

Teachers for the Knowledge Society

Parents and early teachers: sharing education

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Abstract

All children need coherent and constructive collaboration relationships between parents and teachers for a healthy development. The purpose of this study is to examine how these contacts between parents and early teachers occur by investigating a group of children, parents and early teachers' perspectives concerning educational partnerships, during an experimental training program about emotional education. This investigation used focus groups to identify children's voices as a top priority and to evaluate parents' and practitioners' perspectives and suggestions about how such sharing could be achieved. The program helps teachers and parents in their shared educational efforts through the early years.

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1. Introduction

The education of young children matters immeasurably – to them both now and in the future to our society. It matters to all children, but especially to those who in our divided society lack the massively compensating advantages of financial wealth, emotional harmony and a home life which is linguistically, intellectually, culturally and spiritually rich (Cable, C. et. al., 2010). Early pupils represent an increasingly diverse mix of ethnicities, nationalities, languages, cultures, faiths and family styles. The parents and the teachers are the most important people in the life of the little ones. For a child to grow up healthy and happy, it is important that his social and emotional needs are really understood and respected. All children need coherent and constructive collaboration relationships between parents and teachers for a healthy development. The effectiveness of early intervention for children and their families is influenced by the extent to which early teachers are adequately trained. In guiding young children's learning and development, early teachers must possess the knowledge, skills and sensitivity to interact successfully with not only the young child, but also with the parents, whose actions affect children the most. For young children to be effectively supported in all aspects of their development they need knowledgeable, interested and responsive adults who know how to challenge and extend their own thinking and understanding of today's children interests and needs in a diverse society (Vrăsmaș, E., 2008). These adults should not restrict or limit their potential. To do this they need a thorough understanding of how children learn and develop and how to put this into practice working in partnerships (Agabrian, M. & Millea, V., 2005). Parents are central to the task of improving

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children's lives. Therefore partnerships with parents are a unifying theme of early education in the entire world, because teachers need parents' support for their children learning and development process. Parents are not a homogenous group but neither are teachers, and the relationship between these groups needs to acknowledge the strengths and expertise of each. The relationship between parenting and teaching in early education is profound and multi-faceted. Today's concern in early education is to re-state the building of stronger relationships with parents and community as a central aim.

2. Problem statement

Childhood and early education has become a hot topic for the last decade. The recent research in children development and the new global society we live in changed the vision about educational partnership and determined – with the large consensus of the specialists in the field – the priorities and lines for sustainable development, which influence official educational policies. Consequently a database of empirical research results in the field of teachers-parents sharing education is being built nowadays internationally (Alexander, R., 2010). Moving towards a contemporary view of the child, the whole concept of childhood has been questioned. Drawing on a range of perspectives, including the emerging sociology of childhood and the social history of children are examined and discussed and a holistic view is promoted. Insights offered by recent research into early brain development call for new evaluations (Blakemore, 2000, in Cable, C. et. al, 2010, p. 101). Children experience many different and varied upbringings. A series of studies have demonstrated that success in life, mental and emotional health depends on the efficiency of early relationships (Cable, C. et. al., 2010). What happens with children at home affects what happens to them in kindergarten. Their family life – particularly the development during their kindergarten life – can either enhance or erode their chances of fulfillment as young children. It is important to recognize that young children are closely bound to their parents, emotionally. Part of all teaching professionals' responsibility for children's development is the need to work in partnership with the parents. Failure to do this can place unnecessary and unhelpful pressure on children (Agabrian, M. & Millea, V., 2005). Listening to children, working with parents, developing partnerships are the new exigencies and principles of working in early years education.

Recent concerns are about the pressures to which today's children are subject of, and the undesirable values, influences and experiences to which many are exposed in their daily home lives. Considerable demographic and social changes have occurred over the past 50 years. They had a profound impact on both patterns of work and the structure of the family, and consequently have affected the daily rhythm of children's lives at home and at kindergarten. Parental separation, lone parenting, step-families, half-siblings and being an only child are all more familiar to today's children. Both parents are more likely to work, and to work long and atypical hours. Overall more children have to cope with increasingly complex and uncertain lives, inevitably placing extra demands on teachers. It is therefore appropriate to explore the condition of childhood in Romania today and to ask how far the current anxiety about children's well-being is justified. Sometimes it might seem that children growing up in our country are confronted with serious issues. Their lives and enthusiasm are reported to the adult world all too often in terms of stereotypes. Their commented behavior is considered beyond the control of parents and teachers in recent reports (Alexander, R., 2010). Actually they are represented as the over-worked and over-stressed victims of a hardened, selfish society where they can no longer find proper physical or emotional nourishment (Dr. Gordon, Th., 2000).

Politics and media debate about children's educational needs. Nevertheless the truth is that the questions: "How are children's of today educated?" and "How children's of today should be educated?" still get vague answers in practice. If we observe any kindergarten or primary school we will discover that the relationship between teachers and parents is more administrative than educationally based; in many cases it is superficial or distant, and there is no longer enough time to endow children with life-skills that they really need, because the curriculum is too complex or teachers are not adequately trained. A widespread belief, especially among parents, that childhood had become more stressful is another issue that affects children's day-to-day lives in the classroom and at home. Anxieties among teachers because of the financial crisis, too many changes brought by the educational reform, concerns about many parents failing to discipline their children effectively or accept responsibility for their behavior in and out of kindergarten or school, the growing number of children with behavioral and emotional disorders are important issues in today's early education.

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