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SCHOOL-FAMILY PARTNERSHIP, THE REAL SOLUTION FOR SCHOOL SUCCESS

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Abstract

The paper called „School-family partnership, the real solution for school success” presents the issue of the educational partnership between school and family. The educational partnership is a solution for the problems school currently faces. The educational partnership implies: consistent partnership strategies, prioritizing directions within the partnership, clarifying the role assumed by various institutions within the partnership, transforming the partnership into a reforming approach to education. The objectives of the research are: obtaining knowledge of the school–family partnership, identifying ways of collaboration between school and family with regard to supporting pupils, evaluating the means and the ways to solve the difficulties encountered in the school-family partnership. The paper aims to highlight the involvement of school and family in solving the issues and difficulties faced by the two partners in the development of pupils'/children's education. School and family, through knowledge and involvement, can provide pupils/children with a normal schooling and life path. By acting together in partnership, school and family can prevent: school drop-out, absenteeism, juvenile delinquency, inefficient schooling, the marginalization of problem pupils, failure to properly involve the two partners (school and family) in solving the problems covered by this partnership.

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1. Introduction

The school-family partnership undergoes permanent transformation and renewal because every generation of children/pupils has its own characteristics and the process is carried out in an ever changing and developing society.

Within this partnership, both parties have responsibilities and contributions that lead together to the development and training of the children's/pupils' personality. Schools aims at a free, integral, harmonious development, such as the development and training of an autonomous and creative personality. Family cares for the children's needs, providing the material and financial conditions necessary for a normal life. Together, both partners build an educational environment throughout the children's/pupils' school period. We can state the two partners make a proper team that contributes to the training and education of generations. Considering that children's personality is influenced by the three factors (school, environment, and family) the relation and partnership between these factors represent a permanent subject and are constantly subjected to change due to reforming ideas coming in play.

2. Problem Statement

2.1. The school-family educational partnership

The educational partnership needs to be based on the agreement of all categories interested in educational development and in supporting educational institutions. If Romanian society is to accomplish a democratic partnership, all the factors involved need to adopt a series of changes in terms of values, attitudes, and behaviours: decision makers, teaching staff, family, pupils, representatives of governmental and non-governmental institutions. These fundamental changes that condition the evolution of partnerships can be accomplished through special training programs, and through proper educational projects performed in partnerships. Turning partnerships into reality begins by building a partner group that includes various community categories and institutions. Common values to aim for are: ensuring equality of chances in education; the civic spirit and mentality of the community; promoting dialogue, transparency, and open communication; encouraging initiative and participation; developing cooperation and collaboration; adopting discipline and responsibility; harmonising specific conditions with social requirements (Băran-Pescaru, 2004).

The family-school educational partnership represents the cooperation relation between parents and teachers as qualified education professionals. Most parents show interest and openness towards school, but there are cases where this cooperation is disturbed by improper attitudes manifested by parents. The unity of action shown by the two parties is conditioned by how much they know about each other and their common interest in children's education and development. Each partner has clear and precise roles and responsibilities, the school assuming the coordination of the educational process, and the family catering to the needs and requirements of children and supporting the school in its endeavours.

The purpose of the school-family partnership is to create positive relations between school and family. In the context of an educational partnership, the school is aware of the educational environment in the family, its moral relations and values, as well as the place the child occupies in the family (Agabrian & Millea, 2005). On the other hand, the family has the responsibility of better knowing the children, follow their education and behaviour, learn how to support their development. The beneficiaries of the school-

family partnership are the children/pupils that become more confident, feel safe, and develop the inner balance needed for educational training and development. What school accomplishes should not be contradicted by the family, and what the family accomplishes needs to be in sync with school requirements. The key of educational success is the partnership and permanent communication between school and family. The mutual support between school and family favours good education.

Parents expect school to provide children/pupils proper education in order to continue to a good high school or prestigious university; to support children/pupils in having a good future; to support children to have an accomplished life; to teach them to handle themselves; to provide guidance, supervision, and oversight; to organise additional teaching sessions and consultations; to organise extracurricular activities to help children/pupils spend their leisure time in a pleasant and useful way.

Parents also consider that it is important for them to take part in educational activities in order to: motivate children; check learning evolution; support children's reputation in school; fulfil their parental obligations. Family-school and school-family communication can be improved through: more parent-teacher-pupil activities; removing discrimination and differences between children; raising awareness of parents with respect to their children's education (Agabrian, 2006).

Family perceives the educational partnership as a way to: stimulate the curiosity and interest through activities that expose children to real life situations (meetings with different professionals and public figures); solve the problems parents are facing in relation to their children's education; better evaluate and guide children (with respect to their skills and inclinations). School develops educational partnerships because they: contribute to the financial situation of the school; stimulate the educational environment in school; attract sponsorships from companies; ensure children's safety in school; keep children occupied in their spare time through educational activities organised; increase children's performance; increase children's interest in knowledge; ensure educational success. All families are interested in the success of their children and thus they try to have as good as possible relationships with the school. Similarly, the school is interested in involving the family as much as possible in the educational activities organised with the pupils (Vrăşmaş, 2004).

In addition to the administrative measure established by law, educational partnerships entail a system of elaborated scientific activities with clear objectives and responsibilities. It is paramount to train the human resources of the school, to attract resources from the community and to have parents accumulate knowledge and practical skills to be able to educate their children. These responsibilities fall on schools and specialised institutions in the community.

The school-family partnership represents a determining factor of school evolution, and the relationship between the two partners should not be neglected because the family can influence the accomplishments of the children/ pupils through the familial environment and by participating in the educational activities organised by the school, keeping a permanent contact with it.

3. Research Questions

To investigate "The School-Family Partnership, the Real Solution for School Success", we started from the following work hypothesis: if we have/develop an active partnership between school and family,

then the instructive-educational activities (both curricular, and extracurricular) performed will contribute to the harmonious training and development of the children's personality, hence to school success.

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose and the objectives of the study are described as: getting to know the scope of the school-family partnership; identifying the means of cooperation between school and family in order to support pupils; evaluating the means and methods used to solve the issues related to school-family partnership.

5. Research Methods

We used the following research tools to collect information during the investigation: observations, interviews, and case studies.

6. Findings

6.1. Interview analysis

The interviews were carried out based on the guides for interviewing parents and teachers. The interview for parents included 20 questions and was submitted to members of 16 traditional and single-parent families. The interview for teachers included 8 questions and was submitted to 16 teachers of various specialities. The interview analysis revealed the following:

6.1.1. The interview for parents:

The family composition varies depending on their structure, normal traditional families and single-parent families where the parent is either the mother or the father. The number of children varies from one family to another (usually one or two children, rarely three). Leaving conditions are determined by the financial means of the parents. The difficulties of family life are related to the professional training and the job of the parents. These difficulties depend also on the relation between the mother and the father.

The single-parent families face material and financial problems, the income is low, consumption necessities are high and poverty risk is increased (15%). They also face affective problems due to the absence of one of the adult partners. Single parents are usually frustrated and unsatisfied. These families are sometimes labelled and marginalised. 5% of these families use the social services available in the community, and 10% consider that the school, church, townhall, police should be more involved in solving the problems they face.

In the case of traditional families, financial difficulties are not major, relations between the members can present ups and downs influencing the affective environment, but interest is being displayed for the time allocated to children and family activities, as well as to the relation with the school.

In 80% of the cases, the parents in traditional families monitor the education path of the children by keeping contact with the school, being involved in the activities performed by schools. Usually parents encourage children to take part in school competitions, cultural and sport activities, trips, camps, etc. The parents monitor school performance and discipline being constantly in touch with the school through the usual channels: parent meetings, parent consultations, parent committees. There are also parents (10%) that do not answer to the school's demands in terms of discipline and education performance.

A good relation between school and family improves the educational environment in schools. The answers provided by parents show that the highest difficulty in communicating with schools is represented by the limited time allocated to this communication and the lack of interest manifested by some parents towards this communication. The school uses the available means to sufficiently support families in solving children's education and discipline problems. The most efficient communication means between families and schools are parent meetings and consultations, as well as families' participation in all school requirements. The interviewed parents qualified the cooperation between family and school as "very good" in most of the cases.

6.1.2. The interview for teachers:

In 80% of the cases, the relation between school, teachers, and families is good and normal. While the relation is good, there is always room for improvement. There are cases (15%) where the school-family relationship is superficial, one of the partners not really being involved in the education activities. There are situations where the relation between school and family needs to be improved.

Teachers declare that they cooperate with families using the usual means (parent meetings, individual consultations, as well as their involvement in extracurricular activities, referrals to specialists).

The means of improving the cooperation between family and school revealed by the teachers involved in the research are the following: parents need to be made aware that the school-family cooperation is important for children; using activities that parents show interest in; explaining the benefits and performance of other type of activities; planning activities with parents based on their spare time; reducing the time allocated to parent meetings by compressing the materials presented and providing hard- or digital (CD) copies and using the available time for discussing and sharing information about the issues exposed, while also providing practical solutions.

The action unity of the two parties (school and family) with respect to developing children is conditioned by a common way of working and a good mutual awareness, and everything starts with the teachers getting to know the families and their characteristics and educational potential. The school systematically develops both families and children, so that each pupil is able to make a proper selection depending on personal interests and skills. The school is constantly monitoring the education performance as well as the discipline of the pupils and promptly takes the necessary measures.

The school-family partnership is an objective necessity because this cooperation is the only way to ensure a normal educational development with positive results.

6.2. Case study analysis

The groups involved in the case study were represented by families with children that go to school (5 traditional and 5 single parent families with university, average and general education).

Ten case studies were performed: 5 traditional and 5 single parent families.

The traditional families interviewed, especially those with university and average education (65%), are interested in cooperating with the school due to their common goal represented by the school success of the children. Weaker cooperation was noticed in the case of single parent families (25%), especially in the case of those lacking education. There are also single parent families that show interest in the education progress of their children and in the cooperation with the school (75%). Even among traditional families

(15%) with university education there are cases where, due to various reasons, parents do not monitor the school progress of children and do not maintain systematic contact with the school, which leads to poor school results because parents are more interested in their own careers. Single parent families usually rely on the support provided by schools and communities to handle the issues faced in their children's education (e.g.: scholarships and other educational programs organised by the school and community – "School after school").

Family structure, education level, income, and socio-professional area of the parents determine or constitute risks for school success. The education strategies of the families need to be correlated with the support provided by schools in the school-family partnership framework. Parents' expectations are related to their children's performance. Parents with higher education have more expectations from their children as compared to the parents with lower education. Parents need to trust the abilities of their children, motivate them, communicate with them, observe their behaviour and get involved in solving the problems the children face. Spending time with their children, getting to know and encourage their interests and skills are aspects that lead to higher school performance.

6.3. Informative directions in proactive parenting for the emotional development of children

Family life is the first school of emotions. In this intimate reservoir, we learn to recognize both our own emotions and the reactions of others to our emotions, how to think of these emotions and how to choose our reactions, how to read and express our hopes and fears, the essential aspects of a harmonious family life. This school of emotions involves models offered by parents about how to treat their own emotions and those that appear as part of the parent-parent, parent-child, parent-teacher, and child-teacher relationship.

At the basis of effective education and school success there is the constant expression of the feeling of love for the child. It does not matter that it varies as a form of expression depending on time and space. What really matters is that parents meet the child's needs, that they truly be loved.

The essential needs of children do not change. There are factors that change - the context, the external factors and the way of expression according to a particular society - and the changes that took place during the last few decades entitle parents to worry, complicating their delicate child rearing mission. Often, society appears to be a common front against what parents are trying to achieve at home. But, despite this relationship, we must not forget that the fundamental needs of children remain the same. Most parents love their children, but not everyone expresses their affection in a way in which they could be understood or fully satisfy the child's needs. If the cultural, educational or community environment is sufficiently matched to family values, parents can often be less effective in education, as someone else will take over this mission. But when children are developing in a totally different cultural environment than what parents think and appreciate, the task of meeting the children's needs falls exclusively upon them.

Children's needs can be grouped into four categories, each representing a solution for effective education. The consistent expression of love must be given a precise form that adapts to the age and development level of the child's personality. This expression underlying effective education consists of "four cornerstones" (Campbell, 2001, p.15): meeting the emotional and affective needs of the child; ensuring a love-filled training, as well as shaping the child's discipline; ensuring the physical and emotional protection of the child; explaining and exemplifying anger management strategies for the child.

The knowledge and understanding of these essential children needs by their parents ensures emotional balance in the lives of future adults, the ability to cope with the hardships of life, to adapt and to cope successfully in the personal, professional, social, and community life. The failure to meet one of these needs or the lack of interest in the emotional and affective needs of the child can lead to problems in their personal development (lack of self-esteem, low self-esteem, poor relationships, etc.) and educational achievements (group integration, school adjustment, motivation for learning, absenteeism, school failure, low performance).

When parents adhere to an education system that focuses on behavioral change and reaction to certain behaviors, they will not be able to meet the emotional needs of children. That is why children will remain unprepared on certain dimensions, especially in overcoming moments of anger. They are thus destined to develop an attitude that challenges any form of authority, which will degenerate into developing an attitude against parents and finally into the rejection of parental values and beliefs.

6.3.1. Love – fundamental state in the emotional development of the child

Education in the family and the educational environment is appropriate when taking into account the emotional needs of the children before taking concrete actions.

In order to have a good image of themselves and to be able to adapt to the environment they come into contact with, and to the stressful and tense situations in life, children need to feel emotionally affectionate (that their parents love them and care for them). In the current social context, many children and adults have anxiety and depression, developing the complex of inferiority. This prevents them from operating at their full potential in this difficult and competitive society in which we live, so that many take a path that seems more accessible - that of destructive behaviors.

Children need love, and this is what all parents know, but few give them the active affection they would need. To constantly and totally develop the emotional side of their personality while they are still growing, children need a healthy and permanent relationship with the adults who really care about them and fill their emotional reservoir whenever it is needed.

In all human relationships, facts are more telling than words. Love and affection for children must be demonstrated and not only affirmed and supposed. This means that parents must communicate love to the child through emotional and behavioral ways, and express love verbally and non-verbally every day. But what determines the child to feel loved is based more on what we do than what we say.

Both deeds and words must be used daily; when they logically combine to fill the child's reservoir of love, they acquire the necessary energy to develop strongly from all points of view (Campbell, 2001, p. 42).

6.3.2. How to shape disciplined behaviour in our child?

Discipline is not synonymous with punishment, which is a form of discipline but a negative one; punishment must represent only a small part of being disciplined. The reason education is becoming more and more difficult, and more and more children end up bad is that the parent-child relationship has become primarily negative.

Parents can make this relationship positive again. It is natural to use all available positive resources before resorting to the negative ones. There are times when the use of punishment is appropriate; however,

many parents use it as the primary means of sanctioning their children. This is a type of reactive education and is largely blamed for the anti-authority attitude that we find in many children.

The most important thing about good discipline is that parents make children feel safe, protected and loved. After which they can shape them in terms of the mind and character so that they can become active members of society, able to completely master themselves. The discipline involves training, concrete and accurate actions, sure steps to follow; effective discipline uses all kinds of possible communication: the power of personal example, role-models to follow, verbal instructions, preparing and setting up situations from which to learn while at the same time having fun.

Punishment is also part of the discipline and has its place in raising the child, but should never be used as the primary means. Guiding the child to what is good in life is far more important than punishing the child for their mistakes.

The child must identify with their parents, with the model they provide, to accept their advice without resentment, hostility or opposition. When the child fails to identify with their parents and does not feel loved, they consider any parental wishes to be forceful and learn to reject the ideas. Many children today have a negative view of parental authority. It extends to the idea of authority in general and leads exactly to the opposite of the expected outcome.

This disrespectful behavior extends beyond the family environment, reaching school as well as other environments frequented by the child.

6.3.3. Learn to secure your child emotionally and physically!

Every child needs a parent to protect them from any physical and emotional troubles. Today's parents need to protect their children properly, especially when being aware of the negative influences that exist in our society. This is how to avoid the discrepancy between what parents assume their children are doing and what they actually do.

In an increasingly permissive society, it is our responsibility and our privilege - parents and teachers - to shape children so that they think rationally. That is how we can prepare them to deal with negative influences and distinguish between sincere and dubious messages, to analyze the direct or indirect consequences that can reflect upon them.

As our society continues to lose its spiritual and moral heritage, parents concerned with education cannot let someone else from the child' entourage deal with their moral and ethical training.

The hardest thing for parents is to give children enough protection and to know exactly when to give them the right to be independent, to make it alone. They want to be sure that the child can cope in a certain situation before being autonomous, but they do not want them to start from the idea that parents try to hinder them or prevent them from becoming autonomous in a certain direction. The idea of protection and of letting the child manage on their own go very well together.

6.3.4. Controlling the feeling of anger/ rage – between explanation and exemplification

The feeling of anger can become a threat to the good of the child. The extent to which the child learns to master their anger will determine the outcome of the most important moments in their life. A weak management of anger can destroy the child's life, can cause or aggravate any present or potential problem that the child may have from bad grades to destructive relationships, depressions and even suicides.

From the parent's perspective, uncontrolled rage is reflected in irrational and violent behaviors. It often prevents us from thinking that it has a detrimental influence on personal motivations. Anger directed toward a small child is scary, especially when it comes from a parent. The child is helpless in the face of the parent's anger and that is why there is the danger of an emotional blockage. If the parent does not control their own anger, the child's fear will turn into resentment and into anti-parent attitudes and behaviours.

Education based on stimulating emotional intelligence can make a full contribution to family peace and harmony. The basic idea is that parents work with their own emotions and children's emotions intelligently, constructively, positively and creatively, respecting the biological realities and the role of feelings in human nature.

Like most things that create meaning in our lives and bring us satisfaction, education is a fairly complex and profound process. Education based on emotional intelligence starts from the fact that all our actions, both those that concern the important and the small, every day matters allow us to create a healthy balance in the family environment, and in the relations with children (Elias, Tobias, & Friedlander, 2012).

Parents' actions must emphasize the importance of feelings and help children control emotions, instead of acting impulsively or letting themselves feel overwhelmed.

For some children, life is tough and insecure, for others it is full of tension. In both cases, losing control may mean the loss of some rights, the loss of extracurricular or mentoring activities, the loss of opportunities to find a job or even placement in special or boarding schools. Children need a positive environment that offers them many opportunities, and education based on emotional intelligence can increase their chances.

Essentially, children are good, with the support of their parents and school, they will know how to distinguish the good from evil and make the right decisions, they will have an ascendant course. The absence of family and educational support can bring about the formation of the consciousness of their own feelings, the ability to control their impulses, the setting of goals and action plans, the manifestation of sensitivity towards the feelings of others and / or the development of special skills – key elements of emotional development. One way to help children form new skills is to oversee and make them aware of their own behavior. Behavioral surveillance allows for increased self-awareness and self-supervision. It also helps parents look objectively at some behavior, see how bad it is in reality, and whether the situation improves or not.

The focal point of education in personality building, both inside the family and in school, is the independence of the child, their ability to decide, to assume responsibility, to respect themselves and to develop confidence in their own forces.

At any time of existence, doing any activity is greatly facilitated if individuals trust in themselves and in their possibilities to solve the existing situations. It is said that half the road is crossed when you trust yourself. The basis of this force lies in self-knowledge and trust in overcoming obstacles, the force with which the child is charged with the help of parents and school on their educational path.

Parents are the foundation of the emotional development of the child, they are the ones that satisfy the child's emotional and loving needs, the need for physical protection, the need to establish discipline for the development of a socio-emotionally adapted behavior, the need to control feelings and emotions in developing the consciousness of their own feelings, the need to be autonomous, to have life goals. The role

of the teacher is to contribute to the emotional development of the child, and where that is lacking, they must assume an active role in its development.

7. Conclusion

This research approached a series of questions related to the school-family partnership.

The aim was to highlight the involvement of both schools and families in solving the issues faced by both parties in developing and training children/pupils. Everybody wins when families play an active role in education: parents get more experience in knowing their children, pupils are supported because both parents and teachers concentrate on and help in successfully accomplishing educational activities, teachers meet their goal of internalising the instructive-education process.

When they cooperate openly, families and schools share information about children/pupils that are useful to stimulate educational development. Being aware of family's importance, the school needs to take the first step in involving the parents. When parents come to school and get to know its activities, they become aware of the effort involved and appreciate teachers' activity even more. When families and school cooperate efficiently, children benefit from a better learning experience. All parents want their children to succeed and teachers have the power to bring parents closer in their efforts to ensure school success because we should not forget that school essentially prepares children for life. Teachers build and maintain the cooperation with the family through continuous activities. Teachers need to be attentive, friendly, lively and relaxed when approaching families.

Families can provide children/pupils with a normal educational and existential development by getting to know the school and becoming involved in its activities. The following aspects can be combated by knowing and acting: absenteeism, school dropout, juvenile delinquency, inefficient education progress, marginalising of children with problems, etc. All families benefit from the constant support of schools in terms of counselling and support in overcoming certain crisis situations.

Having proper knowledge about the school-family partnership positively influences the development and education of the children/pupils and ensures their social integration, thus proving that the school-family partnership is the real solution for school success.

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