship. These studies seek to define the extent of cooperation and identify its constituent elements. Researchers also analyze the conditions and potential obstacles that impede the development of constructive collaboration between parents and teachers (Epstein, 2007; Kołodziejczyk et al., 2012).

As Marta Wiatr (2019) observes, “in this dominant normative discourse, the lack of cooperation with the school or the lack of parental involvement in the form expected by the institution is interpreted in terms of insufficient cultural resources in the family environment, individual pathologies and deficits, or lack of willingness and misunderstanding of the task. As a result, the parent is treated as a ‘partner without resources’” (p. 210). Theoretical analyses and studies often overlook the psychosocial context of parent–teacher cooperation and may attribute failures in building positive family–school relationships solely to family-related causes.

In contrast, some researchers point to socio-psychological and socio-political factors that influence the capacity of families and schools to support the child’s learning. A distinctly different perspective emerges in the critical–emancipatory discourse, which demands that parents be recognized as competent partners in their relationship with teachers, partners who not only know their children very well but also have the right to express views about their children’s development and the school’s activities (Wiatr, 2019).

Cooperation between parents and teachers involves jointly pursuing shared goals and participating in collective decision-making. However, such cooperation should not be understood as merely satisfying each party’s expectations; rather, it requires a collaborative search for solutions to existing problems related to teaching, learning, and child development (Dubis, 2016). According to Bogusław Śliwerski (2004), in a democratic school, based on a subjective, personalistic approach to cooperation, mutual relations among educational actors demand autonomous participation, openness to individual needs, and formal equality before the law, along with respect for these principles in the system of collaborating partners.

The unique relationships among teachers, parents, and children—who “share a common goal accepted by all three parties, maintain a positive emotional attitude toward one another, uphold mutual respect, cooperate, and assume joint responsibility”—are defined as an **educational partnership** (Milerski & Śliwerski, 2000, p. 144). As Janke (2004)

notes, the principle of educational partnership requires clearly defining the duties, areas, and framework of cooperation. The optimal model of such cooperation is built on the idea of acting *for* the child and *with* the child. One of the most crucial conditions for partnership is the openness of both parents and teachers to joining collaboration and to coordinating their efforts in a shared direction, one that shapes students' attitudes, behaviors, and value systems (Karbowiczek, 2016).

The purpose of this article is to present educational partnership with teachers from the perspective of parents. The qualitative research conducted for this study made it possible to shed light on how parents of early school-aged children conceptualize the essence of this partnership in their relationships with teachers, as well as how they experience it in everyday school practice.

Teacher–parent relationship and creating space for educational partnership: theoretical context

One of the most neglected areas of cooperation between teachers and parents is pedagogical support and parental education. In this context, scholars emphasize that in light of sweeping social changes taking place in almost all areas of life, parents often confront challenges that exceed their abilities and skills. These difficulties concern, among other things, the fulfillment of their educational role—an area in which intuitive action and the experience gained in one's family of origin are often insufficient. Marzena Banańczyk describes this situation as follows:

Parents often ask themselves what to do and how to raise a child properly. Today, parents base their educational practices mainly on their own childhood experiences. The knowledge of previous generations is no longer adequate for proper upbringing, therefore parents frequently express confusion and helplessness in matters of raising children. Thus, we are currently witnessing an educational crisis in the family (2011, p. 7).

Henryk Cudak shares similar concerns:

In modern times, parents, even with higher levels of education, are often unable to influence their children's development, upbringing, and socialization in a way consistent with good pedagogical practice. Their educational actions tend to be spontaneous, not intentional, which frequently leads to undesirable outcomes. (...) For this reason, the school, as an institution of care, upbringing, and education, should carry out pedagogical tasks in a planned and purposeful way (2011, p. 9).

Contemporary living conditions increasingly underscore the need for parent education. This stems from the fact that "today's social and cultural reality creates difficult conditions for the child's adaptation process and therefore requires parents to possess additional knowledge and educational skills" (Skreczko, 2001, p. 175). Parents begin preparing for their role in their own family of origin. This preparation is shaped by everyday knowledge, the experiences and behavioral patterns of their parents, and their pedagogical culture; it is later modified by their own reflections, intuition, and subsequent exposures and experiences. It is also impossible to overlook the media as an important source of information for contemporary parents.

On the one hand, parents actively seek knowledge and information that may help them resolve educational problems, but on the other hand, they often perceive school initiatives as criticism of their parenting efforts. Teachers, in turn, report that only a small number of parents take part in organized pedagogical activities, which leads schools to discontinue such efforts. School administrators are also reluctant to adopt broader parent education programs because their implementation involves additional financial outlays.

Parents often avoid seeking extra knowledge out of fear that doing so will be interpreted as an admission that they are struggling to fulfill their educational responsibilities toward their child. Even when they recognize the need to support their children, they often do not know where or how to access the necessary resources (Balukiewicz, 2008; Kopeć, 2014). It also

seems that the low level of parental engagement in this form of cooperation may stem simply from a lack of awareness both of the opportunities available and of their rights in this respect. Parents often do not know what their rights are. They may be unaware that they can receive support from the school, what that support entails, or who is responsible for providing it (Kochanowska, 2007).

Parents who recognize the need to support their child's school education expect teachers to assist them in this process, for example, by offering guidance or advice on improving the child's learning skills at home or addressing educational difficulties (Śliwerski, 2001). Research (Christopher, 2004) shows, however, that the possibility of establishing an educational partnership is significantly weakened by the persistent belief that the sphere of education—including content, standards, and teaching methods—belongs exclusively to teachers. Teachers often defend what they see as their didactic (methodological) territory. They believe that this space formally belongs to them and should not be subject to external interference. Many view the didactic domain as an area of their exclusive competence and professional preparation, validated by formal qualifications and a diploma.

In some cases, a teacher may interpret a parent's natural interest in their child's academic difficulties as an unwarranted intrusion into their professional sphere. As a result, they lose the opportunity to gain the parent as an ally in their actions and efforts. Instead, they may weaken or even erode the parent's sense of shared responsibility for effectively finding solutions to the child's problems. Parents who encounter such attitudes often develop emotional distance or even negative feelings toward the teacher and may become increasingly passive.

A lack of mutual understanding between teachers and parents can give rise to negative behaviors and patterns, such as distrust and reluctance, mutual accusations, blaming each other for the child's academic difficulties, or competing for influence (Mendel, 2004; Zalewska-Bujak, 2020). Research by Barbara Lulek (2012) shows that although school principals do not explicitly distance themselves from cooperation with parents, many are nonetheless satisfied with parents' attitudes of detachment

or indifference toward their children's education. The traditional division between "competent professional teachers" and "less competent parents" continues to function in many schools, where strong partnerships among participants and co-participants in the educational process are rare.

The issue of educational partnership in teacher–parent relationships is rarely examined from subjective and constructivist perspectives, in which teachers are not viewed solely as educators of parents, but parents themselves are recognized as valuable sources of knowledge about their children, their upbringing, and their developmental needs. In a genuine partnership, interactions should include the exchange of knowledge, negotiation, collaborative problem-solving, and the joint optimization of the educational and upbringing process in both the school and the family environment. As Maria Czerepaniak-Walczak writes:

The process of emancipation of the school and the culture of education does not occur because of "experts" and politics, but despite "experts" and politics. It is specific to a given school culture, whose subjects share a common vision of the school as a space for the development of rational, critical thinking, courage and responsibility, mutual trust, and respect for the right to honest and open communication. (2018, p. 241)

Such communication becomes possible through a **culture of cooperation and dialogue**, characterized by spontaneity and voluntariness, but also by a certain degree of unpredictability. This culture is created primarily by teachers themselves, emerges from their needs, gives them professional satisfaction, and promotes the development of personal initiative. It is based on the shared understanding and values of teachers, the school principal, students, and parents. Cooperation takes place in both formal, goal-oriented contexts and informal interactions (Gołębniak, 2004).

In such a school, friendly relations exist among all educational stakeholders, accompanied by a commitment to mutual understanding and respect for each interaction partner. As Roland Meighan points out, recognizing the role of collaboration among participants in the educational

process, in which each person is “at once a learner and a source from whom others learn” (2005, p. 82), is an essential element of parent–teacher cooperation. Sharing knowledge, exchanging ideas, offering systematic help, and creating opportunities for reflection on the activities of all educational partners heighten awareness of the potential for community and multifaceted engagement. Participation in shared activities forms the most beneficial system of connections between the elements of the educational and upbringing environment (Dubis, 2019).

Although each school represents a distinct space in which community members form particular relationships, dependencies, and roles, in all cases it is only relationships based on a **subject-centered educational paradigm** that make an authentic educational partnership among teachers, parents, and students possible.

Research method and procedure

Grounded in the belief that recognizing parental subjectivity is essential for students' effective functioning in the school environment, this qualitative study sought to reconstruct the ways in which parents experience educational partnership in their relationships with early-grade elementary teachers. The aim was to examine how parents conceptualize the essence of educational partnership and to determine how—and whether—they experience such partnership at school. Particular attention was given to the initiators and inhibitors of partnership, as well as the factors that parents perceive as determining its quality, including types of teacher–parent communication, teachers' perceptions of parents' competencies, areas of shared interaction, and the attitudes of both parents and teachers toward educational support.

Guided by the interpretive paradigm of qualitative research, the study sought to capture the various ways in which parents of early school-aged children understand educational partnership and participate in their children's schooling. The findings presented here are preliminary and exploratory; the study will be continued. By making parents' educational

partnership the focus of analysis, the article contributes to a research trend aimed at transforming early childhood education practices to create space for parents' full participation in their children's learning.

As Neuman notes, the most important aspect of the interpretive approach is the systematic analysis of the social meanings that people create in their natural settings, aimed at understanding and interpreting how people construct and make sense of the world in which they live (1994, p. 162). In the interpretive approach, words constitute the primary research data. Participants' statements and narratives allow researchers to gain insight into the meanings that informants attribute to the events in which they take part (Zwiernik, 2015). The decision to employ this method of data collection stemmed from the belief that it makes it possible to access the respondents' lived worlds: their everyday experiences (Kvale, 2004).

The research problems were formulated as the following questions:

1. What meanings do parents attribute to the category of educational partnership between parents and teachers in early school education?
2. What picture of parents' experiences of educational partnership with teachers emerges from their statements?

The research was conducted using individual, open-ended, semi-structured interviews, which made it possible to gain insight into parents' experiences of educational partnership. As Earl Babbie explains, an open-ended interview is "an interaction between an interviewer and a respondent in which the interview has a general plan of inquiry but not a specific set of questions that must be asked in a specific order" (2008, p. 342). A semi-structured interview, by contrast, is characterized by a small set of core questions that directly address the essence of the phenomenon under study, the subjective meaning of which, present in the mind of the interviewee (in this study, the parent), the researcher seeks to uncover in the research process (Męczkowska, 2002, p. 24).

An integral part of the research procedure involves the interviewer asking for clarification or elaboration during the recorded conversations. Thus, several basic key questions were prepared in advance, along with

a list of supplementary questions that could be used as needed. The basic interview questions included:

1. Do you experience a sense of partnership in your child's education, and to what extent? What does this partnership mean to you?
2. How do you assess your relationship with the teacher when discussing instructional or educational issues concerning your child?
3. Do you want to be involved in matters related to your child's education at school and beyond, and if so, in what ways?
4. Is there anything you would like to change in your relationship with the teacher regarding your child's education?
5. What do you believe stands in the way of achieving a collaborative learning partnership between teachers and parents? How do you experience this?

Auxiliary questions were formulated during the interview to help respondents articulate and thematize their experiences. The research was conducted with twenty-two parents—mothers and fathers—of early school-aged children attending urban and rural schools in the Silesia and Lesser Poland provinces.

The number of respondents was determined by the study's anchoring in the interpretive paradigm, whose methodological contours involve, among other elements, the exhaustion of the "result field" during exploration (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2000) and the saturation of categories that emerge during analysis. The selection of the research sample was therefore based not on the criterion of generalizability, typical of quantitative research, but on internal and external validity. Internal validity concerns the accuracy of generalizations made about members of the group who were not interviewed; external validity relates to the researcher's ability to predict how the observed phenomena might function under different conditions or in other communities (Szkudlarek, 1997).

As Męczkowska (2002, p. 27) notes, analysis in this type of research is typically conducted with a small group of approximately twenty participants. With such a number, the "result field" becomes exhausted—that

is, new contextual elements cease to appear in participants' statements (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2000). As Heinz-Hermann Krüger explains, the selection and inclusion of additional material ends when "theoretical saturation" is reached, i.e., further research no longer contributes anything new (2007, p. 162). Data collection therefore concludes at the point when no new categories emerge that would require additional analytical directions or explanations. As a result, the interview data more accurately capture what participants themselves think about their reality, instead of serving to confirm preconceived theses held by the researcher.

Participants were selected randomly, with the main eligibility criterion being that they were the parent of a child in the first, second, or third grade of elementary school and consented to participate. The researcher conducted the interviews in person, on dates individually arranged with each parent, between January and June 2024.

The study group consisted of 16 mothers and 6 fathers. Most participants (15 individuals) were between 27 and 40 years old, and the remaining parents were over 40.

Presentation and analysis of research results

In accordance with the adopted research approach, the ways in which respondents understood the studied phenomenon—as expressed in the analyzed material—guided the researcher in establishing descriptive categories. These categories are "generalized and structured descriptions of the ways phenomena present in respondents' experiences are understood" (Męczkowska, 2002, p. 18). They were identified by condensing recurring themes that emerged during the review of participants' responses. The established categories constitute the *outcome space* and may, but do not necessarily have to, be hierarchized to create a structure of descriptive categories.

It should be emphasized that these categories are simultaneously individual and collective, which means that a single statement may represent various expressions of the same concept, or even different concepts

altogether (Jurgiel, 2009). The categories presented here reflect generalized and structured descriptions of how respondents understand the phenomena in question (Męczkowska, 2002).

Given the interpretive paradigm of the study, the aim was not to examine the phenomenon in terms of quantity or frequency—an approach characteristic of quantitative research—but to uncover the meanings and dimensions of educational partnership between parents and early childhood teachers. In what follows, I limit myself to presenting the categories identified in the respondents' statements, illustrated through selected excerpts from the interviews to shed light on the themes discussed and the analyses presented.

The analysis of empirical material obtained from a relatively small group is qualitative in nature and does not involve statistical tools. Nevertheless, scholars note that quantitative elements can be used in qualitative and explanatory research. As David Silverman explains, simple computational techniques can serve as a way to probe the entire dataset, much of which is often overlooked during intensive qualitative analysis (2008, p. 62). The analysis of the collected statements from parents of early school-aged children made it possible to distinguish the following categories and subcategories of description:

The essence of educational partnership with teachers from the perspective of parents

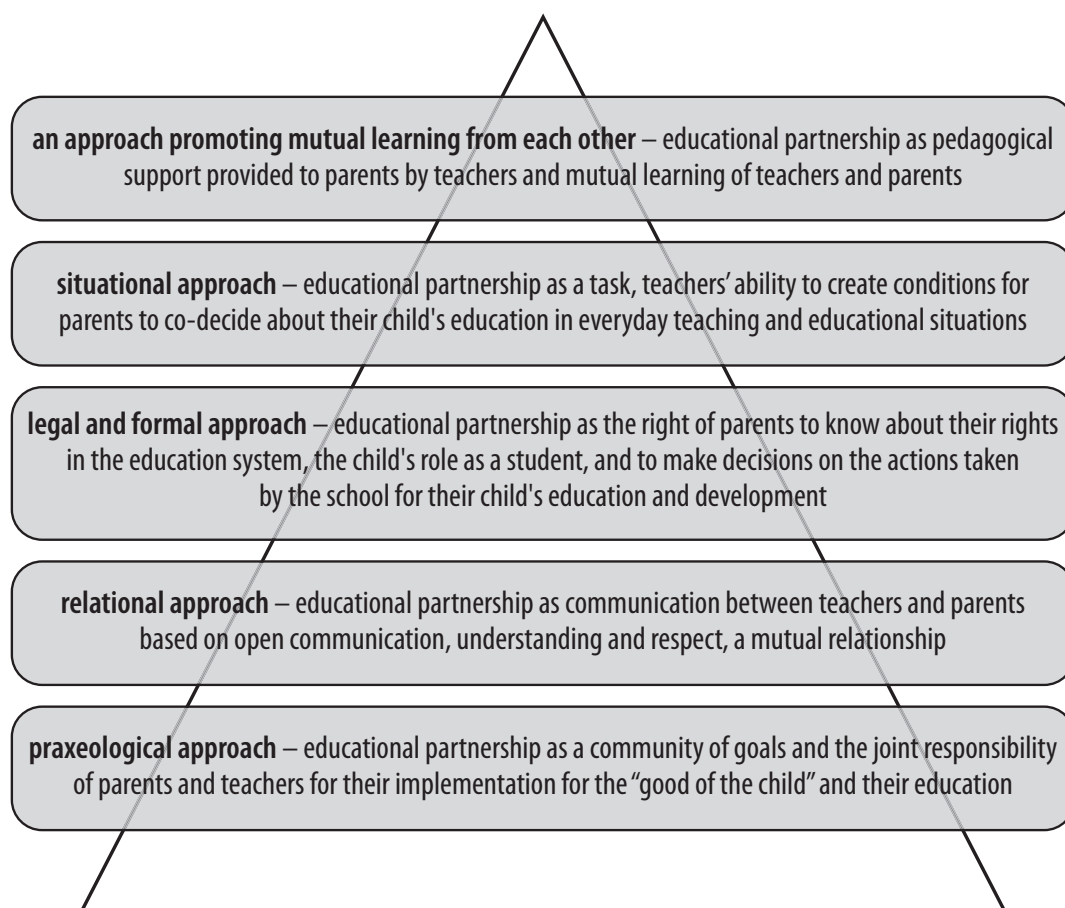
Analysis of the statements provided by parents of early school-aged children made it possible to identify how they conceptualize educational partnership with teachers. To begin with, it should be noted that all respondents recognized that educational partnership between parents and teachers is a necessary condition for ensuring the effectiveness of a child's learning and developmental process.

The content analysis of interview responses led to the identification of several ways in which parents understand the essence of this concept, differing in both scope and thematic emphasis. It is important to stress

that these categories are not mutually exclusive; elements associated with different categories frequently appeared together within the same interview. Consistent with the adopted qualitative research procedures, the presentation of results (for the purposes of this study) is limited to describing the categories of responses distinguished as a result of the analysis of parents' statements, along with the dominant tendencies observed within them.

Based on this analysis, five distinct parental approaches to the essence of educational partnership were identified (Fig. 1).

Fig. 1. Parents' conceptualizations of the essence of educational partnership with teachers



Source: Author's own research

Category 1.1: Educational partnership as a community of goals and shared responsibility of parents and teachers for achieving them “for the child’s good” and development

(praxeological approach)

The vast majority of respondents (20 parents), when explaining the discussed concept, focused primarily on the teleological aspect of educational partnership. They defined it broadly as the pursuit of common goals shared by the school and the family, along with coordinated actions taken by both educational environments to achieve these goals. It should be emphasized that parents’ definitions were largely aspirational, often expressed through formulations such as “it should be this way,” “ideally,” “it would be good if...” and so on.

Example of a parent’s statement¹:

There is no doubt that both parents and teachers should be partners at school. Both should care about the child developing and learning well. The most important thing is to support them together and help them develop their abilities and skills as much as possible. And here both must act together. Without this, unfortunately, nothing will happen... [Interview 3].

According to these respondents, the shared goal of parents and the school should be to meet children’s educational and developmental needs and to create optimal conditions for learning.

Category 1.2: Educational partnership as communication, relationships, and open dialogue based on understanding and respect

(relational approach)

Teachers and parents enter into specific relationships characterized by mutual dependence and clearly defined roles. These relationships can take positive or negative forms, and in the school context it is mainly the

¹ The respondents’ statements were quoted without linguistic correction, in their original form.

teacher who shapes the quality of the relationship with parents. A substantial group of respondents (18 parents) emphasized the importance of proper communication in establishing an educational partnership.

In the opinion of parents, a partnership must be built on mutual trust and on treating one another as allies working toward shared goals. Only authentic, cooperative, and respectful relationships that acknowledge the subjectivity of both parents and teachers enable parents to participate fully in their children's education.

Example of a parent's statement:

The most important thing is for the teacher to be open to contact with parents, to talk to them. If the teacher is inaccessible, doesn't let the parent speak, only lectures them, tells the child what they're doing wrong and how badly they behave at school, and still doesn't listen to the parent—how can you even say that this teacher is a partner? They must want to listen to the parent and be interested in what the parent has to say... Interview 12].

Category 1.3: Educational partnership as parents' right to know their rights in the education system, to understand their child's functioning as a student, and to participate in decisions about school actions taken for the child's learning and development (legal and formal approach)

A significant number of respondents (16 parents) associated partnership primarily with the equality of parents' and teachers' rights in the child's education. This includes parents' right to access information about their child's schooling and to participate in decisions regarding their child's course of education. Analysis of parents' statements shows that their ability to take part in decision-making at school constitutes an important component of what they consider an educational partnership.

In their view, parents' knowledge of their child, including their needs, often quite specific ones, entitles them to such participation. Knowing one's rights in the school system provides the basis for co-managing the educational process and co-determining the direction of the school's activities.

Parents linked educational partnership with the right to accurate, reliable information about their child's functioning at school and the right to express opinions and expectations concerning the school's actions.

Example of a parent's statement:

If a parent knows their rights—knows what they can demand or expect from the teacher and the school—then they know how to enforce them. Then they can decide together with the teacher what the child's education and upbringing should look like. I would like to know what's happening at school at any time, to have access to my child's work... But that's not always the case... [Interview 8].

Category 1.4: Educational partnership as a task—teachers' ability to create conditions that allow parents to co-decide about their child's education in everyday instructional and educational situations

(situational approach)

In contrast to the previously discussed ways of conceptualizing educational partnership, the next category emphasizes the *processual, situational, and systematic* nature of involving parents in their child's education at school and in resolving any instructional or educational problems. The parents in this group (10 respondents) associate educational partnership with having a sense of real influence on their child's education and on school functioning. In their opinion, teachers have the responsibility to involve parents in school life both in planned situations and in those that arise naturally in the course of everyday teaching.

Example of a parent's statement:

I feel like a partner in my child's education at school. Matters concerning my daughter's learning and upbringing are discussed at meetings and individually. I can always speak up and express my opinion... I feel that my voice matters and is important. I know what is happening at school on an ongoing basis. I know I'm fortunate, but sadly, it's not always like that in schools... [Interview 4].

Category 1.5: Educational partnership as pedagogical support provided to parents by teachers and mutual education of teachers and parents (an approach promoting mutual learning from each other)

The least frequent association found in parents' statements (8 respondents) concerned educational partnership as a mutual exchange of knowledge. These parents recognized that their interpretation of educational reality may differ from that of teachers, and hence, it is necessary to juxtapose and synthesize these perspectives in order to understand instructional and educational situations at school. They expect teachers to be cognitively open to parents' knowledge and experiences, which—though often intuitive or based on everyday understanding, as they themselves admit—can nonetheless be useful in teaching and upbringing.

Parents also expressed a need and willingness to improve their own competencies, especially those related to supporting their child's education. They expect teachers to provide pedagogical guidance in raising and educating their children, as well as to provide instruction tailored to parents' needs and capabilities.

Example of a parent's statement:

I would like to be a better mother—to help my child more, for example, with learning or developing interests. But I don't always know how to do that. It's really hard. I try, but it would be good if teachers, as professionals, helped parents raise and teach their children, and not just informed us or told us what needs to be changed in our child's behavior because they're misbehaving... I know my child. I try to talk to the teacher at school, but I sense a lack of interest. "Please speak to your child," they say—but how? [Interview 11].

Ways in which parents (do not) experience educational partnership at school

The qualitative analysis of parents' statements provided data that made it possible to identify how parents experience educational partnership

with teachers. A substantial number of respondents (15 parents) reported feeling that they have little or no influence on their child's education at school. These parents participate in their child's instructional and educational process only within the boundaries and to the extent permitted by the teacher.

The remaining respondents did perceive themselves as educational partners, but most often (7 parents) only to a limited degree. Analysis of parents' statements allowed for the identification of several factors that determine the scope and level of their sense of partnership with teachers.

Category 2.1: The teacher or the parent as the initiator/inhibitor of educational partnership

According to the majority of respondents (17 parents), it is mainly the teacher who initiates contact with parents and who decides on the form and structure of the meeting (regardless of whether it is a group meeting during formal school events or an individual consultation). Parents in this group emphasized that they themselves rarely initiate contact regarding their child's education. They are often uncertain whether the teacher will consider the matter important enough, how they will be treated, and what the consequences might be. Some worry they may be perceived as parents who "think they know better" or who are "too demanding." Only a small number of parents (5 respondents) felt that the teacher was open to communication and that they could independently initiate meetings or exchange information in other ways.

Category 2.2: Time as a factor determining the quality of educational partnership between parents and teachers

In many parents' statements (10 respondents), great importance was attributed to the factor of *time*. Referring to their own experiences, all respondents expressed the belief that there is "no time" at school for true partnership with parents. Teacher-initiated interactions were described as strictly planned, confined to narrow timeframes, and conducted according to predetermined rules. Several respondents (7 parents) mentioned the lack of flexibility in adjusting meeting times to parents' availability.

A smaller group (6 parents) noted that their relationship with the teacher had improved “over time,” with gradual progress toward an educational partnership based on mutual understanding and the recognition of both parties as sources of valuable information relevant to the child’s education and development.

Category 2.3: Types of teacher–parent communication relations: one-sided communication versus interactive dialogue

A strong teacher–parent relationship depends on communication that allows for mutual exchange. However, according to most respondents (15 parents), communication with teachers is usually one-sided, with teachers presenting their own viewpoints and focusing on their role as the sender of messages. In such interactions, parents reported that their role is largely passive: listening, acknowledging, and expressing readiness to comply with the teacher’s comments and recommendations about their child’s education.

Parents often described the teacher’s stance as dominant and expert-driven, which they associated with their professionalism and credentials. Several respondents (4 parents) suggested that this may also stem from teachers’ fears of losing authority or relinquishing their role as the “more competent” figure.

In contrast, the remaining respondents (7 parents) characterized communication with teachers as open to dialogue. In their experience, teachers listened attentively and nonjudgmentally, creating an atmosphere of trust that enabled parents to speak freely about educational and instructional concerns. Such communicative relationships provided an opportunity to exchange experiences and establish a platform for dialogue.

Category 2.4: Symmetry/asymmetry in teachers’ perceptions of parents’ competencies

The respondents’ experiences also shed light on how teachers perceive parents’ educational competencies. According to most parents (15 respondents), their knowledge about their child and their child’s upbringing is not sufficiently acknowledged or utilized by teachers at school.

Parents attributed this primarily to a lack of dialogue, teachers' reluctance to allow parents into the sphere of school activities, and the tendency to treat parents' knowledge—often intuitive and rooted in everyday experience—as "inferior."

Some respondents also indicated that teachers only *pretend* to value parents' competencies. Although teachers may appear to solicit parents' opinions, ideas, or observations, parents felt that these contributions were not considered in practice. As a result, parents in this group expressed little confidence in their actual influence on their child's education at school.

In contrast, the remaining respondents (7 parents) evaluated teachers' attitudes toward their educational competencies as open and sincerely interested. These parents felt that their knowledge and experience, despite not being professionally substantiated, were accepted and considered important by the teacher.

Category 2.5: Spaces of educational partnership—areas of joint interaction between parents and teachers

Analysis of the respondents' statements revealed the thematic areas that are typically undertaken within teacher–parent communication. All respondents emphasized that the primary purpose of teacher-initiated contact, whether in group meetings or individual consultations, is to inform parents about their child's academic performance and behavior at school, especially regarding instructional and educational difficulties in the classroom, as well as matters related to class or school organization. The mode of communication is predominantly transmission-based: teachers convey information and provide general recommendations, such as advising parents to talk to their child or to increase supervision of their behavior or learning processes.

All respondents reported participating in *pedagogical sessions* during parent meetings, usually delivered in the form of lectures or presentations by a teacher or school specialist (e.g., a school counselor). These sessions were less frequently conducted as discussions, and their topics were most often predetermined. Only six parents reported having had the opportunity to propose topics for such sessions (usually via a survey

question about future themes). Five parents participated in open lessons organized by the teacher. These findings indicate that the topics addressed in teacher–parent interactions rarely constitute genuine co-created spaces of educational partnership.

Category 2.6: Openness or reluctance of parents and teachers toward pedagogical support and parent education offered by teachers

Some parents (12 respondents) emphasized the teacher's role in enriching their pedagogical awareness and providing information about the course and outcomes of their child's education and upbringing. Parents in this group experienced support from teachers in solving difficult educational problems and reported receiving appropriate assistance related to their child's learning. For these respondents, being supported in their parenting and jointly seeking solutions with teachers represents an important expression of educational partnership. They also expressed a need for pedagogical support and parent education that goes beyond lectures—requesting workshops, meetings, opportunities to participate in lessons, and other interactive formats.

In contrast, a smaller group (5 parents) did not see the need for schools or teachers to undertake educational initiatives directed toward parents. They did not expect teachers to show initiative in this area and maintained a clear division between the responsibilities of the school and those of parents, especially regarding the child's education. These parents emphasized that teachers, as trained professionals, “know best how to teach and raise children,” and therefore saw no need for cooperation beyond checking homework or occasionally helping their child study.

Conclusions

There is no doubt that “both the school and parents are competent entities capable of creating synergistic systems by generating rules of organization and collaboration with other people, institutions, and various

types of communities” (Dubis, 2019, p. 155). The effectiveness of the educational and upbringing process depends to a large extent on authentic, cooperative, and reciprocal relationships between parents and teachers.

Based on the qualitative research, it can be concluded that parents are aware of the importance of their participation in their child’s education at school. In their view, educational partnership between parents and teachers is a necessary factor that shapes the course and outcomes of the child’s learning. Parents tend to emphasize the teacher’s role as the person who determines whether an educational partnership occurs and what form it takes. They perceive the essence of partnership primarily as the pursuit of shared goals between school and family and as a relationship based on mutual trust and respect.

Some respondents associated educational partnership with equality between parents and teachers expressed through parents’ sense of agency and participation in decision-making regarding their child’s education. Others linked partnership with the systematic and situational inclusion of parents in school-based educational activities and in handling current instructional and developmental issues. The least common association in parents’ statements involved the mutual exchange of knowledge and experience between teachers and parents. Nonetheless, many parents expect teachers to be open to learning from parents’ insights, even when such knowledge is intuitive or experiential.

For many respondents, experiences of educational partnership were marked by a perceived lack of influence on their child’s education, teacher dominance in determining the time, form, content, and course of interactions with parents, one-way communication, and an expert-driven teacher stance. More than half of the respondents expressed a desire to expand their pedagogical understanding through support offered by teachers as part of a true partnership.

There is no doubt that a key element of educational partnership must be teachers’ willingness to recognize parents as “potential advisors, experts from whom it is possible and worthwhile to learn and whose knowledge and skills should be used in the teaching and upbringing process” (Śliwerski, 2017, p. 257). The findings of this preliminary study

may constitute a foundation for further reflection and more in-depth research on the role of educational partnership in teacher–parent relationships, understood as authentic engagement in the child's education based on symmetrical communication, joint pursuit of shared goals, and shared decision-making.

For educational partnership to be genuine rather than superficial, the school must become a unique space shaped by the quality of relationships that occur within it. Such a school should be characterized above all by dialogue between teachers and parents, a sense of acceptance, recognition of “parental potential,” shared understanding of problems, and collaborative, creative actions aimed at transforming educational reality into one that is relational and partnership-oriented.

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