

Cooperation Between Teachers and Parents of Foreign Students

Maria Trzcińska-Król

Akademia Pedagogiki Specjalnej im. Marii Grzegorzewskiej
Warsaw, Poland

Recent years have contributed to the creation of many publications about the important role of parents in the education process and their cooperation with the school for fuller and more comprehensive development of the child. The role of parents, although not explicit, is increasingly appreciated by teachers and pedagogues in the process of adapting and building a satisfactory educational path for children and adolescents. Today, however, as a result of migratory movements of the population, the school is facing a new challenge: work in a culturally diverse environment. One of the issues is including foreign students and their parents in the school community. In the face of the constantly increasing number of foreign pupils in Polish schools, it is extremely important to know to what extent the Polish education system supports the dialogue and partnership between teachers and parents of foreign children.

The essence of this paper is the presentation of the results of pilot studies conducted by the author in the Warsaw school environment. The aim of the research is to get to know the scope of cooperation and communication between teachers and parents of foreign students in Warsaw schools. The research was based on a cooperation model by Joyce L. Epstein (2010, 2019), referring to: parenting, communication, volunteering, learning at home, decision making and collaboration with the community.

The presented research has the character of a diagnostic survey and it is an attempt to answer the following research questions: How does communication with parents of foreign students work? How teachers assess the parents' attitude in terms of: parenting, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, collaborating with the community?

Keywords: cooperation, collaboration, communications, teacher, parents of foreign students.

Introduction

The role of parents, although not explicit, is increasingly appreciated by teachers and educators in the process of adaptation and building a satisfying educational path for children and youth. However, today, the school has faced a new challenge, working in a culturally diverse environment.

Foreigners are and will be present in Warsaw, as in many other European cities. As a result of migration movements, they will become an increasing part of local communities. In 2014, 1,198 students who were not Polish citizens attended Warsaw schools and kindergartens. Of this group, only 3%, i.e. 38 children, had a Polish Card, and 5%, i.e. 56 children, had citizenship of an EU Member State or EFTA Member State. "In

total, 13% of students (154) had refugee status, tolerated stay consent, subsidiary protection or temporary protection on the territory of the Republic of Poland, and less than 7% (80 students) were children of asylum seekers" (qtd. in Dudkiewicz, 2016, p. 77). In 2015, 945 children enrolled in Polish schools and kindergartens, whose legal guardians applied for international protection. "This group included 418 children from Ukraine, 370 children from the Russian Federation (mostly Chechens), 44 children from Kyrgyzstan, 40 from Georgia and 32 from Syria. In the 2014/2015 school year, around 10,000 studied in Polish schools. foreign children, including few – over 800 refugee children" (Markowska-Manista, 2016, p. 137).

Intercultural pedagogy mainly focuses on issues related to identity, the occurrence of cultural groups, aspects of population movement, educational and social policy, and relations between cultures. However, there are no studies on the involvement of parents of foreign children in Polish schools.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Maria Trzcińska-Król, e-mail: maria@aps.edu.pl

Pedagogical study programs include the subject of cooperation with parents. However, they are still insufficient. Both teachers and parents are still looking for a common thread of understanding. It is not an easy way and depends not only on legal solutions but also people's attitudes, their character and willingness to take action.

The study programs include elements of intercultural education as well as the subject of cooperation with parents, but the aspect of parents' multiculturalism or related communication problems is completely ignored. Lack of proper preparation of teachers to work with parents of foreign students, ignorance of the culture of a given community and its language often make it difficult to build partner relationships. There is a need to examine and describe the situation of parents of foreign children in Polish schools, determine the type of involvement, type of tasks, redefine forms of cooperation, indicate difficulties in establishing cooperation.

The Theoretical Framework

In a multicultural school, one should especially pay attention to the transition from noticing a culturally different person to interaction, learning, understanding, and establishing a partner dialogue, which will result in establishing cooperation and cooperation. There are still many schools where parents and teachers form two separate organs that function independently of each other. In a special way, this situation affects parents of foreign children, who are often marginalized due to their differences, lack of language skills, stereotypes, ignorance of a given culture or family.

Already in the 1990s, Zbigniew Łobocki (1985) pointed out that a conversation between parents and teachers could bring many benefits to both parties, including: helping to get to know each other and get to know students; deepen mutual trust; relieve tension; help parents in parenting work with their children; limit upbringing errors of both environments; help in uniform pedagogical influence on the pupil.

The combination of knowledge about the functioning of the student in school and home conditions allows forming a diagnosis that will in the future result in comprehensive development of the pupil. Such joint diagnosis takes the form of an exchange of information between home and

school, sharing knowledge about the ward, his interests, abilities, problems and experiences related to his development.

Currently, more and more talk about establishing cooperation, not only between parents and teachers of students, but also the identification and integration of resources and services on the part of the community. Therefore the research was based on a six types of involvement model by Joyce L. Epstein (2010, 2019), and "framework outlines the components of comprehensive programs of school, family, and community partnerships" (Epstein, 2019, pp. 153-154). The types of engagement referring to: parenting (helping families, parents understand child, his development and support child like a student, also help school understand families), communication (effective forms of information exchange about school programs and children's progress using a variety of technologies), volunteering (recruiting and organizing parental assistance), learning at home (informing parents and passing on ideas to help students at home in their homework and other activities related to the curriculum, making decisions and planning), decision making (involving parents in decision making, developing parent leaders and representatives) and collaboration with the community (identification and integration of resources and services on the part of the community in order to strengthen school programs, family practices and students' development and learning).

Methods of Research

The practical purpose of the pilot research conducted by the author in the Warsaw school environment was to verify the research tool that is to be used for research on a larger scale. The cognitive goal is to learn the scope of cooperation and communication of teachers and parents of students from cultural, national and ethnic groups other than Poland.

The presented research has the character of a diagnostic survey and it is an attempt to answer the following research questions:

- How does communication with parents of foreign students work?
- How teachers assess the parents' attitude in terms of: parenting, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, collaborating with the community?

In order to conduct the research, paper versions of two questionnaires were constructed. The first was addressed to all teachers. The second was to deepen information about students' families and their involvement in school life. The results presented later in the article come from the second survey, which was built of 18 questions about the cooperation of class tutors with parents of students from cultural, national, ethnic and non-Polish groups. The survey contained a total of 6 semi-open questions, including 3 questions with a semi-open dysjunctive cafeteria and 3 with a semi-open conjunctive cafeteria and 11 closed questions, including 5 questions with a dysjunctive closed cafeteria and 6 with a conjunctive closed cafeteria (Pilch, & Bauman, 2010, p. 61).

Due to the zero return of paper questionnaires, an electronic research tool was constructed using Google forms. At the same time, modifying some of the questions with the semi-open cafeteria.

The survey is a teacher's assessment of cooperation with the parents of every student coming from cultural, national or ethnic groups other than Poland attending the class in which the teacher is an educator.

Area and organization of research

The first attempts to carry out the research were made in May 2019. The author asked to be able to conduct research in one of the Warsaw primary schools located in Targówek, which are attended by, among others students staying in a refugee centre located near the facility. This selection of the sample was deliberate, due to the number of students from cultural, national and ethnic groups other than Poland attending this institution and the experience of teachers cooperating with students and their parents. The management agreed to conduct the research and offered help in carrying out the research. It was quite a difficult time for the teaching environment. Shortly after the strike lasted about a month, and just before the end of the school year, which, as it turned out, was shortened by a week. It was a time of intensive work and catching up. In this situation, the teaching environment was not favorable to taking part in the research. None of the 100 questionnaires distributed on paper were completed. In this situation, after agreeing with the management, it was decided to conduct an electronic survey

during the summer holidays. In early September, questionnaires were sent to 5 other primary schools located in Warsaw or in its vicinity. As a result, information was obtained from 7 teachers about 11 students and their parents. The number of respondents prevents deeper analyses and generalizations, however, allows verification of the tool, which was the practical goal of the pilot study.

Research group

Seven teachers (six women and one man) from two schools located in Warsaw took part in the study. The oldest respondent was 55 years old, the youngest 28 ($M = 42.14$; $SD = 8.255$). The longest internship recorded was 33 years, the shortest was 3 years ($M = 13.57$; $SD = 10.17$). Five teachers declared completion of second-cycle MA studies, one – first-cycle bachelor's degree and one 5-year MA degree. Of the 7 teachers, 3 were employed as a contract teacher, 3 as a qualified teacher and one as an appointed teacher. Most of the respondents were early school education teachers (6 people) and one person was a subject teacher. Among the respondents, 6 were tutors of classes 1-3 and one person from class 7.

Findings

Below the data are presented in the order of research questions. They were preceded by the characteristics of a group of parents and students referred to by teachers.

The teachers jointly commented on the parents of 11 students (6 girls and 5 boys). Students mainly attended classes 1-3 (10 people), one student attended grade 7. Among the national, cultural and ethnic groups, the teachers listed: Chechnya (4 students), Ukraine (2 students), Georgia (1 student), African (1 student), Muslim (1 student), refugee (1 student), multicultural (1 student).

The obtained data shows that mothers are mainly responsible for the education of children. Out of 11 mothers, 6 actively participated in the education of their child, 4 unfortunately not, and for one teacher could not determine her involvement in the education of the child. Also, the mother was first indicated as the person responsible for contacts with the school (9 people). Only in the case of two students are both parents in contact with the school. The

situation is completely different when describing the cooperation of students' fathers with the school. Only one actively participates in the education of his child. Compared to two, the teacher could not make a clear statement, while 8 families do not participate in the educational processes of their children at all. Many parents have problems communicating in Polish. This situation applies to almost all mothers, 4 mothers have problems with speaking and communicating, 3 do not communicate in Polish, 2 understand perfectly, but they have problems with speaking. Only one mother speaks Polish fluently. In relation to fathers, teachers had a big problem determining their level of communication in Polish. Only in the case of two fathers did the teachers indicate that one has problems with speaking and understanding, and the other understands perfectly, but has a problem with speaking.

Of the 11 families, 7 maintained regular contact with the school, and 4 appeared occasionally or not at all.

Teachers contact the parents of the foreign student mainly in person (7 responses), and through the use of media communication channels, e-mail, e-journal etc. (5 indications), by phone (3 indications).

The traditional form of contact is information published in student diaries and correspondence notebooks. Feedback for teachers that the parent has read the message is their signing by the guardians. In the opinion of educators, 3 parents are usually signed. Also 3 parents do it sporadically, 4 do not do it at all, and in relation to one of the families, the teachers were not able to clearly answer the question about signing notes.

The biggest difficulty in making contact with parents is the language barrier pointed out by teachers regarding 8 families. For two families, teachers talk about a cultural barrier. Also in the case of two families, teachers talk about the lack of any problems in establishing contacts. Among parents there are also those who are not interested in the education of a child (1 family) and those who simply do not have time for it (1 family).

Despite the emerging difficulties in communication, teachers assess it at a good or very good level (6 families), in the case of two families the teacher says about rather poor communication. Educators could not clearly assess communication with 3 families.

Many schools, supporting parents in their upbringing and parenting activities, organize various workshops, trainings and meetings with an expert. Unfortunately, none of the parents referred to by the educators attend such meetings, and almost half of them (5 families) avoid contact with the school. However, more than half of the families are happy to share with the school about the student (5 families – share information about the talents and abilities of the student; 2 families – share information about the culture, origin of the student; 3 families – provide information about the student).

Parents try to be involved in school activities (e.g. events) as much as they can and can do (6 families). One is involved in providing information to others. In the group characterized, there are also parents who passively observe the actions of others (5 people). None of the parents are involved in helping other families, students or even teachers, and no one wants to devote their time to help get information to others.

The collected data from teachers shows that 8 families exhibit a passive attitude and transfer the responsibility for children's education to the teacher. Only 3 parents together with the teacher determine the strategy of activities, goals focused on the child, strengthening his strengths and eliminating weaknesses.

All parents of students from cultural, national and ethnic groups other than Poland use the resources of the local environment. These are mainly various types of assistance programs (7 families), information meetings on e.g. social assistance, programs targeted at parents of foreign students (5 families). Two families allow the child to take advantage of additional activities organized e.g. by Culture Houses, and one family talks about the child's out of school successes.

Discussion

A lot of space is devoted to the subject of cooperation and communication between teachers and parents in pedagogical literature. Very often the role of this cooperation and its impact not only on educational successes but also on the lives of children are shown in it (e.g., Mendel, 2002; Maszke, 2002). How difficult it is to involve pupils' mentors in the school's life, probably every teacher knows. Despite the growing self-awareness of parents and the desire to influence the education of their children, there are still too few socially involved people who

want to devote their time and enthusiasm to other members of the group. In the presented studies, the low participation of parents in children's educational processes may result from, among others language, cultural or systemic problems. It is worth noting that all mothers (they are mainly responsible for education and contacts with the school) in the case of whom teachers have noticed a lack of commitment are people who have problems communicating in Polish. Despite language problems and little active participation in children's education, parents try to maintain regular contact with the school.

Teachers in their contacts with parents of students from cultural, national or ethnic groups other than Poland prefer direct contact. They also use mediated communication (e-mail, e-journal, telephone). Similar results are presented in studies in a group of Polish parents and teachers (e.g., Trzcińska-Król, 2014; Trzcińska-Król, & Pilipczuk, 2015; Baum, 2014; Gogolin, & Szymik, 2016). Direct contact, honest conversation allow us to clear up misunderstandings and ambiguities on an ongoing basis, discuss bothering issues, allow us to focus on the problems of a particular student (Łobocki, 1985; Śliwerski, 2012; Hernik, & Malinowska, 2015).

In educational institutions, one of the forms of communication with parents is information published in the student's diaries and correspondence notebooks. At school, gathering a large number of students from cultural, national, ethnic groups other than Poland, in which the study was conducted, notes, information, notes in student diaries are usually translated for parents who do not know Polish or are given in two language versions. In turn, in the second institution participating in the study, which is attended by a smaller group of foreign students, the notes are published only in Polish. Schools must be ready and must be able to communicate with all families, not only those who are fluent in Polish (Hutchins, Greenfeld, Epstein, Sanders, & Galindo, 2013). According to the presented research, parents, in the opinion of class teachers, rarely give feedback to the teacher that they have read them. The need to translate materials for other parents can be an opportunity to engage not only parents, but also students and the local environment. Translations of materials can be made by employees of the municipal education office, volunteer parents, language learning students, or social

organizations and volunteers (Hutchins, Greenfeld, Epstein, Sanders, & Galindo, 2013). In teachers' opinions, the activities of parents in cooperation with the local community focus mainly on assistance and support programs addressed to them. Such attitudes seem to be natural and justified given the fact that the collected research material mostly comes from the school attended by children from a nearby refugee center.

However, parents of students from cultural, national or ethnic groups other than Poland find it difficult to get involved in the school, although they offer their help in this regard as much as they can. The answers received from teachers show that none of the parents is involved in helping other families, pupils or teachers, and neither parent wants to devote their time to help get information to others. The information obtained from educators is worth confronting with the opinions of the parents themselves, because, as research shows, conducted among parents of a Polish national group and teachers, there are discrepancies in the mutual assessment of activities (e.g., Łukasiewicz-Wieleba, & Trzcińska-Król, 2016; Trzcińska-Król, & Pilipczuk, 2015; Łukasiewicz-Wieleba, 2014; Młynek, 2017).

Schools supporting guardians in parenthood and the role of educators often organize various workshops for parents, meetings with experts and trainings. In addition, cultural assistants are employed in the institutions, whose role is, among others, to support both foreign students and their parents, help in integration in the environment; contacts with parents; participation in meetings – translating and speaking, among others on students' difficulties) (Lachowicz, n.d.).

The presented research is part of the problem of cooperation with the school and local environment, and although it shows little involvement of parents in the education of their children, at this stage of the research it cannot be applied to all parents of students from cultural, national or ethnic groups other than Poland. Further analysis and research are required, in which the topic of little participation should be deepened and the reasons for this state of affairs found out. Do they result from parents' reluctance or language, cultural, systemic or social problems? The author of the research hopes that she will get a more complete picture of the situation and role of cooperation between teachers and parents of students from

cultural, national and ethnic groups other than Poland from questionnaires addressed to teachers as well as from the planned interviews with tutors and guardians of foreign students.

The research allowed the author to achieve the practical goal of research, i.e. checking the research tool and pointed out elements of the tool that should be redefined. The cognitive goal, which was to learn the scope of cooperation and

communication of teachers and parents of students from cultural, national or ethnic groups other than Poland, was not achieved. The obtained results only allowed to signal some elements that require further analysis and research. In order to be able to talk about the scope of cooperation, the involvement of parents should be conducted on a wider research group.

References

- Dudkiewicz, M. (Ed.). (2016). *Cudzoziemcy w Warszawie, czyli jak zmierzyć się z nieuniknionym. Raport* [Foreigners in Warsaw, or How to Tace the Inevitable. Report]. Warszawa. Retrieved from: <https://cudzoziemcywaw.files.wordpress.com/2016/06/raport1.pdf> (access: 28.09.2019).
- Epstein, J.L. (2010). School/Family/Community Partnerships: Caring for the Children We Share. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 2010 92: 81, 81–96. DOI: 10.1177/003172171009200326.
- Epstein, J.L. (2019). Comprehensive Framework: School, Family, and Community Partnerships – Caring for the Children We Share Time for Action across Countries: Research-Based Approaches for Programs of Family and Community Engagement. [in:] M. Mendel (Ed.). *Parent Engagement as Power: Selected Writings* (pp. 145–176). Gdańsk-Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Gdańskiego, Wolters Kluwer.
- Gogolin, O., & Szymik, E. (2016). Współpraca rodziców z nauczycielami edukacji wczesnoszkolnej w świetle badań sondażowych [Cooperation Between Parents and Early Childhood Education Teachers in the Light of Surveys]. *Studia i Prace Pedagogiczne* 2016(3). *Rozprawy i Materiały* (pedagogika), 87–105.
- Hutchins, D.J., Greenfeld, M.D., Epstein, J.L., Sanders, M.G., & Galindo, C.L. (2013). *Multicultural partnerships: involve all families*. New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group.
- Lachowicz, B. (n.d.). Organizacja edukacji cudzoziemców w polskiej szkole [Organization of Education of Foreigners at a Polish School]. [in:] B. Lachowicz (Ed.). *Uczniowie z różnych kultur w szkole* (pp. 7–15). Warszawa: Ośrodek Rozwoju Edukacji.
- Łobocki, M. (1985). *Współdziałanie nauczycieli i rodziców w procesie wychowania* [Cooperation of Teachers and Parents in the Process of Education]. Warszawa: Nasza Księgarnia.
- Łukasiewicz-Wieleba, J. (Ed.) (2014). *Nauczyciele i rodzice. Komunikacja. Relacje* [Teachers and Parents. Communication. Relations]. Współpraca. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Akademii Pedagogiki Specjalnej.
- Łukasiewicz-Wieleba, J., & Trzcińska-Król, M. (2016). Komunikacja, relacje i współpraca nauczycieli i rodziców. Koherencja ocen jako element dialogu pomiędzy nauczycielami a rodzicami [Communication, Relations and Cooperation Between Teachers and Parents. Coherence of Grades as Part of the Dialogue Between Teachers and Parents]. [in:] D. Jankowska, & M. Grzelak-Klus (Eds.). *Pedagogika dialogu: dialog jako droga rozumienia i samorozumienia* (pp. 233–242). Warszawa: Akademia Pedagogiki Specjalnej.
- Markowska-Manista, U. (2016). Praca z uczniem z trudnościami adaptacyjnymi – specyfika różnic kulturowych i zmiany środowiska edukacyjnego [Work with Students with Adaptation Difficulties – Specificity of Cultural Differences and Changes in the Educational Environment]. [in:] E. Śmiechowska-Petrovskij (Ed.). *Dzieci z trudnościami adaptacyjnymi w młodszym wieku* (pp. 125–148). Warszawa: Wyd. UKSW.

- Maszke, A.W. (2002). Współpraca i partnerstwo rodziców i nauczycieli [Cooperation and Partnership of Parents and Teachers]. [in:] A. Karpińska (Ed.). *Kreatorzy edukacyjnego dialogu* (pp. 67–80). Białystok: Wydawnictwo Uniwersyteckie Trans Humana.
- Mendel, M. (2002). *Edukacja społeczna. Partnerstwo rodziny, szkoły i gminy w perspektywie amerykańskiej* [Social Education. Family, School and Community Partnership in an American Perspective]. Toruń: Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek.
- Młynek, P. (2017). *Współpraca rodziców i nauczycieli – charakter, oczekiwania i uwarunkowania. Praca doktorska* [Cooperation of Parents and Teachers – Character, Expectations and Conditions. PhD Thesis]. Katowice: Uniwersytet Śląski. Retrieved from: https://rebus.us.edu.pl/bitstream/20.500.12128/5897/1/Mlynek_Wspolpraca_rodzicow_i_nauczycieli_charakter_oczekiwania_i_uwarunkowania.pdf (access: 28.09.2019).
- Pilch, T., & Bauman, T. (2010). *Zasady badań pedagogicznych. Strategie ilościowe i jakościowe* [Principles of Pedagogical Research. Quantitative and Qualitative Strategies]. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Akademickie "Żak".
- Śliwerski, B. (2012). *Szkoła na wirażu zmian politycznych. Bez cenzury* [A School on the Whirlwind of Political Change. No Censorship]. Kraków: Oficyna Wydawnicza Impuls.
- Trzcińska-Król, M. (2014). Nauczyciele o komunikacji i relacjach z rodzicami [Teachers about Communication and Relationships with Parents]. [in:] J. Łukasiewicz-Wieleba (Ed.). *Nauczyciele i rodzice. Relacje, komunikacja, współpraca* (pp. 71–84). Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Akademii Pedagogiki Specjalnej.
- Trzcińska-Król, M., & Pilipczuk, B. (2015). *Media w komunikacji nauczycieli i rodziców* [Media in the Communication Between Teachers and Parents]. Warszawa: Akademia Pedagogiki Specjalnej.