

PARENTS' READINESS FOR SOCIAL PARTNERSHIP WITH TEACHERS

Svetlana Kostromina, Natalia Moskvicheva

Saint Petersburg State University (Russian Federation)

Abstract

Education is a shared responsibility of the family, school and society in achieving the common goal of the child's development and upbringing. One of the key aspects of creating the atmosphere of trust and mutual (common) responsibility of school teachers, parents and the child is psychological readiness of parents and teachers for social partnership. However, one or both parties are not often ready for equal working relationships.

In this study we investigated parents' psychological readiness for partnership interaction with teachers. The emphasis was placed on the personality component. Thus, the aim of the research was to identify parents' attitudes towards school, as well as parents' personality characteristics that promote or impede partnerships with teachers.

The study involved 370 parents of primary school pupils in St. Petersburg, Russia, and their class teachers.

We used the author's questionnaire for parents that included three blocks of questions: interaction with teacher, equal communication with the child, and participation in school activities. To study psychological characteristics of parents we used R. Cattell's Sixteen Personality Factor Questionnaire, form C (diagnosis of personality traits), K. Thomas test, an adapted form (the tendency towards behavior strategies in the conflict), and Varga - Stolin questionnaire (parental attitudes towards the child). The data were processed by mathematical statistical methods: descriptive statistics, U-test Mann-Whitney pair-wise comparisons, correlation analysis, and regression analysis.

The results showed that most parents demonstrate a personal interest in the child's academic performance. 82% of parents give a positive assessment of the importance of regular contacts with teachers. Among them, 13% are ready to solve the child's problems with studies partly in alliance with the teacher and 11% of parents believe that relationships with the class teacher should be moderate and does not play a key role in the academic success of children. Approximately a fifth of parents (18%) do not want to ask the class teacher for the pedagogical advice. 4% of parents do not consider the teacher an ally and a partner in the upbringing of the child.

The parents' readiness to ask for pedagogical advice and the frequency of their visits to teachers is negatively correlated with the 'cooperation' type of parent-child interaction ($p \leq 0.003$), parents' anxiety ($p \leq 0.023$) and tension ($p \leq 0.038$). This can be explained by an inner sense of guilt because of the child's failures, leading to a certain degree of parents' frustration. The symbiotic relationship with the child, typical of most parents, acts as the basis for the parents' interest in equal interaction with teachers ($p \leq 0.018$). Considering the class teacher as an 'ally' in the child's upbringing is positively correlated with the control of the child ($p \leq 0.055$).

The main challenges that parents are faced with when approaching the teacher were revealed. The frequency of misunderstandings with the teacher is positively correlated with the parents' avoidance strategy in emotionally difficult situations ($p \leq 0.008$). Overall, the study revealed that the ability to control your own emotions, emotional stability and balance, purposefulness, and sufficiently high activity when solving group tasks allow us to talk about parents' personality potential in social partnership with the teacher.

Keywords: social partnership between family and school; relationships between parents and teachers; psychological readiness

1 INTRODUCTION

Since the time when the functions of teaching, upbringing and development of the individual went beyond family responsibility and were shared with the state, two "educational poles" came into existence, which determine independently what, how and why should be mastered in order for the child to grow up prepared for adult life. Each of them sets its own system of reference points – the context of social connections, standards, values and relationships. And not only do they differ from each other, but often contradict each other. Differences may be exacerbated when a schoolchild comes from a different sociocultural environment, for example from a family of migrants. New roles, new rules and new tasks which require participation of both parties- the family and the school – increase the probability of misunderstanding between parents and teachers.

E. Patall, H. Cooper and J. Robinson (2008) think that the main point where misunderstanding occurs is the collision between the ideas of goal-oriented studies at school and the instructions parents give to their children at home when doing the tasks [1]. A. Harris and J. Goodall (2007) consider parents' resistance as one of the reasons for cautious and even alienated attitude of teachers towards parents [2].

Along with this, there is quite a widespread position of superiority (often even snobbishness) of teachers over parents. Its existence is caused by teachers' belief in their own pedagogical and psychological competence, while parents, from their point of view, have limited knowledge in the sphere of the child's education and upbringing. This results in the formation of barriers, situations of disintegration and conflict relationships between teachers and parents.

How can the atmosphere of trust and mutual understanding between teachers and parents be created? Obviously, its basis is the possibility of mutually beneficial equal relationships. This type of relationships was called social partnership. The only question is how far both parties are psychologically ready for it.

2 PROBLEM STATEMENT

The idea of the development of relationships between family and school appeared in the late 60-s in the USA. In 1974 it was first proved that family involvement was an essential factor in realization of any educational programme [3]. In present-day Russia, the development of the idea of social partnership between parents and teachers started quite recently - in the late 90-s – early 2000-s. It appeared as a result of blurring the role lines of family and school. The initial responsibility of parents for children's upbringing, and the school's responsibility for education gradually blended. Upbringing and education started to be regarded as a joint responsibility of teachers and parents. Now the term "partnership" is used to describe essential cooperation between family and school, in which both parties consult each other, exchange experience and knowledge, and support each other in promoting education, motivation and pupils' overall development [4].

In a general sense, partnership is a type of social interaction, which means recognition and acceptance of the importance of the personality, views, interests and peculiarities of each other. It directs participants towards equal cooperation, search for agreement and reaching a consensus, and optimization of relationships [5].

In education, it implies parents' participation in regular bilateral and meaningful relationships with the educational establishment (No Child Left Behind Act, 2002), which includes supporting the child in education as such and in other school activities [6]. According to American Parent Teacher Association, mutually beneficial cooperation between parents and teachers can take different forms, including the role of parents as 1) the first agents of education, 2) those taking a decision about the child's education, healthcare and well-being, 3) protectors of their child's success.

V.I. Zagvyazdinskiy (2006) views social partnership as a socio-psychological phenomenon, the essence of which is integration of activities and ensuring that the needs of the partners in the interaction are met through movement towards agreement, cooperation and development of all the participants [7]. The result of mutually beneficial cooperation between teachers and parents is the opportunity to bring up responsible and determined pupils able to join the partnership along with adults and capable of more mature social behaviour in future [8]. According to L. Darinskaya (2012), the basis for such behaviour is highly developed self-organizational skills [9], openness to new experience, the ability to present yourself and orientation towards achieving success at the next stages of education [10].

R. Cowan, N. Swearer and S. Sheridan (2004) compare two forms of interaction between school and family: partnership and cooperation. They understand cooperation between family and school as 'a bilateral dynamic process between at least one of the parents and at least one person from the school system (e.g. a teacher, or an administration representative, or a psychologist), who interact when taking decisions in the context of mutually beneficial tasks concerning a pupil for whom all the parties share responsibility [11, p.203]. The authors differentiate between the notions of 'cooperation' and 'partnership', because cooperation implies the process referring to a specific goal or set of goals which can be achieved in a rather short period of time. While partnership suggests **long-term**, constantly developing relationships between parents and school representatives and solving problems which are beyond time limits. That is to say the basis of partnership is deep and long-term cooperation [12].

A. D. Tveit (2009) identifies the conditions for partnership relationships between teachers and parents [13]. They include mutual trust, voluntary basis, and teachers considering parents as an indispensable element of the educational process, the availability of common information space that implies agreement of goals, values, and roles, which can be reached in the process of bilateral communication. A. Araújo et al. (2012) point out that one example of partnership relationships in education is involvement of parents in the planning jointly with teachers of educational and career

prospects for adolescents, including evaluation of the resources available to adolescents and tasks in career guidance and academic performance[14].

At the same time, cooperation between family and school, in the context of educational partnership, may mean that parties have equal statuses in the partnership, but they are not equal to each other [15].L.Dozza (2014) points out essential differences in parents' assessment (N=3669) of teachers' competence in different cultural and language communities – Italian, German and those living in southern Tirol. Still, the majority of parents stress the importance of the teacher's knowledge, the ability to teach enthusiastically, to motivate pupils, to respect differences, and to effectively manage the class [16].

Many authors consider that in fact parents and school have different intentions, interests and responsibilities [3, 17, 18and others]. Parents approach partnership personally, and therefore, emotionally; while teachers do it professionally. Consequently, the degree of readiness for social partnership of teachers and parents has a different basis and different orientation. For teachers it is professional competence. The school tries to find the most effective way to involve parents. For parents it is a personal interest, disposition, involvement, and psychological readiness for such interaction. Thus, the understanding of psychological peculiarities of parents who contribute to or impede partnership relationships with teachers is one of the key components of mutually beneficial equal cooperation between family and school.

3 METHOD

3.1 Purpose of Study

The purpose of the research is to study personal characteristics of parents that determine the efficacy of partnership relationships between family and school. In the context of psychological readiness for social partnership, it was important to establish the personality basis for equal practical interaction between parents and teachers.

3.2 Participants

The study involved 370 parents of primary school pupils (five first grades and six fourth grades) in St. Petersburg, Russia. All of them were women aged 29-52 (mean age 34.3±3.9). Sex specification is connected with a deeply rooted Russian tradition. Among parents, the vast majority of those communicating with school are mothers.

The choice of the cluster (primary school) is determined by the most widespread in literature idea that the first stage in education is connected with the highest throughout the process of child's education level of motivation for interaction of parents and teachers. Primary school age is the time when it is easiest to involve parents while they are eager to invest all the available resources in this process

3.3 Research Methods and Instruments

The following psycho-diagnostic techniques were used:

- R. Cattell Sixteen Personality Factor Questionnaire (16 FPQ–105, form C - diagnosis of personality traits) [19];
- K. Thomas test, an adapted form (the tendency to behavior strategies in the conflict) [20];
- A. Varga–V. Stolin questionnaire (parental attitudes toward the child) [21].

Besides, the authors' questionnaire was developed, aimed at studying parents' attitude to school and the correspondence of parents' behaviour to partner communication criteria. In terms of the contents, the questions included 3 blocks: partnership with the teacher (e.g. 'Are you ready to approach the teacher for advice on such issues as ...'), partnership with the child (such statements as 'I help with homework', 'I talk to him/ her about school', 'I check homework together with the child'), participation in school activities ('I accompany the child on different class trips (excursions, hiking, etc.)', 'I attend meetings of parents club'). Subjective assessment was done on a scale of 0 to 10, where 10 points is the maximum intensity and saturation of contacts, and 0 – their absence. SPSS-20 was used for data processing. Descriptive statistics, the Mann-Whitney U test, and Spearman correlation analysis and regression analysis were conducted to evaluate the study objectives.

3.4. Procedure

The study was conducted in September-December 2013.

In the course of 4 sessions, parents and teachers filled in a form and psycho-diagnostic questionnaires. Considering the specificity of the research topic, the main condition for the participation of teachers and parents in the study was voluntary basis. The researcher visited parents meetings in each class

where she was given the opportunity to speak. The parents were told about the study, about its importance and topicality. Then they were given a choice – to participate in it or not.

Based on the results of the study, data were obtained on 29 parameters: personal characteristics (openness - aloofness, developed intellect – limited intellect, emotional stability – emotional instability, independence – submission, carelessness – preoccupation, conscientiousness– unscrupulousness, boldness - timidity, sensitivity – firmness, suspicion – gullibility, dreaminess- practicality, sophistication – simplicity, predisposition to the feeling of guilt – self-confidence, radicalism – conservatism, self-reliance – dependence, self-control, inner tension), strategies of behaving in conflicts (adjustment, cooperation, compromise, avoidance), the type of parental attitude (acceptance – rejection, cooperation, symbiosis, the attitude to child's failures), indicators of partnership relationships (the general index, interaction with the teacher, equal communication with the child, participation in school activities).

4 RESULTS

4.1 Parents' attitude to school

The content-analysis of the answers to the questionnaire allowed us to reveal the degree and the quality of parents' involvement in social partnership with the teacher, and to understand the peculiarities of their attitude towards the educational process in the context of dividing the areas of responsibility. The results of the correlation analysis of partnership indicators with the strategies of behaving in conflict situations and the type of parental attitude stressed the possible basis of the demonstrated forms of behaviour.

On the whole, the parents' answers to the questionnaire reflect their eagerness to be involved in their child's educational process. When answering the question "How important do you think it is to maintain contact between parents and the class teacher?", 83% of parents declare their readiness for cooperation with the teacher. 11% of parents think that maintaining contact with the class teacher should be at a moderate level and that it does not play the key role in the efficacy of education.

The level of the assessment of the importance of partnership interaction for parents positively correlates with the "adjustment" strategy of behaving in the conflict ($p \leq 0.031$), and negatively correlates with the "rivalry" strategy ($p \leq 0.036$). Besides, an essential positive correlation was established with the symbiotic type of parental attitude in the 'mother – child' dyad ($p \leq 0.005$). Thus, the desire to be closer to the child and to protect them from difficulties and a high level of devotion contribute to parents' active participation in relationships with the teacher and may determine the strategy of this interaction – adjustment. Parents are ready to adjust to the teacher's requirements and rules.

Another important fact is the revealed essential correlation of the following parameters: 'the teacher is my ally in the upbringing' and 'control of the child' ($p \leq 0.055$), i.e. the more the parent tries to control their child, the more often they regard the teacher their ally in upbringing and education. It is worth mentioning that this interrelation is quite characteristic of this sample. It is common for 73% of parents. At the same time only 4 % of parents do not see the teacher as an ally and a partner in the child's upbringing. Another 23% are partly ready to solve educational problems in alliance with the teacher.

The next significant indicator of parents' attitude to school is the frequency of visits to the teacher for advice. Overall, about one fifth of parents (18%) do not want to approach their class teacher for pedagogical advice. At the same time, the frequency of visits to the teacher for advice decreases from the 1st grade to the 4th grade. At the beginning of school education only 9% do this rarely, while by the end of primary education 37.5% approach the teacher from time to time, and almost a quarter do it rarely if ever. This shows that parents do not need to constantly maintain contact with the teacher. We would also like to point out that the *frequency* of visits and *readiness* to approach the teacher for advice negatively correlate with the "cooperation" type of parental attitude ($p \leq 0.015$, $p \leq 0.003$ respectively). Thus, the parents' desire for cooperation with the child, demonstration of their sincere interest and participation in the child's activities decrease the number of visits to the teacher for advice. Parents think that together with the child they can manage everything.

As the main difficulties faced by parents when approaching the teacher, parents name the following things (in the order of incidence): 1) too much work, they do not always have time to visit or contact the teacher; 2) they are afraid of meeting the teacher because of the previous negative experience - their own or their close friends' or relatives'; 3) they do not think it is necessary to contact the teacher.

The analysis of problem situations in which parents are ready to ask for advice shows the priority of poor performance issue. Almost all parents think that in case of problems with learning it is necessary to solve the problem together with the teacher. Most rarely, parents are ready to ask for advice about the development of patience, attention span and self-reliance, as well as about upbringing on the whole. Two other directions – motivation for studies and coping with the unwillingness to do homework

– demonstrate a great difference in attitudes according to the answers. One part of parents is eager to discuss this with the teacher, while the other part is totally against it.

The question “How often do you have misunderstanding with the teacher?” showed that 7% of parents are faced with misunderstanding quite often, another 7 % - rarely, and the remaining 86% are completely satisfied with their mutual understanding with the teacher. When there is a disagreement, 57% of parents are ready to search for a joint decision, 33% say that they will take notice of the teacher’s opinion, 6% will insist on their own point of view, 4% will refuse to discuss it further. At the same time, we obtained the information showing the negation of potentially conflict situations, which is typical of parents, and it is confirmed by the revealed positive correlation with the frequency of the use of avoidance strategy by many parents ($p \leq 0.008$). This attests to most parents’ tendency to avoid and ignore undesirable situations, in which they can be faced with misunderstanding and disagreements. In other words, parents who declare their readiness to interact with the teacher and to discuss the problems connected with their child’s studies are in fact not always ready to do it.

Parents’ answers concerning their interaction with children are quite similar. There are few differences. The vast majority of parents talk with their children about school. A significant part is interested in the things that the child has learnt at school and finds interesting. Considering the specificity of primary school, most parents take part in homework preparation and absolutely all parents follow their child’s school performance.

As for the indicator ‘participation in school activities’, it was found out that 21% of parents do this rarely if ever, another 19% visit some events selectively, and 27% visit all or most events. The others are not involved in school events. The statement “I talk to other parents about school, school events and etc.” allowed us to trace how far the parent identifies himself/ herself with the parent group and how far they are involved in the interaction with other parents. Half of the parents regularly communicate with each other, a third of parents keep in touch with the others only on a more superficial level, and 20% are not eager to communicate with other parents.

4.2 Interrelation between parents’ personal characteristics and orientation towards partnership with the teacher.

To establish the personality basis for the readiness for social partnership between parents and the teacher, a correlation analysis and a regression analysis were carried out. In table 1, the results of the interrelation between personal characteristics (Cattell’s questionnaire), the indicators of partnership relationships and the type of parental attitude (Varga - Stolin questionnaire) are presented.

Table 1. Interrelation between personal characteristics and the indicators of partnership relationships

Personality factors (16PF Cattell Questionnaire)	Indicators of partnership relationships in the educational process			The type of parental attitude		
	The level of interaction with the teacher	The frequency of visits to the teacher for advice	The frequency of misunders tandings	The frequency of participatio n in school events	Control of the child	Symbiosis
B –developed intellect			-.2914 ($p \leq 0.049$)			
C –emotional stability					-.3299 ($p \leq 0.018$)	
G conscientiousness/ unscrupulousness	-.3268 $p \leq 0.028$			-.3577 ($p \leq 0.009$)		
M –dreaminess/ practicality					-.4123 ($p \leq 0.001$)	
O –predisposition towards the feeling of guilt		-.3350 ($p \leq 0.023$)			.2975 ($p \leq 0.045$)	
Q2 –self-reliance/ dependence	.3056 $p \leq 0.041$			-.2670 ($p \leq 0.073$)		
Q3 self-control	.4669 $p \leq 0.001$					
Q4 inner tension		-.3077 ($p \leq 0.038$)				.2960 ($p \leq 0.029$)

As could be seen from the table 1, active interaction with the teacher is characteristic of parents with a high level of self-control and self-reliance, but not decisive enough, ready to act, with reduced thoroughness and social standards of behaviour.

Carelessness and light-mindedness in the behaviour (negative interrelation with factor G), increased conformity and orientation towards social approval (negative interrelation with factor Q2) provide greater involvement of parents in school life and their visiting different school events. Self-reliant and well-balanced parents, who are business-minded, participate in school events more rarely.

Parents with a predisposition towards the feeling of guilt and inner tension approach the teacher for advice more seldom. Consequently, increased anxiety (for example, because of the child's failures), highly developed commitment, and a certain degree of frustration and worry contribute to avoidance of communication with the teacher.

The frequency of misunderstandings on parents' part negatively correlates with the level of intellect development. Perhaps, drawbacks in the analysis of the situation, in the ability to generalize and establish cause and effect relationship provoke conflict behaviour of parents, exacerbate disagreements and prevent the search for a mutually acceptable solution.

The formation of partnership relationships with the child is interrelated negatively with emotional stability and positively with anxiety and the feeling of guilt on parents' part. Besides, excessive control is characteristic of parents oriented towards outer reality (factor M) and generally accepted rules. Thus, the basis of the desire to control the child's behaviour, including their academic success and failures, is the inner dependence on a group or on someone's opinion, the inability to control their own emotions, excessive irritability, and predisposition to worry and dismay.

Inner tension is characteristic of parents with the symbiotic type of child-parent relationships. Parents who are constantly worried about their child limit the child's self-reliance.

The results of the regression analysis allowed us to determine the key personal characteristics which are responsible for parents' psychological readiness for partnership interaction with the teacher (table 2). The general indicator of readiness for partnership relationships was used as a dependent variable.

Table 2. Personal characteristics determining the level of psychological readiness for partnership in education

Personality factors according to Cattell	Beta	Std.Err. of Beta	B	Std.Err. of B	t	p-level
Q1 – radicalism/ conservatism	-0.8930	0.2098	-0.4775	0.1122	-4.255	0.0014
MD – self-esteem adequacy	0.6722	0.21782	0.3379	0.1094	3.0863	0.0104
Q4 – inner tension	0.3979	0.1348	0.2197	0.0744	2.9517	0.0132
A – openness/ aloofness	0.7796	0.2679	0.4051	0.1392	2.9096	0.0142
C – emotional stability	0.4961	0.1802	0.3416	0.1241	2.7527	0.0187
O – predisposition to the feeling of guilt	-0.3652	0.1510	-0.1817	0.0751	-2.4181	0.0341

In accordance with the obtained data, readiness for partnership relationships in education is demonstrated by parents with adequate self-esteem and moderate tension, who are sociable and emotionally stable. Proneness to the feeling of guilt and excessive radicalism reduce the orientation towards mutually beneficial working relationships.

5 FINDINGS

Multilevel analysis of the data (descriptive, correlation, comparative, and regression) showed great variability of the measured characteristics. Parents of pupils from different grades significantly differ in their personal characteristics and their attitude towards school. However, it is safe to say that there are personal characteristics, which are determinants of parents' psychological readiness for social partnership with the teacher.

At the same time, readiness doesn't always mean activity. It was found out that the intensity of interaction between parents and teachers in the context of educational process is determined by the conditions created by the educational environment and the teachers themselves. In all the classes that were studied they are different. Parents are ready to approach the class teacher for pedagogical advice to the extent that is established by the teacher him- / herself. Parents and teachers quite similarly assess the level of interaction between the class teacher and the family considering their own example. However, teachers have a tendency towards overestimation. It was found out that readiness to approach the teacher concerning personal issues which are somehow connected with school is

characteristic of parents who are calm and relaxed in their behaviour, who take difficulties and failures easy and can cope with them, and who are free of the feeling of guilt and anxiety about what is going on. Correlation and regression analyses showed that these indicators are the determinants of partnership efficacy.

Parents with high level of independence and high level of self-control (discipline, accuracy in meeting social requirements) who control their emotions tend to rate the level of interaction with the teacher more highly. These data correspond to the results obtained by Epstein J. L. and Sanders M.G. [18, 22]. Children whose parents have more contacts with school are more self-reliant, tend to show more initiative and readiness to take responsibility, and contact with teachers more easily. And parents who are characterized by situational behaviour and flexibility concerning social norms generally tend to rate the level of interaction between the teacher and the families more highly.

Besides, the studies confirmed that in most families relationships between the parents and the child are more likely to be characterized by the vertical type of devotion [23]. Vertical devotion is the devotion to those who gave us the most important thing - our life. Symbiosis in parents-children relationships contributes to parents' active participation in the interaction with teachers. But it is only children that are allowed to criticize parents in such relationships. They can tell parents about their drawbacks, while the others are not allowed to do that. It is very important that the school should realize the difference between vertical devotion and horizontal devotion (e.g. between teachers, friends, or partners) and should not oppose them.

6 CONCLUSIONS

Social partnership between school and family is a specific type of joint, specially organized activity of the pedagogical staff of an educational establishment and pupils' parents, which is characterized by trust, common goals and values, voluntary and long-term relationships, as well as by recognition of mutual responsibility of parties for the result of their cooperation and development, and which leads to qualitative changes in the subjects of the interaction.

Psychological readiness for social partnership is the personality's entity based on the traits contributing to mutually beneficial equal interaction between the participants of joint activity. It reflects the general orientation of the personality, determines the axiological system of the subject's attitudes and gears them up for active and reasonable actions.

Personal characteristics determining parents' readiness for social partnership are conservatism, adequate self-esteem, sociability, emotional stability, calmness, self-confidence, empathy, realistic outlook and practicality, reflexivity, and eagerness to cooperate in the situation of disagreement.

Such personal characteristics as inadequate self-esteem, aloofness, emotional instability, emotional rigidity, and struggle for power in the situation of disagreement prevent the establishment of partnership relationships.

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