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Teacher – parent partnership in the light of ensuring better pupils' learning achievements

Abstract: In this paper, we try to determine to what extent co-operation between teachers and parents, as well as the involvement of parents in their child's school work both at home and at school, contributes to better learning achievements of that child. Furthermore, it is important to determine how the involvement of parents and co-operation between teachers and parents should be carried out to ensure optimal results. In the first part of this paper, we present conclusions of studies of this question performed abroad, while in the second part we will interpret some of the findings of the study we carried out on a representative sample of primary school teachers and parents of primary school children. We wanted to determine the importance of various reasons for co-operation between teachers and parents from the point of view of both teachers and parents, in relation to the child's learning achievements, his or her wellbeing among school mates, and the teacher-pupil relationship, as well as to determine what attitudes teachers and parents have in relation to the burden parents feel due to their child's school obligations, and to what extent parents can help their child prepare for school, in the teachers' and parents' opinions. This paper opens new questions on the possibilities and the strength of co-operation between teachers and parents and on the necessary mechanisms for the parents to be adequately involved, which bring concrete results in the area of child's learning achievement.

Key words: co-operation of teachers and parents, partnership, involvement of parents, learning achievement, optimal development

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Introduction

The basic trend of contemporary co-operation between teachers and parents is to ensure and encourage their partnership. This influences the change of forms, methods and the content of work with parents, and impacts the formal organization and development of a more genuine relationship between teachers and parents. A partnership gives parents more rights, thus increasing their responsibility for their child's socialization and home studying (Resman 1992, p. 35). In their care for the child, the school and parents should build a partnership, since their mutual tie and common interest is an individual, supported by parents at home and by teachers at school. Burden (1995, p. 196) specifies the following reasons for working with parents:

- Establishing open, two-way communication,
- Understanding (and reacting to) pupils' domestic situations,
- Providing parents with information on the school's expectations, events and on the pupil's behaviour,
- Involving parents in school work,
- Informing parents of expectations concerning discipline and measures taken in this respect,
- Encouraging parents to assist their children with school work.

Of the reasons provided, quite a few are closely related to the teaching process and the child's studying in general. The basic aim of co-operation and partnership between teachers and parents is to enable the child's most optimal development, and to ensure good performance in various areas. The child's future life and his professional career will also depend on this co-operation.

Establishing a partnership depends on the school's type, its level and aims, as well as on its orientation (greater orientation in socialization or greater concern for learning and learning achievements) and expectations. The expectations of schools, teachers and parents are never identical, but can be more or less co-ordinated (see in more detail: Kalin 2001, Kalin 2003). This involves many objective and subjective circumstances which encourage or hinder their co-operation.

What involvement of parents means

Involvement of parents can be understood in a number of ways. Some use this term as a synonym for co-operation, participation of parents, parents' authority, and the partnership between the school, family and the community (Epstein, 1996 in Soo-Yin, 2003; Wolfendale, 1989 in Soo-Yin, 2003). The involvement of parents may take various forms and be of different levels, both in and out of school. It includes all activities the school facilitates and stimulates, supporting parents in their actions, with the aim of improving the child's learning and development. Epstein (1996 in Soo-Yin, 2003) has expanded this concept from the »involvement of parents« to a »partnership between school, family and community«, in order to put special emphasis on the fact that each child learns and develops within three contexts: the school, his family and the wider community. All three contexts shall be taken into consideration as a whole, since they are expressed as such in the education system and the learning process of each individual child.

It is important for every school to encourage and facilitate teacher – parent partnerships, which increase the involvement of parents and their participation in encouraging the social, emotional and intellectual development of their child (Children's Defense Foundation 2000, p. 64 in Soo-Yin, 2003). School, parents and the community should be aware of their interaction and should together create a vision and understand the role of individual factors in relation to the roles of others. Such co-operation is necessary to ensure the support and the assistance which every child needs to succeed at school.

Pomerantz et al. (2007, p. 374) emphasize that there are two distinct types of involvement of parents in the education of their child: involvement at home, and involvement in school. *Involvement at school* requires direct contact between parents and teachers, or the school, such as: co-operation in parental meetings and consultation hours for parents, attendance at school events or voluntary activities at school. Research conducted in the USA (U.S. Department of Education 2006 in Pomerantz et al., 2007) indicates that around two thirds of parents – regardless of their ethnic origin – were included in school work through parental meetings and school events. This is surpassed by the involvement of parents with higher socio-economic status and higher formal education. Less frequent, however, is the involvement of parents as volunteers, especially among less-educated parents and those belonging to other linguistic and cultural groups (ibid.).

The involvement of parents at home represents parents' activities in relation to school, which take place outside school, but not necessarily at home. Such activities may be directly linked to school, such as assisting the child with his school obligations, providing good learning conditions, ensuring an adequate place to learn, providing assistance in home assignments, giving advice on the selection of elective subjects, reacting to the child's learning efforts (assistance in the selection of project topics and seminar papers, test achievements) and discussing school matters with the child (what has happened at school, the im-

portance of working at school, etc.). The characteristic of the involvement of parents at home represents also the child's involvement in intellectual activities (reading books with the child, visiting libraries, museums, galleries, and so on) which are not directly linked to school as such. Grolnick and Slowiaczek (1994 in Pomerantz et al., 2007) called such activities cognitive-intellectual involvement.

The two forms – integration at school and integration at home – may of course be directly linked to each other and interwoven. Parents may participate in two ways – at home and at school by using two basic models: the model for development of skills, and the model for development of motivation (Pomerantz et al. 2007, p. 376).

The skill development model includes the development of cognitive skills (e.g. linguistic skills) and metacognitive skills – learning planning, monitoring and self-control. There are several reasons why the involvement of parents may positively influence the development of these skills in children: parents obtain appropriate information on how and what their children learn at school and this can be used when helping their children develop their abilities, while parents in this manner get to know their child's abilities and are able to offer the child suitable assistance at the level which will ensure their optimal development; at home, parents may facilitate learning from practice and experience. Some authors (Epstein and Becker, 1982 in Pomerantz et al., 2007) also stress that when parents are involved, teachers give more attention to development of the child's skills and become themselves even more involved.

The motivation development model means that involvement of parents encourages the child's achievements, because it gives the child different sources of motivation, such as monitoring his academic achievements, or positive perception of his or her abilities. If parents participate in the child's life at school, they emphasize the value of school for the child, which helps him view school as important; in the course of time they may be able to internalize school values as such and their learning may become internally motivated to a greater extent. Parents, together with their actions, present them a model for how to control developments and make positive changes. Through involvement of parents, children are also more familiar with school tasks, which may lead them to believe that they are able to solve academic tasks (Pomerantz et al., 2007).

Parents may provide sources which influence the development of skills and motivation in children, and also help them develop skills, which in turn enhance their motivation.

Advantages of involving parents in school – what research indicates

Several researches into the involvement of parents and their impact on their child's learning achievements have been carried out from the early eighties of the past century (Pomerantz et al., 2007). Research was conducted in two basic directions – studying of the actual integration of parents and re-

searching the interventions/initiatives aimed at encouraging the involvement of parents. The first type of research revealed that the involvement of parents in school benefits the child in regards to his achievements; however, researches on the involvement of parents at home are less consistent regarding positive effects. Since the involvement of parents at home is one of the oldest forms of involvement for the majority of parents, it should give rise to the question what type and manner of co-operation brings the best results. Researches into various initiatives, with the aim of encouraging the involvement of parents, show lesser influence than those on direct involvement of parents. It is true, however, that there has not been enough relevant research in this area in order to come to any certain conclusions.

Research into the involvement of parents, where teachers and parents continually support and encourage the child's learning and development, shows positive effects on children, family and school (Bronfenbrenner, 1974, 1979; Eccles & Harold, 1993; Henderson, 1987; Illinois State Board of Education, 1993, all in Soo-Yin, 2003). As Henderson and Berla (1994) state, the most appropriate indicator of pupil's success at school is not the financial or social status of his family, but the degree to which the child's family is capable of:

- Creating a family environment which encourages/supports learning,
- Expressing high (but not unreal) expectations for their child's learning achievement and his future career,
- Getting involved in the child's school and community education.

Henderson and Berla (1994) have examined and analysed 85 studies concerning the advantages of involving parents in the education of their child. Well-planned and successful involvement of parents has positive effects on the child and parents, as well as teachers and the school as a whole. The advantage for the child lies in his endeavour to achieve better learning results, in higher consistency of homework and his attendance at school, his increased self-confidence, in higher self-discipline; he also shows higher aspirations and school motivation. The positive attitude of a child towards school is often manifested in his improved class behaviour and as a decrease in the number of discipline problems.

An advantage for parents who are more closely connected with their children and have frequent conversations with them is in that they become more sensitive to their child's social, emotional and intellectual needs. In addition, parents have more confidence in their parental role and decision-making skills, and after obtaining better insight in the child's development, they use more methods of positive encouragement and less punishment, and better understand the teacher's work and the school curriculum. If parents know what their child learns at school, they will be more willing to actively take part in working with their child at home, when teachers expect it. The view of parents on school improves and closer inter-relation and sense of belonging to the school are established.

The benefits for teachers manifest largely in the professional work of teachers and headmasters, in improved communication and relationships between

parents, teachers and school head staff, in teachers and headmasters better understanding the cultural setting of each family, and being able to create deeper respect for parents' abilities and their time. Teachers and headmasters also report greater professional satisfaction.

Schools that actively involve parents and their communities have a better reputation in the community and enjoy greater support, while school programmes that encourage and integrate parents usually have better performance and achieve higher quality than those not including parents.

Researchers have confirmed that overall involvement of parents represents a positive contribution to learning and the learning achievements of children and adolescents (Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler, 1997 in Gonzalez-DeHass et al., 2005, p. 100). Studies including pupils of different ages show that learning results are better when the family is actively involved (Hendeson and Berla, 1994 in Gonzalez-DeHass et al., 2005). These studies prove there is a close relation between the involvement of parents and the learning achievement of pupils, their wellbeing, attendance at school, views of pupils, their homework assignments, school marks and their educational aspirations. This also links to higher learning achievements of pupils, the time spent for their homework, a more favourable attitude towards school and lower number of pupils who quit school («dropouts»).

In their study, Gonzalez-DeHass et al. (2005) made a comparative analysis of the research and noted a significant interaction between parent involvement and pupil motivation. Due to greater involvement of parents, pupils have demonstrated greater efforts, concentration and school attendance. Pupils were more interested in learning and demonstrated better achievements. Pupils whose parents get involved assume a higher degree of personal responsibility for their learning. When parents are interested in the education of their children, pupils develop more target-oriented learning, in which they look more for challenging tasks, persist in academic challenges, and are satisfied with their school work.

There are of course several reasons for such results, as they also have several implications. We can search for these reasons in various directions (Gonzalez-DeHass et al., 2005):

1. *Involvement of parents contributes to pupil's self-control of learning and to a realistic perception of his or her learning capacities.* When parents represent a source of pupils' home activities, the school and home environments become closer. The child feels more confident when facing learning activities at school. Parents may support their child in shaping new strategies of action. When the child sees an example in his parents as trustworthy learning partners, he is able to better judge his own abilities and actions (Adunyarittigun, 1997 in Gonzalez-DeHass et al., 2005, p. 118).
2. *Involvement of parents provides a sense of security and affiliation.* When children encounter intellectual, social and personal challenges on a daily basis, their parents set them limits, provide encouragement, and act as a source of knowledge. Parents taking part in school activities show how

important their children are to them (Grolnick and Slowiaczek, 1994 in Gonzalez-DeHass et al., 2005, p. 119), which is an extremely important message for the child to receive.

3. *The involvement of parents helps pupils internalize educational values.* Through their involvement, parents communicate to their child how important education is for them. Pupils' motivation increases when they see their parents take an active role and show an interest for school. This is a home-based support system which stimulates the value of education. When pupils see that their parents value the importance of school efforts and achievements, they are also more motivated and have higher perception of their learning capacity (Marchant et al., 2001 in Gonzalez-DeHass et al., 2005, p. 119).
4. *A pupil's motivation enhances parent involvement.* Parents may get more involved when they believe that their children are motivated; likewise, a motivated child may demand greater involvement of parents.

Pomerantz et al. (2007) conclude their extensive study of various researches into the involvement of parents with the observation that adequate involvement of parents has an impact on higher learning achievements of the child, his mental health, and is a positive contribution to the child's emotional and social development.

Despite the fact that many teachers and schools have accepted the concept of involvement of parents and are aware of its impact on the child, many of them have not as yet transferred this knowledge and belief into practice. A number of studies confirm that parents are interested in co-operation at all levels, from attending individual events to decision-making at the school level. Many parents often still do not know how to enter into co-operation. It is, therefore, more a problem of parents' lacking knowledge of how to get involved rather than a low degree of interest (Nichols, 1991 in Soo-Yin, 2003).

Involvement of parents in their children's home assignments

Learning at home serves various purposes besides enhancing the child's learning experience. It stimulates, supports and enhances learning that has already started at school (Trahan & Lawer-Prince, 1999, in Soo-Yin, 2003). When referring to home work, we may speak of learning through play, of homework assignments and activities closely related to the school curriculum – from learning mathematics to natural and social sciences, as well as languages. Parents help their children in setting their goals for a particular school year or for the future, advise them in their choice of elective subjects and in extra-curricular activities. For all these activities, parents may or may not obtain certain orientations and guidelines from teachers. Epstein (1987 in Soo-Yin, 2003) speaks of two types of activities that parents develop at home. He quotes *common skills or behaviour*, and *specific skills*. Common skills are those stimulating critical thinking, problem solving skills, development of language skills, development of social and emotional skills, or development of specific behaviour. Specific skills

are those which integrate family and parents to assist a child in examining, completing or complementing the skills he has begun developing with his teacher in the class and during lessons. Most parents help their children on the basis of their past experience in schooling and their acquired knowledge of school subjects. Parents mostly desire to obtain more information on their child's home assignments, the rules on home assignments and approaches which they could use to help their child in the learning process. The question is whether parents have enough knowledge to provide adequate assistance to their child.

According to Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2001 in Jordan et al., 2001), research shows that involvement of parents in assisting their children with homework encompasses several questions, namely questions concerning the content, processes and results of parent involvement. It would be worthwhile to study the motivation of parents to help their children, the dynamics of efficient interaction between parents and the child during assistance with homework, and specific mechanisms of involvement influencing pupil's learning results.

Involvement of parents in homework may influence pupil's achievements through different types of activities, such as imitation, encouragement and direct teaching. Moreover, it may also show a more extensive influence, for instance changing child's attitudes to homework, perception of his or her abilities, and self-control. The issues worth exploring in the future are processes and results of parents' help to a child and study of different activities through which parents encourage and influence efficient home work of pupils.

Training parents to assist their children with their home work

Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2001 in Jordan et al., 2001) point out that parents get involved in homework because they are persuaded that their co-operation is needed as to bring about certain changes, and that their involvement is expected. In literature it can also be observed that parents want to know more about the teacher's aims concerning homework and how to be more efficient in assisting their child. Some of them (Faires et al., 2000 in Jordan et al., 2001) propose educational programmes for parents in order to use subject-specific strategies of aid with homework that support pupil's progress and learning. The question is, however, how to effectively educate parents to obtain skills for providing such assistance to their child. Training Latin American mothers for reading activities with their child at home proved a particular success in the USA, and resulted in better school performance (Melzi et al., 2000 in Jordan et al., 2001).

Parents may, despite their positive attitude towards assisting their child with homework, be under stress regarding homework, their own limited knowledge of certain subject areas and relevant strategies they should apply in working with their child. It would be interesting to find out how teachers and other school staff can effectively support parent assistance in pupils' homework.

Homework that requires interaction between parents and the child as part of an activity, may be, according to certain authors, a way of supporting the

involvement of parents and increasing pupil's achievements. Homework, particularly that which is planned by teachers to stimulate the interactions between parents and their child, has shown positive results in different subject areas (Epstein et al., 1997 in Jordan et al., 2001; Van Voorhis, 2000 in Jordan et al., 2001). Van Voorhis emphasizes that well-planned tasks requiring interaction may have various positive effects: they may help the child develop learning strategies, prepare lessons, participate in learning situations, develop personal responsibility for homework, as well as stimulate mutual relations between the parents and their child, and develop communication between parents and the teacher. Teachers should consider and systematically plan tasks that require interaction between parents and their child to specifically stimulate involvement of parents and achievements of pupils.

Naturally, the methods, as well as the influence of parent assistance and involvement, vary depending on the child's age. Nevertheless, authors (Walker and Hoover-Dempsey, 2001 in Jordan et al., 2001) point out that it is necessary to maintain tasks that encourage the interaction between parents and children also with older children. The amount and adequacy of aid should be regulated in respect to the child's age. Studies of home assignments in Slovenia (Čagran 1990, Čagran 1993a, Čagran 1993b, Čagran 1993c, Čagran 1997) included research into their effectiveness and investigation of innovations regarding conventional practice in home assignments. Čagran (1993c) specifically points out the effectiveness of unconventional home assignments' practices which more than usual emphasize the teacher's role in planning, transmitting, carrying out and assessing home assignments. The role of parents is presented in the process of carrying out home assignments in terms of their co-operation and »optimal assistance in relation to the child's age and both physiological and psychological characteristics without limiting the child's independence« (Čagran 1993c, p. 251).

The purpose of the research

Within the goal-oriented research project »Vzvodi uspešnega sodelovanja med domom in šolo: sodobne rešitve in perspektive (Lever of successful co-operation between the school and home: modern solutions and perspectives)« (Kalin et al. 2008) we were interested in how teachers and parents evaluate mutual co-operation and which are the key problems of such co-operation. We gave special attention to identifying drivers of change – improvement of co-operation of school and family, teachers and parents. In this paper we will limit our discussion only to a part of findings linked to the following research questions:

1. To what extent are a child's learning achievements, his or her wellbeing among school mates and the teacher-child relationship factors of co-operation between teachers and parents?
2. To what extent can parents help their child in preparing for school and lessons according to teachers' and parents' opinions?

3. What are teachers' and parents' attitudes regarding overburdening parents with their child's school obligations?
4. Are there any statistically significant differences between teachers and parents in answering the above-mentioned questions?
5. Are there statistically significant differences between parents in answering the above-mentioned questions depending on their gender, level of education, number of children in family, the grade attended by their child and their child's learning success?
6. Are there statistically significant differences between teachers in answering the above-mentioned questions depending on their years of teaching experience, the triad they teach or whether and they come from an urban or non-urban school?

Method

We used a descriptive and causal-non-experimental method of pedagogical research. The basic population included all primary schools in Slovenia (N = 448), which were further divided into two strongly distinguished strata, namely urban (N = 237) and non-urban schools (N = 211). Strata were conceived as independent groups within the entire basic group. We then randomly selected 20 urban and 20 non-urban primary schools from the abovementioned strata, thus forming the random sample at the first level. At each school we selected 'a' classes of the 3rd grade, 5th/6th grade and 9th grade and distributed questionnaires to the parents of the pupils. We received 1690 completed questionnaires. All the teachers at all forty schools of the random sample were included in the research. We received 467 completed questionnaires.

Anonymity was ensured to both teachers and parents. Questionnaires for teachers and parents contained multiple choice questions, scales and open-end questions. We made telephone contact with all the schools included in the sample, explained the contextual guidelines of the research and asked for their co-operation. Simultaneously we acquired data of the number of children in 'a' classes of the third, fifth/sixth and ninth grade and the number of teachers at each particular school. We sent questionnaires to schools by post in November 2007, and we received the completed questionnaires towards the end of December 2007 and in the beginning of January 2008. The data was processed with the SPSS statistical package, using descriptive statistical and hi-square test.

Results and interpretation

To what extent pupils' learning achievements, their wellbeing among school mates and the teacher-child relationship depend on co-operation between teachers and children.

Parents enter into co-operation with the teacher for various reasons, and their expectations usually also vary to a large degree. The same is true for teachers. We tried to verify varied expectations by asking teachers and parents which is the most important reason of co-operation, and how they rank three basic reasons: child's learning achievement, child's wellbeing among school mates and the teacher-child relationship. Both parents and teachers ranked these three reasons according to importance using the following scale: 1 – the most important reason for me, 2 – reason of medium importance, and 3 – the least important reason to co-operate for me. Ranking of each of the reasons is presented below.

Let us first have a look at the results of comparison for the whole sample in terms of percentage of parents' and teachers' answers.

	PARENTS						TEACHERS					
	Learning achievement		Wellbeing		Relationship with teachers		Learning achievement		Wellbeing		Relationship with teachers	
	F	f %	f	f %	F	f %	f	f %	f	f %	F	f %
1	384	26.3	408	27.9	668	45.8	101	22.4	190	42.1	160	35.5
2	362	24.8	554	37.9	545	37.4	95	22.1	190	42.1	166	36.8
3	714	48.9	498	34.1	247	16.8	255	56.5	71	15.7	125	27.7
Total	1460	100	1460	100	1460	100	451	100	451	100	451	100

Table 1: Comparison of reasons for co-operation between teachers and parents by their importance.

Legend: 1 – the most important reason for me, 2 – reason of medium importance, 3 – the least important reason to co-operate for me.

Parents' most frequent first ranking answer is the teacher-child relationship (45.8 %). The child's wellbeing among their school mates is the most frequent second ranking answer (37.9 %), however it was closely followed by the teacher-child relationship (37.4 %). The most frequently third ranking answer is the child's learning achievement (48.9 %).

Teachers most often chose the child's wellbeing among school mates as their first ranking answer (42.1 %) – this also appears as the second ranking answer in the same percentage of responses. The most frequently chosen third ranking reason is the learning achievement of the pupil with 56.5 % of answers.

Parents with primary, vocational and secondary education more often cite learning success as the most important reason – parents with primary education gave this answer in 31.4 % of cases, while the share of parents with highest education, ranking learning success in first place, is 22.7 %. The latter most often (53.5 %) rate learning success as the least important reason for co-operation with teachers. Parents with a higher level of education more often mention their child's wellbeing among school mates as the most important reason for co-operation – 41.5% of parents with a university degree responded this way.

Among all groups of parents, parents with one child most often cited lear-

ning success as the most important reason for co-operating with teachers. The frequency of the answer that the child's wellbeing among school mates is the most important reason for co-operation increases in line with the increase in the number of children in the family in question.

Teachers most often chose child's wellbeing among school mates as the most important reason (42.1 %). Child's relationship with teacher is a less important reason for teachers, while parents mention it as the most important. It is noteworthy that out of all three reasons, learning success is the least important for both teachers and parents.

Parents' assisting their children in preparing for school and lessons

We were interested in teachers' and parents' views on the question to what extent parents can help their child prepare for school and lessons, and to what extent teachers and parents believe that parents are overburdened with their child's school obligations. Involvement of parents in helping the child with homework poses various questions: from the parents' motivation in helping their child, to strategies parents use to help their child. A special question thus opens concerning qualification of parents to give such help and concerning the necessity to educate parents as to how to help their child in a more suitable way.

We established that parents and teachers show statistically significant differences ($\chi^2 = 2.446E2$; $g = 2$, $\alpha = 0.000$) in their answers on how parents can help their child prepare for school and lessons.

65.8 % of the parents in the sample estimate that they know how to help their child in almost all subjects if necessary. Teachers chose this answer in 27.3 % of cases. Most teachers (71.2 %) estimate that parents know how to help their child in only some subjects; this answer appears in parents in 30.8 % of cases. 3.4 % of parents and 1.5 % of teachers say that they do not know how to help in any subject.

Parents are therefore more confident of their own abilities to help, while teachers recorded the answer that parents can help to a lesser degree.

		Do you view that you can help your child prepare for school and lessons?			
		I can help with all subjects	I can help with some subjects	Almost with none of the subjects	Total
Parents	f	1084	507	56	1647
	f %	65.8	30.8	3.4	100.0
Teachers	f	125	326	7	458
	f %	27.3	71.2	1.5	100.0
Total	f	1209	833	63	2105
	f %	57.4	39.6	3.0	100.0

Table 2: Teachers' and parents' attitudes on how parents can help their child prepare for school and lessons.

In relation to achieved education we established statistically significant differences ($\chi^2 = 2.154E2$; $g = 4$, $\alpha = 0.000$) in the responses to the question how parents can help their child in preparations for school and lessons.

As many as 88.8 % of parents with the highest education answered that they can help their child in all subjects, while this percentage decreases in line with the level of achieved education and reaches 43.2 % in parents with only primary and vocational education. These parents answered in the highest degree (49.1 %) that they can help their child with some subjects. 10.7 % of the highest educated parents chose this answer, although we expected this share to be smaller. Parents with the lowest education stated that they cannot help their child with any of the subjects in the highest share (7.7 %).

			Do you view that you can help your child prepare for school and lessons?			
			I can help with all subjects	I can help with some subjects	Almost with none of the subjects	Total
Education:	PS + VS	f	202	230	36	468
		f %	43.2	49.1	7.7	100.0
	SS	f	493	218	17	728
		f %	67.7	29.9	2.3	100.0
	Coll.+Univ. and above	f	372	45	2	419
		f %	88.8	10.7	0.5	100.0
	Total	f	1067	493	55	1615
		f %	66.1	30.5	3.4	100.0

Table 3: Teachers' and parents' views on how parents can help their child prepare for school and lessons.

Legend: PS = Primary school; VS = Vocational school; SS = Secondary school; Coll. = College; Univ. = University

We established statistically significant differences in relation to the number of children in the family ($\chi^2 = 46.273$; $g = 6$, $\alpha = 0.000$) regarding the question on helping their child prepare for school and lessons. The share of parents' answers that they can help their child in all subjects decreases with the number of children in the family – this is stated by 74.2 % of parents with one child and 55.6 % of parents with four or more children. The share of answers that they can help with some subjects increases from 24.2 % in parents with one child to 30.6 % in parents with four and more children.

Parents' answers differ in a statistically significant degree in relation to the child's learning achievements ($\chi^2 = 2.2828E2$; $g = 4$, $\alpha = 0.000$). Parents of children for whom descriptive assessment is used, can help their child with all subjects in 90.6 % of cases; the lowest share (33.8 %) of these answers is among parents of children with good, satisfactory and unsatisfactory learning achievements. These parents contribute the highest share of answers that they

can help with some subjects (58.1 %), while 8.1 % cannot help in almost any of the subjects. 60.7 % of parents of children with excellent and very good learning achievements answer that they can help with all subjects, while 35.4 % can help with some subjects. Parents of children with less satisfactory learning achievements can help their children to learn only some subjects. Therefore we could raise questions whether parents need help or training to adequately support their child's learning, as well as how this help could be carried out and by whom.

			Do you view that you can help your child prepare for school and lessons?			
			I can help with all subjects	I can help with some subjects	Almost with none of the subjects	Total
Learning achievement	Descriptive assessment	f	483	49	1	533
		f %	90.6	9.2	0.2	100.0
	Excellent and very good	f	502	293	32	827
		f %	60.7	35.4	3.9	100.0
	Good + satisfactory + unsatisfactory	f	92	158	22	272
		f %	33.8	58.1	8.1	100.0
	Total	f	1077	500	55	1632
		f %	66.0	30.6	3.4	100.0

Table 4: Teachers' and parents' attitudes about how parents can help their child prepare for school and lessons

In relation to the class attended, there are statistically significant differences ($\chi^2 = 3.132E2$; $g = 4$, $\alpha = 0.000$) in parents' answers to the question whether they can help their child prepare for school and lessons. As the child's grade increases, the percentage of parents who can help the child with all subjects decreases – from 89.6 % in the third grade to 40.8 % in the ninth grade. The percentage of parents saying that they can help in some subjects similarly increases (from 10.2 % in the third grade to 50.1 % in the ninth grade), as does the percentage of parents who cannot help their child at all any more (in the ninth grade there are 9.1 % of such parents and 0.2 % in the third grade).

We also researched the *teachers' opinion* whether parents can help in preparation for school and lessons at home. We established statistically significant differences in relation to the triad in which teachers teach ($\chi^2 = 86.047$; $g = 4$, $\alpha = 0.000$).

Teachers' opinions are similar to those of parents. As the teacher's number of years of working in schooling increases, teachers view that parents are less and less able to help their child – from 50.6 % of teachers who estimate that parents can help with all subjects in the first triad, to only 6.6 % of parents, who, according to teachers, can help in the 9th grade. According to teachers, 89.2 % of

			Do you view that you can help your child prepare for school and lessons?			
			I can help with all subjects	I can help with some subjects	Almost with none of the subjects	Total
Grade	Third	f	510	58	1	569
		f%	89.6	10.2	0.2	100.0
	fifth and sixth	f	359	184	8	551
		f%	65.2	33.4	1.5	100.0
	Ninth	f	212	260	47	519
		f%	40.8	50.1	9.1	100.0
	Total	f	1081	502	56	1639
		f%	66.0	30.6	3.4	100.0

Table 5: Parents' views on how they can help their child prepare for school and lessons in relation to the grade attended

parents can only partly help their children in the 9th grade, while they estimate the share of such parents to amount to 49.4 % in the first triad.

			Do you view that parents can help their child prepare for school and lessons?			
			They can help with all lessons	They can partly help	They can help with almost none of the subjects	Total
Triad	First triad	F	80	78	0	158
		f%	50.6	49.4	0.0	100.0
	Second triad	f	33	84	0	117
		f%	28.2	71.8	0.0	100.0
	Third triad	f	11	149	7	167
		f%	6.6	89.2	4.2	100.0
	Total	f	124	311	7	442
		f%	28.1	70.4	1.6	100.0

Table 6: Teachers' views on how parents can help their child prepare for school and lessons in relation to the triad they teach

Teachers' and parents' attitudes regarding overburdening of parents with school obligations of their child

We were interested in teachers' and parents' attitudes regarding overburdening of parents with school obligations of their child. It is a known fact that school to a great extent determines the dynamics and characteristics of family life.

We established a statistically significant difference between teachers and parents ($\chi^2 = 56.313$; $g = 4$, $\alpha = 0.000$) regarding the statement that parents are overburdened with school obligations of their child.

		Parents are overburdened with school obligations of their child.					
		I absolutely disagree	I don't agree	I partially agree	I agree	I absolutely agree	Total
Parents	f	74	399	597	345	195	1610
	f %	4.6	24.8	37.1	21.4	12.1	100.0
Teachers	f	12	149	215	60	18	454
	f %	2.6	32.8	47.4	13.2	4.0	100.0
Total	f	86	548	812	405	213	2064
	f %	4.2	26.6	39.3	19.6	10.3	100.0

Table 7: Teachers' and parents' attitudes regarding overburdening of parents with school obligations of their child.

In fact, parents and teachers most often declared that they partially agreed with the statement. The share of such answers is somewhat greater in teachers (47.4 %), compared to parents (37.1 %). Significantly more teachers than parents disagree with the statement; this applies to 32.8 % of teachers and 24.8 % of parents. The share of parents who agree or absolutely agree with the statement exceeds the teachers' share. Teachers less often believe parents are overburdened with their child's school obligations. As much as a third of parents agree with the statement that they feel overburdened with their child's school obligations.

			Parents are overburdened with school obligations of their children.					
			I absolutely disagree	I don't agree	I partially agree	I agree	I absolutely agree	Total
Education:	PS +VS	f	27	117	163	96	47	450
		f%	6.0	26.0	36.2	21.3	10.4	100.0
	SS	f	30	149	276	164	99	718
		f%	4.2	20.8	38.4	22.8	13.8	100.0
	Coll.+Univ. and above	f	15	129	147	77	45	413
		f	3.6	31.2	35.6	18.6	10.9	100.0
	Total	f	72	395	586	337	191	1581
		f%	4.6	25.0	37.1	21.3	12.1	100.0

Table 8: Parents' views regarding being overburdened with school obligations of their child depending on their level of education

Parents' answers to this question show statistically significant differences ($\chi^2 = 20.922$; $g = 8$, $\alpha = 0.007$) also in view of their achieved education. Partial agreement is the most frequent answer in all groups of parents. 6 % of parents with primary and vocational education say that they do not agree at all, while the same answer is recorded in 4.2 % of parents with the highest education. The latter hold the biggest share of the answer that they do not agree (31.2 %). The answer »I absolutely agree« is most often given by parents with secondary education (13.8 %).

Statistically significant differences ($\chi^2 = 34.735$; $g = 12$, $\alpha = 0.001$) appeared in parents' responses also in relation to the number of children in the family. The overwhelming majority of parents partially agreed. The answer »I absolutely disagree« was mostly (8.7 %) given by parents with four or more children, in frequency (5.4 %) they are followed by parents with one child. Most parents with one child maintain that they don't agree, while parents with two children say that they absolutely agree (14.1 %); in this they are followed by parents with four or more children (12.6 %). It seems that parents with two children experience overburdening in the highest degree.

Parents' answers also show statistically significant differences ($\chi^2 = 24.654$; $g = 8$, $\alpha = 0.002$) in relation to the class attended by their child. Everywhere the most frequent answer was partial agreement – from 41.7 % to 50.8 %. Among parents of children in the 5th and 6th grade, 6.1 % do not agree at all with the statement, while in other two grades the share of such parents is 3.8 % and 3.9 %. Parents of children in the 9th grade most often partially agreed with the statement – in 40.1 %. Agreement is most often expressed by parents of children in the 5th and 6th grade (25.4 %), while absolute agreement is in the highest share expressed by parents of children in the 3rd grade – 13.7 %.

			Parents are overburdened with school obligations of their children.					
			I absolutely disagree	I don't agree	I partially agree	I agree	I absolutely agree	Total
Grade	Third	f	22	141	201	121	77	562
		f%	3.9	25.1	35.8	21.5	13.7	100.0
	fifth and sixth	f	33	111	191	137	67	539
		f%	6.1	20.6	35.4	25.4	12.4	100.0
	Ninth	f	19	146	202	86	51	504
		f%	3.8	29.0	40.1	17.1	10.1	100.0
	Total	f	74	398	594	344	195	1605
		f%	4.6	24.8	37.0	21.4	12.1	100.0

Table 9: Parents' attitudes regarding overburdening with school obligations of their child in relation to the grade attended by the child

In the sample of teachers there are statistically significant differences ($\chi^2 = 32.758$; $g = 8$, $\alpha = 0.000$) in their agreement with the statement in relation to the triad where they teach. 46.2 % of teachers in the first triad do not agree that parents are overburdened with school obligations; while partial agreement is expressed by 41.7 % of teachers. It is characteristic of the second triad that 50.8 % of teachers partly agree with the statement, while 21.2 % do not agree. Most teachers from the second triad absolutely agree (7.6 %) that parents are overburdened. Third triad teachers also partly agree with the statement (50.3 %), while total agreement was expressed by 17 % of them – this is the largest share when compared to teachers of the other two triads.

			Parents are overburdened with school obligations of their children.					
			I absolutely disagree	I don't agree	I partially agree	I agree	I absolutely agree	Total
Triad	First	f	4	72	65	11	4	156
		f %	2.6	46.2	41.7	7.1	2.6	100.0
	Second	f	6	25	60	18	9	118
		f %	5.1	21.2	50.8	15.3	7.6	100.0
	Third	f	1	48	83	28	5	165
		f %	0.6	29.1	50.3	17.0	3.0	100.0
	Total	f	11	145	208	57	18	439
		f %	2.5	33.0	47.4	13.0	4.1	100.0

Table 10: Teachers' attitudes regarding overburdening of parents with school obligations of their child, in relation to the triad they teach

A statistically significant difference was also recorded among teachers ($\chi^2 = 31.751$; $g = 12$, $\alpha = 0.002$) in relation to years of teaching when evaluating the statement that parents are overburdened with school obligations of their child. Teachers with most years of teaching to the greatest extent disagree with the statement that parents are overburdened – their share is 8.1 %. In this group, 52.2 % of teachers express partial agreement. Teachers with the shortest time of teaching agreed similarly– 52.9 % of them partly agree that parents are overburdened.

Conclusions

We found that parents most often cite the teacher-child relationship as the reason for their co-operation with teachers (45.8 %), while teachers cite the child's wellbeing among school mates as the most important reason for co-operating with parents (42.1 %). Parents with primary, vocational and secondary education more often mention learning success as the most important reason, while

for parents with higher education the child's wellbeing among school mates is of most importance. Our research pointed out that learning success is a more important reason for parents with one child. The child's relationship with the teacher is a less important reason for teachers, while for parents it figures in the first place. It is noteworthy that among all three reasons (child's learning success, teacher-child relationship, child's wellbeing among school mates), learning success is the least important for both teachers and parents, even though some differences between teachers and parents appear, which certainly influences the readiness of parents to get involved in and to co-operate with the school and teachers, while on the other hand it influences teachers and their organizing of those forms and methods of co-operation where parents will be able to get involved according to their basic expectations about co-operation with teachers.

In general, parents and teachers partly agreed that parents were overburdened with school obligations of their children. Parents expressed a higher degree of agreement than teachers. It may be interesting to note that it is the parents with two children who feel the heaviest burden and not those who have four or more children. We can conclude that the difference between how teachers and parents experience overburdening with the child's school obligations arises due to different understanding of the parents' role in their child's learning. We can see two different interpretations. On the one hand parents may take too much responsibility for their child's school obligations, they may even do the homework instead of the child and experience that school to a large extent determines their family life. On the other hand teachers may fail to notice such parents' distress and not discuss the subject with them sufficiently, or fail to explain to the parents where they see their role in a child's school obligations, or they plan school obligations insufficiently without taking into account the parents' role in assisting their child. All these interpretations are merely indirect and subjective. Further suitable research in this area is needed to achieve a more objective view.

65.8 % of parents in the sample estimate that they *know how to help their child* with almost all subjects if help is needed. Most teachers (71.2 %) estimate that parents know how to help child only with some subjects. Parents are therefore slightly more convinced in their own abilities to help, while with teachers the answer that parents can only partly help prevails. Our finding is that the share of parents answering that they can help their child with all subjects decreases with the level of achieved formal education of parents. 10.7 % of parents with the highest achieved education answer that they can help their child only in some subjects, while this answer was given by 49.1 % of parents with primary and vocational education. Parents of children with less satisfactory learning achievements can help their children only in some subjects. This opens questions about possible parents' needs for appropriate training to help their children, especially at the beginning of schooling when their role has more significance than later, when it is important that children themselves assume more responsibility for their learning and learning success. This also gives rise to the question about the nature of parental assistance to the child in preparation for school and lessons. Answers indicate that teachers to a lesser degree plan

homework which would require parents' involvement, or they do not give home assignments to systematically encourage interaction between parents and children. Communication about school work, along with particular home assignments where the child has to co-operate with parents, can be an encouragement for the child to learn, and it also raises the child's motivation for learning, helps to internalize the value of education, etc. (Gonzalez-DeHass et al. 2005). In this respect, teachers would probably need more systematic training also in the area of giving home assignments and other forms of encouraging communication between parents and children through school work.

On the other hand, as mentioned in the theoretical introduction, it is specially important for parents to be aware of their responsibility to create family environment, supportive of learning, where they express suitably high (but not unreal) expectation about child's learning achievements and future career and that they get appropriately included in their child's education in school and community (Henderson and Berla 1994).

The problem may lie in the fact that parents see themselves more as directly helping their child in learning and preparing for the lessons than primarily supporting their child's learning and encouraging learning, where the level of formally achieved education of parents and the acquired knowledge for specific help in preparations for lessons and work with home assignments have considerably smaller value than the awareness of the value of education and appropriate encouraging (supporting) of a child's learning and development.

The research undoubtedly opens new questions about possibilities and power of co-operation between teachers and parents, and about drivers necessary for appropriate involvement of parents to bring about specific results in the area of the child's learning achievement. Research carried out abroad (Henderson and Berla 1994; Hoover-Dempsey et al. 2001 in Jordan et al. 2001; Gonzalez-DeHass et al. 2005; Pomerantz et al. 2007) indicates that active involvement of parents significantly influenced learning achievement of pupils. In our environment we would need systematic research of this area and with it appropriate training of teachers for planning, introduction and evaluation of those types of involvement and co-operation with parents that will, in the highest possible degree, ensure optimum development of each individual and learning achievements in line with each individual's capabilities.

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