

# The Kindergarten-Family Partnership, a Basis for Early Childhood Education

Otilia Bersan<sup>1</sup>

## I. The partnership between kindergarten (school) and family

The kindergarten-family partnership represents a topical issue, pinpointed in educational policy documents, at both national and international levels.

In Romania, parents are considered the main partners and beneficiaries of the education process, according to National Education Law no.1/2011, Art. 80, which stipulates that “all major decisions in secondary education are to be taken by consulting the representative groups of parents”.<sup>2</sup>

The most suitable environment in which children develop during early childhood is the family. Starting with the child’s early years, the family is essential in his/her mental development, being a primary source of education, love and support.<sup>3</sup> “It is obvious that development occurs only if a balance is maintained between what the child can, wants, knows at a given time, but also what he/she is offered. The offer has to be stimulating, always one level higher than what that particular child can, wants, knows”.<sup>4</sup>

The family has to support all the upbringing and development needs, both physiological and emotional, needs that fundamentally condition the quality of the child’s subsequent psycho-behavioral acquisitions.

“The family represents the first factor in the child’s socialization process. Primary and anticipatory socialization takes place within the

---

<sup>1</sup> Department of Education Sciences, West University of Timisoara, Romania.

<sup>2</sup> [www.edu.ro/sites/default/files/\\_fi%C8%99iere/Minister/2017/legislatie%](http://www.edu.ro/sites/default/files/_fi%C8%99iere/Minister/2017/legislatie%202020) (accessed October 2020).

<sup>3</sup> D. Batâr, *Familia în dinamica societății* [The Family in the Dynamics of the Society] (Sibiu: Editura Universității Lucian Blaga, 2004), 108.

<sup>4</sup> A. Cosmovici, L. Iacob, *Psihologie școlară* [School Psychology] (Iasi: Polirom, 1999), 30.

family, through which the child learns to relate, communicate and interact in society”.<sup>5</sup> The parent is responsible for children’s development, with a role in their upbringing, nurture, education, she/he is “the first and permanently present teacher in a child’s life”.<sup>6</sup>

When we refer to the educational function of the family, we have to underline the fact that, in order to really benefit from the kindergarten environment, the child needs encouragement and psycho-affective support from the family, and in kindergarten the child will be able to build constant relationships with other children more easily, he/she will be able to act independently, without the parents’ intermediation, will benefit from affectively neutral relationships, will be able to experience some responsibilities.

Within the partnership, none of the members (parents, teachers) take leadership roles, who to do something, what to do, and why they should do it, but there is a need for collaboration in decision making, in order to achieve common goals, reciprocity of open communication, mutual respect, negotiation in search of solutions.

In the Report of the European Commission of 2017, regarding the European Policy for parent education, we find the following debate on education in the European Union: “... By learning to develop their parental skills, parents can contribute more to improving the child’s health and education, at the same time gaining self-confidence and self-esteem”<sup>7</sup>.

“The foundations of the educational partnership must be established from the period of early education, when the prevailing activity is not instruction, but socialization, becoming autonomous and preparing for the experience of schooling.”<sup>8</sup>

It is more often asserted that “the effective participation of some parents as volunteers, together with educators, in the educational activity in kindergarten, is an evolved form of partnership, which deserves to be

---

<sup>5</sup> D. Batâr, *Familia în dinamica societății*, 108.

<sup>6</sup> A. Faber, E. Mazlish, *Comunicarea eficientă cu copiii, acasă și la școală* [Effective Communication with Children, at Home and at School] (Bucharest: Curtea Veche Publishing, 2002), 12.

<sup>7</sup> [http://publications.europa.eu/resource/cellar/397b6165-71ac-11e7-b2f2-01aa75ed71a1.0007.01/DOC\\_1](http://publications.europa.eu/resource/cellar/397b6165-71ac-11e7-b2f2-01aa75ed71a1.0007.01/DOC_1) (accessed October 2020).

<sup>8</sup> Brazelton and Greenspan, cited in Liliana Stan, *Educație timpurie. Probleme și soluții* [Early Education. Problems and Solutions] (Iasi: Polirom, 2016), 109.

cultivated. Some parents will help by facilitating the activities, others, assisted by educators, will lead activities for which they have a vocation.”<sup>9</sup>

Studies in the field show that the main perspective on the educational partnership is rather ideal, the practice often being the place of uncomfortable situations, for both teachers and other factors involved.

“As an institution of pre-school education, the kindergarten can complete the work tasks only in partnership with the family and the community. The partnership requires mutual respect, acceptance, tolerance and lack of value judgments, of prejudices regarding the parents’ economic, social and educational situation.”<sup>10</sup>

Thus, we can say that the kindergarten cooperates with the family on two levels:

The level of the child-parent relationship that monitors kindergarten attendance, the obtained results, the emotional and material support for the child’s didactic activity, coming from the parent.

The level of the family-kindergarten relationship, which refers to the parents’ choice of the kindergarten where they want to enroll their children, to the direct contact with the teachers, here referring to the meetings with the parents, the counseling program, the practical activities, the activities in partnership with other institutions, involvement in educational projects, competitions, etc.

“The success or failure in the future activity, the school-related one, depends on the nature of the influences exerted on the child during the kindergarten period: gaining independence, self-confidence, social adaptability and intellectual curiosity”<sup>11</sup> are only a few aspects that crystallize in pre-school education.

The theoretical objectives underlying a partnership between kindergarten and family can be viewed from several perspectives.

With regard to the teacher:

- to inform the parents about the educational and developmental

---

<sup>9</sup> A. Mateiaș, *Copiii preșcolari, educatoarele și părinții, Ghid de parteneriat și consiliere* [Preschoolers, Educators and Parents, A Guide for Partnership and Counseling] (Bucharest: Editura Didactică și Pedagogică, 2003), 57.

<sup>10</sup> T. Vrasmaș, E. Vrasmaș, *Educația incluzivă în grădiniță: dimensiuni, provocări și soluții* [Inclusive Education in Kindergarten: Dimensions, Challenges and Solutions] (Buzau: UNICEF România, Alpha MDN, 2012), 98.

<sup>11</sup> Florinda Golu, *Manual de psihologia dezvoltării. O abordare psihodinamică* [Manual for the Psychology of Development. A Psycho-Dynamic Approach] (Iasi: Polirom, 2015), 122.

aspects of the children according to their age and individual characteristics;

- to present to the parents the purpose and content of the educational program/curricula carried out in the kindergarten;
- to provide individual and group counselling on family education and on education in the preschool institution.

With regard to the parents:

- to participate in the activities carried out within the family-kindergarten partnership, as well as in other kindergarten activities;
- to inform the teacher about the children's behavior in the family and in society;
- to continue certain educational solutions in the family, proposed by the teacher and established by agreement, harmoniously combining permissive attitude with exigence.

A basic concept, which emerges from the partnership, is the psycho-pedagogical counselling of parents, or parental counselling.

“Parental psycho-pedagogical counselling is a broad configuration of actions/activities for orientating and guiding the parents,”<sup>12</sup> or “counselling activities involve a formative-educational approach focused on capitalizing the person's individual capabilities and availability. Psycho-pedagogical counselling is meant to facilitate the learning by each person of some skills and abilities, which will allow him/her to permanently adapt, through an evolutionary change, to the demands of reality”<sup>13</sup>.

In general, the content of some parental counseling activities covers general aspects regarding the child's life, health and education, the optimal upbringing and development, but also the adaptation to the kindergarten tasks and requirements, to the institutionalized, long-term program.

Teachers of pre-school education who carry out parent counseling activities should limit themselves to its pedagogical, educational side, the desired result being an improvement in the intellectual, cognitive, attitudinal and behavioral levels, both in children and (in some cases) in

---

<sup>12</sup> Ion Al. Dumitru, *Consiliere psihopedagogică* [Psycho-Pedagogical Counseling] (Iasi: Polirom, 2008), 97.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibidem*.

parents. Explaining the fundamental role of early education, the learning experiences from an early age, the acquisition of minimal independence skills and skills for solving some (early) life problems are just a few of the useful aspects of parental counseling, for the purpose of preschooler's education.

Another concept conveyed within a kindergarten-family partnership is that of parental education. "The purpose of parental education is to develop parent-child relationships by encouraging supportive parenting behaviors, and by modifying non-productive or harmful behaviors."<sup>14</sup>, but in a broad sense, parental education refers to "programs, services and resources for parents and caregivers, in order to support them and improve their ability to raise their children."<sup>15</sup>

Starting from the theoretical elements mentioned above, I have outlined an educational program, based on a partnership between a state kindergarten and the families of the children who are enrolled in this kindergarten.

## **II. The premises of the practical-applicative approach**

- The family's partnership with the kindergarten represents an essential condition of the preschoolers' integration and quality education;
- Close connections and good teacher - parent communication improve their perspective on kindergarten;
- The involvement of the family, as active participants, in the kindergarten activity and in decision-making, is the key to educational success;
- Proposing and running a kindergarten-family partnership program

Pursued objectives:

- O1 – Identifying the procedures and the organizational pattern, and running an effective educational Partnership;
- O2 – Demonstrating the need for a kindergarten-family partnership program;
- O3 – Emphasizing the importance of the choice made by parents regarding the participation in the activities that took place during

---

<sup>14</sup> S. Cojocaru, D. Cojocaru, *Educația parentală în România* [Parental Education in Romania] (Bucharest: Alpha Media Print, 2011), 12.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibidem*, 5.

the program, with a view to the preschoolers' integration and quality education;

The educational program focused on three distinct phases: the implementation of a questionnaire on the parents' opinions (pre-test), proposing and running a partnership program based on various counseling and guidance activities for preschoolers and parents, and, finally, implementing another questionnaire for parents, with the purpose of noting some results (post-test).

### **III. Questionnaire for parents - pre-test**

During the first meeting with the parents, they answered a short questionnaire, with 5 items. The items involved probing opinions about the role that parents assign to preschool education, the activities they wish to carry out with their children, aspects of early education that are at the basis of teacher-parent communication. The questionnaire was answered by *40 parents* (both mother and father from some families), the parents of preschoolers in their final year at a state kindergarten in Timisoara.

Most of the parents understood from the beginning the important role of early education and asked for children's involvement in various activities in this regard.

Among the activities that the parents requested (in the questionnaire) to be carried out, in addition to those in the preschool schedule, were the following: extracurricular activities (13 options), practical lessons (11 options), lectures (16 options), celebrations (9 options), and educational projects (3 options).

### **IV. The partnership program**

It was presented to the parents as a proposal, after analyzing the answers offered to the pre-test questionnaire.

This program aimed at one activity per month, from September to June (2018-2019 school year), a total of 10 activities, in which the preschoolers' parents participated voluntarily (on average, 40 adults, in some cases both parents);

The activities were carried out as lectures with the parents of preschoolers in their final year at a state kindergarten in Timisoara. The

topics that were discussed with the parents were:

- September, 2018: World Cleanup Day (23 Sep) - Debate on hygiene rules, avoiding disease transmission, food rules etc.
- October, 2018: Effective communication strategies. The child's communication;
- November, 2018: Various leisure activities;
- December, 2018: Winter holidays for children;
- January, 2019: Relationship, friendship and socialization among preschoolers;
- February, 2019: Parent-child joint activities;
- March, 2019: Preparation of an exhibition on March 1 („Mărțișor”) - parent-child activities
- April, 2019: Easter traditions for preschoolers - parent-child activities
- May, 2019: Thematic trip and visit to Secondary school no. 25, the preparatory classes
- June, 2019: Fears and expectations regarding the primary preparatory grade.

Other activities that were carried out, optionally attended by both preschoolers and their parents were: charity activity - culinary fair; demonstrative activities (organized by the preschool educators as open lessons for parents); spring carnival; parent-child modelling competition; presenting your family atypically - activity carried out by parents and children.

Some results obtained at the end of the partnership program and of the carried-out activities, the following were noted:

- Awareness of the role of pre-school education, of early education (from birth to entry into school);
- Knowledge of various educational activities that can be carried out with preschoolers;
- stimulating the child's assertive behavior;
- Opening to communicating situations that are specific to preschoolers;
- acknowledging the children's initiative, by cultivating positive discipline and taking responsibility in different activities;
- Engaging the children in different practical activities - household, training skills and empowering the child for behavioral autonomy;
- Outlining a possible strategy for approaching school life.

## V. The Post-Test Questionnaire

The Post-Test Questionnaire administered to the preschoolers' parents, at the end of the program and of the school year, emphasized once again, through the given answers, the role of a solid kindergarten-family partnership, of transparent communication, but also of engaging the preschoolers and their parents in various educational activities, as ways to make children's education more efficient.

Most of the parents' answers focused on the following aspects: during the program they learned more details about the educational activity in kindergarten, they learned, in turn, how to involve their children in educational and training activities and they understood, much better, aspects related to preschool ages.

The activities that the parents considered as having very good results and satisfactory results for them and their children were: extracurricular activities (13 options), practical lessons (11 options), lectures (16 options), celebrations / the carnival (9 options), educational projects (3 options).

## VI. Conclusions

In this paper I have tried to identify the premises that were at the basis of the kindergarten-family partnership, as follows: close connections and good communication with parents improve their perspective on kindergarten, permanent involvement of the family, both as active participants in the kindergarten activity and in decision making and knowing the purpose and objectives of the kindergarten education program are some of the key aspects for a successful education.

As a limit of this paper, we can provide the lack of correlations between the particular case and other researches, data from the national and international level is one of the weak points of the paper in order to increase its value and originality.

The subject of the paper is still researched. The inner perspective of the case presented is valuable and it may become a model of approaching the relation between parents- kindergarten- teachers. The research itself is a strength point of the paper.

How to involve parents in the kindergarten educational activities? A question from which I started in this process. Possible answers would be: by identifying the processes and the way of organizing and developing

an effective educational partnership, by demonstrating the need to carry out activities within the partnership program, by underlining the importance of the choice made by parents regarding the activities that have taken place throughout the program and by admitting the fact that a close collaboration between the kindergarten and the family improves the quality of the preschoolers' instructional-educational process.

## References

- Batâr, D. *Familia în dinamica societății* [The Family in the Dynamics of Society]. Sibiu: Editura Universității Lucian Blaga, 2004.
- Cojocaru Ș., and D. Cojocaru. *Educația parentală în România* [Parental Education in Romania]. Bucharest: Alpha Media Print, 2011.
- Cosmovici, A., and L. Iacob. *Psihologie școlară* [School Psychology]. Iasi: Polirom, 1999.
- Dumitru, Ion Al. *Consiliere psihopedagogică* [Psycho-Pedagogical Counseling]. Iasi: Polirom, 2008.
- Faber, A., and E. Mazlish. *Comunicarea eficientă cu copiii, acasă și la școală*, [Effective Communication with Children, at Home and at School]. Bucharest: Curtea Veche Publishing, 2002.
- Golu, Florinda. *Manual de psihologia dezvoltării. O abordare psihodinamică* [Manual for the Psychology of Development. A Psycho-Dynamic Approach]. Iasi: Polirom, 2015.
- Mateiaș, A. *Copiii preșcolari, educatoarele și părinții, Ghid de parteneriat și consiliere* [Preschoolers, Educators and Parents. A Guide for Partnership and Counseling]. Bucharest: Ed. Didactică și Pedagogică, 2003.
- Stan, Liliana. *Educație timpurie. Probleme și soluții* [Early Education. Problems and Solutions]. Iasi: Polirom, 2016.
- Vrasmaș, T., and E. Vrasmaș. *Educația incluzivă în grădiniță: dimensiuni, provocări și soluții* [Inclusive Education in Kindergarten: Dimensions, Challenges and Solutions]. Bucharest: UNICEF România, Alpha MDN, 2012.

### **Online sources**

[https://www.edu.ro/sites/default/files/\\_fi%C8%99iere/Minister/2017/legislatie%20MEN/Legea%20nr.%201\\_2011\\_actualizata2018.pdf](https://www.edu.ro/sites/default/files/_fi%C8%99iere/Minister/2017/legislatie%20MEN/Legea%20nr.%201_2011_actualizata2018.pdf)  
(accessed October 2019)

[http://publications.europa.eu/resource/cellar/397b6165-71ac-11e7-b2f2-01aa75ed71a1.0007.01/DOC\\_1](http://publications.europa.eu/resource/cellar/397b6165-71ac-11e7-b2f2-01aa75ed71a1.0007.01/DOC_1) (accessed November 2019)