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Responsible Parenthood as the Foundation of a Child's Success in Education

Abstract: This paper is an attempt to look at parenthood in the context of supporting the child in the educational process. It emphasizes the idea that educational success and further achievement and well-being of the child largely depend on the manner and quality of educational role performed by parents. Other important factors include parents' social and professional status, financial situation as well as parental awareness and responsibility. The results of survey research used in this work show that the students of Rzeszów University Teaching Faculty see a considerable need for parental involvement in the teaching process of their offspring, which results mainly from a faulty school system.

The findings of the research are useful for teaching practice. Firstly, it seems that nowadays there is a need to look for new solutions that would make school and teachers closer to the real needs and capabilities of children and their parents. On the other hand, there is also a growing need for intensified educational activity directed to parents and potential parents aimed primarily at developing responsible parenting attitudes.

Keywords: parenthood, parental responsibility, parental involvement, education, educational success, school.

Introduction

The successful education of any child is largely dependent on the method and quality of the parenting role. This role should be understood as an aspect of family educational function whose fulfilment depends on a range of social, economic and cultural conditions affecting the family and the environment in which it operates. In the context of successful socio-educational start of the child, the key configuration of family conditions seems to be the one that ensures enhanced opportunities for the development of siblings through making such perspectives that enable the utmost psychophysical, intellectual, social and cultural development of the younger generation. What matters in this respect is the parents' professional status, education level, tradition of cultural and educational advancement, prosperity (Kawula, 1999, p. 281), and parental awareness (Kawula, 2000, p. 185). Special importance is attributed to high-quality parenthood resulting mainly from parental responsibility. This type of responsibility affects parents' conduct towards the child, which is oriented towards the latter's well-being.

Joanna M. Michalak points out that parental responsibility is the parent's response to the child's well-being, where the parent takes responsibility for everything that lies within the scope of their possibilities. Moreover, parental responsibility is related to all aspects of offspring life. It should be emphasized here that parents are responsible "for" the child, including the course of their development and meeting emotional needs, but also "for" themselves. At the same time, parents are responsible for what they have done and what they are like, because the latter affects their own future as well as the future of their children (Michalak, 2003, p. 22–24).

Responsible parenthood is about care responsibilities, upbringing and continuous concern about the child's development. This is also about creating such conditions for the child, from the very moment of birth, that enable independent existence, development of valuable orientations to life and ambitions. In the aspect that is of interest to us here, responsible motherhood or fatherhood involves promoting the child's

motivation to learn, developing interests and educational aspirations as well as the parent's engagement and participation in the educational process.

Methodology of research

The scope of the problems as outlined above was dealt with by means of an empirical approach, whereby I tried to determine how the students of Rzeszów University Teaching Faculty, as future teachers, perceive parents as promoters of the educational success of their children.

My research procedure combined a survey and a questionnaire technique. All the respondents were asked to provide reasonably detailed comments while answering open-ended questions, because I believed that non-standard opinions of the respondents were worth analysing in the context of the problems that are the subject of my interest. While analysing the feedback that I received, I made some generalizations as to their content. Occasionally, I also quoted several opinions. When asking questions about the parental role in the child's education, I did not specify the age of the offspring so as not to limit the respondents' feedback. The vast majority of the opinions were about primary school education with only 3 answers related to parental roles in the education of older children.

The research material that was obtained allowed for four major questions to be answered:

- how do respondents see the need for parental involvement in the child's school education?
- what is the reason for the active participation of the parent in the child's education?
- what is the essence of adequate parental involvement in the child's education?
- what circumstances prejudice the priority role of the parent in the child's education?

The research involved a total of 60 students in the field of Teaching (majoring in preschool and primary/early school education, childcare education and media education) and Family Studies. There were 56 students of Teaching (93,3%) and 4 students of Family Studies (6,7%). 25 respondents (41,6%) were undergraduate /first cycle students, while 35 of them (58,4%) were doing graduate courses. As regards sex, there were 59 women and only one man.

Analysis and interpretation of research results

On the basis of the results it may be said that the absolute majority of the subjects (54 people - 90%) pointed to the need for parental involvement in the child's education. This involvement is considered by the students as fundamental for the child's educational success and as a factor in the child's adaptation to school conditions and atmosphere as well as a condition of developing interest in learning, forging ambitions, aspirations and motivation to study. Two persons (3,33%) were of the opinion that this active engagement of parents is also necessary at the level of secondary school due to the fact that "young people are often unable to solve their school problems on their own," "need to be directed, and parents often have to assist in finding private lessons."

Table 1. The need for parental involvement in the child's education

Is it necessary for parents to get involved in their child's education?	Number of respondents N=60	%
Definitely necessary: the key for the child's educational success	54	90,00
Necessary but not as much as it is generally believed	2	3,33
It is hard to say	1	1,66
Unnecessary, it stops the child being independent	3	5,00
Definitely unnecessary	–	–

Source – own calculations

There were also opposite opinions. 3 people claimed that many parents make the mistake of “replacing the child” or “doing exercises **instead of the child**”, “becoming overprotective”, and even “dictating text assignments to the child” or “assisting with the easiest mathematical problems or solving them instead of the child.” Another problem is private lessons which are already sought at the level of primary school and, to some extent, “release all responsibility from the child and in fact teach passivity.”

According to the students who participated in the research, parental involvement in the child's education is a necessity that results from:

1. The child's personal features; in this respect the subjects emphasised the fact that at the stage of primary education every child needs assistance from their parents, because at the beginning of school education (“especially when starting at the age of 6”) the child is not introduced and used to systematic work and may forget about new duties. It is the role of parents to “make sure that the child does homework,” “remind the child about school duties,” “review communication notebook every day,” “regularly review notebooks and assignments,” “develop the habit of systematic work,” “make the child realize that studying precedes pleasures,” “talk to the teacher frequently”; it is also parents' share “to make the child realize that studying is hard work, which is not really understood as such by the young child” and during further stages of education “to eliminate or diminish negative peer pressure that forces the fashion of not studying.”
2. Preconditions of school education; in this context the students pointed to the fact that in its present shape, school does not carry out its functions and tasks correctly. It is predetermined by a number of reasons, among which the respondents mentioned the very organisation of teaching process, where the transmission model still prevails, school work organization, performance quality of specific teachers which, in their opinion, is the outcome of professional commitment, responsibility, empathy and competency to develop relationships and bonds with pupils/students

and their parents. Generalized opinions of the respondents are presented in the table below.

Table 2. Sources of the necessity of parental involvement in the child's education

Sources	Number of respondents N=60	%
Child's personal qualities resulting from age	12	20,00
Too high requirements imposed by the teacher that the child cannot meet	53	88,33
Overloaded and difficult curriculum	52	86,66
Teacher's negligence of pupils/students who have learning problems	50	83,33
Big classes which prevent the teacher from regular measuring of learning progress and individual approach to pupils/students	46	76,66
Quick pace of lessons that makes it impossible for many children to follow	34	56,66
Strict teachers that raise fear	29	48,33
Crowded schools that make the child feel anonymous	25	41,66
Demanding attitude of teachers expecting all responsibility to be taken by parents	17	28,33
No educational and childcare tasks being carried out by tutors and teachers	12	20,00

Source – own calculations

It is worth mentioning here a few opinions presented by the respondents:

- "The teacher expects from the parent that the child will be able to do everything before going to school";
- "Parental role in the child's education is the following: if the parent did not support the child, they would not manage at school";
- "School education is not enough. There must be the parent who will motivate the child and assist in studying"
- "If the parent does not get involved in the child's learning, the latter will fall behind with work, because the teacher will not notice anything";

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- "Parents are made to spent time doing tasks which should be completed at school. Especially in primary school children are given assignments that they do not understand";
 - "Because they are concerned about their child's education, parents take responsibility for education, because school curriculum is too extensive and covered inappropriately, thus the child is not able to learn things independently";
 - "The child has to learn things at home which should be explained at school";
 - "Even the smartest students face learning problems, because teachers do not give interesting presentations. (...) School kills ambition in pupils/students, so it is parents who must persuade their child that it is worth to learn";
 - "The teacher often solves easy tasks at school and those difficult ones are assigned as homework. That is why parents have to help, although it should not be like that";
 - "Teachers use parents to explain things to the child";
 - "The child is not able to do extensive tasks independently. Parents have to help because they are made to do it";
 - "Teachers do not consider the fact that young children are not able to sit still for a few hours and do work at home. I think that if it was not for parents, most children would give up education very quickly, which is unfortunate";
 - "The role of parents is the fundamental one, because school just does not fulfil its tasks".

To sum up, if the parent wants to foster the child's educational success, they must undertake a series of activities aimed at promoting the development of the child's abilities. As one of the respondents said, "if parents are convinced that school will make something to bring about their child's success, they are wrong (...) they must show more interest and arrange for extra classes on their own."

The respondents also noted that once the parent takes over the role of a home educator, it inevitably affects the parent-child relationship. This

influence may be a positive one when bonds become tighter and the parent is “looked up to as an authority,” or negative, when “the teacher demands but the parent, who is not a teacher and has no idea how to teach, forces the child to study at home. What follows is yelling, which in fact discourages effective work and prevents closeness.”

The respondents believed that parental participation in the child’s education is a complex and multi-faceted problem. On the one hand, it is unacceptable to allow for the situation where parental involvement eliminates or weakens commitment expected from the child, but on the other hand, the child may not be left alone and deprived of due help and support at the beginning of their school career.

Finding the so called golden mean is a hard task for many people. Nowadays, parents have very high educational aspirations with respect to their children, which means that they want their offspring to achieve better and higher quality education than their own (Szlendak, 2010, p. 236). They also yield to some social pressure which accompanies the trend of training and teaching children from an early age. As a result, very young children are sent to foreign language classes or other educational activities. Parents, who want success, good marks and victories at contests or competitions for their children, direct their behaviour, which results in children losing self-confidence (Ochojska, 2013, p. 91). In this context, Kornelia Hübscher describes a didactically-oriented parental strategy. It is present in people who carry out some well-thought out and planned activities targeted at professional success in the future life. The effect of parental strategy is expected as the child who is valuable, i.e. has the type of knowledge and skills that are necessary for work (Hübscher, 2013, s. 154–155). On the other hand, the parent who demands top marks may replace the child in school duties, which affects the latter’s activity, spontaneity, creativity, but worst of all, undermines the belief that no educational success is possible without hard work, effort, but also failures.

The following answers presented in table 3 were provided to the question about the essence of correct and responsible parental involvement in the child’s education.

Table 3. Core ingredients of responsible parental involvement in the child's education

Responsible parental involvement	Number of respondents N=60	%
Assistance in doing homework	58	96,66
Supervising homework being done	53	96,66
Emotional support to the child facing school problems	51	85,00
Parental involvement and participation in class and school life	45	75,00
If necessary, arranging assistance (private lessons, extra/compensatory classes at school, psychological assistance)	44	73,33
Real interest of the child in learning; invoking curiosity and eagerness to learn	40	66,66
Cooperation with teachers on a partnership basis	34	56,66
Making sure the child has attractive and suitable school aids (encyclopaedias, computer software, stationery)	33	55,00
Encouraging the child to read books and making sure school list books are read	28	46,66
Showing unconditional acceptance and meeting emotional needs of the child	23	38,33
Showing content and satisfaction with the child's success	22	36,66
Enrolment of the child in extra-curriculum activities (language camps, activity clubs)	19	31,66
Making and enforcing demands in compliance with teachers' demands	18	30,00
Stimulating intellectual development by frequent talks for the child and organization of education-oriented free time	18	30,00
Introducing to and teaching systematic hard work	17	28,33
Encouraging the child to take part in school competitions and subject contests	15	25,00

Source: own research. When analysing the respondents' answers to open-ended questions, some generalization of their content was made. Hence the decimals do not total 100.

On another analysis of the conditions and circumstances that pre-judge the priority of parental role in the child's education, the respondents referred to a number of means which, they believed, may be used to exert some influence on the child. The means mentioned are presented in table 4.

Table 4. What determines the priorities of the parental role in the child's education?

Parents play a key role because	Number of respondents N=60	%
They can approach the child individually	34	56,66
They can offer attractive rewards for success	21	35,00
Constitute an authority	18	30,00
Teach values, give love and safety	17	28,33
May build up the child's responsibility daily	14	23,33
Know their child's intellectual and emotional potential	12	20,00
Know their child's interests and preferences	13	21,66
Can regularly measure progress	11	18,33
Can watch their child every day, in usual situations, and modify educational activity accordingly	10	16,66
Can be counsellor	10	16,66
By showing interest, can promote the child to make effort better than the teacher	9	15,00
May assist in the choice of further career	4	6,66

Source: own calculations

Research conclusions and final observations

Parenthood, which is about fulfilling the role of mother and father, is the source of quality developmental changes which occur both in parents and children. It is also connected with different forms of parental activity and solving numerous emotional, social, religious, peer or school problems (Izdebska, 2015, p. 109). As regards the last aspect, parental responsibility and involvement may determine educational success and future life of the child. The results of research may be recapitulated in four points:

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- The respondents agree that there is a tremendous need for parental involvement in the education process of their offspring;
 - Parental involvement in education is a necessity that results mainly from a faulty school system. These problems are exemplified by high demands incompatible with the child's needs, overloaded curricula, and insufficient teacher's attention being given to students with school problems;
 - An essential part of responsible parental involvement in the child's education is primarily their assistance in doing homework and ensuring that homework is done systematically as well as providing emotional support to the child when the latter has problems; parental involvement in education cannot lead to children being limited or replaced in their activities;
 - The importance of parental role in the child's education is determined by a number of conditions, such as the possibility of individual approach to the child, rewarding success, and the fact that the parent is an authority to the child, a meaningful person who teaches values, gives love and safety.

As presented, the research is not the basis for broader generalization of the results. Its objective was to depict major problems perceived by the students of the teaching as far as the role of parents in the child's education is concerned. However, the results that have been obtained highlighted some issues and problems that need to be discussed.

Namely, the research indicates that nowadays there is a need to look for new solutions that would make school and teachers closer to the real needs of children and their parents. As the Swiss experience shows, the school oriented on the child as a person, enhances the student's awareness of being valuable as a human being. By promoting individualism in school environment, the student is encouraged to self-study, build self-confidence, „develop conscience, the feeling of freedom, responsibility, and it is school which helps the students to develop their own emotions and deal with them, fosters independent thinking, expressing emotions and communication.“ In this way, the school contributes to the child's

integral development understood as emotional, spiritual and psychophysical growth in accordance with natural laws and social life requirements (Izdebska, 2015, pp. 36–37).

At the same time, the research results are a prerequisite for undertaking educational activities targeted at parents, whose basic objective should be preparation for valuable and committed parenthood. When making references to the category mentioned in the topic, i.e. responsibility, it must be emphasized that shaping awareness skills in parents and building competencies that could contribute to the child's educational success, are both of utmost importance. It is vital here that parents have knowledge of their child, understand the idea of upbringing and can stimulate cognitive activity and educational ambitions in their child, understand that parent-teacher contacts do matter and their own parenting skills should be constantly upgraded. This will enable to select a correct educational strategy for the child (Hübscher, 2013, p. 141), combining involvement, dialogue with the child, cooperation with the teacher, assistance and support within a broadly understood conception of parental responsibility.

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