

Book Review

# The Dimensions of Parent-School Partnership

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**Bibliography of the reviewed special issue:** Pusztai, G., & Engler, Á. (Eds.) (2020). *Value-Creating Pedagogy in School and Family. Kapocs*, Special Issue. Maria Kopp Institute for Demography and Families (KINCS).

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## Introduction

Between November 2019 and January 2020 an assessment was conducted as part of the „Value-Creating Pedagogy” research, involving more than 1000 parents and teachers of 4th grade Hungarian students. The research was sponsored by the Maria Kopp Institute for Demography and Families (KINCS). The assessment examined parent-teacher cooperation, pedagogical theories and the quantity of time spent with children. The studies included in this special issue were based on the results of the research. The authors worked in an unusual time: data collection happened in January 2020, the papers, however, were written after the first case of COVID was diagnosed in Hungary. The pandemic period amplified pedagogical challenges, thus both educational researchers and readers understood the role of cooperation between schools, children, and parents. The importance of researching and supporting communication between these three parties was also highlighted.

It should be noted that the work of the researchers did not stop in January 2020. As members of the MTA-DE-Parent-Teacher Cooperation Research Group, they continued their inevitable research on parent involvement and have published a number of papers discussing several areas of the topic. The examined sub-topics include father involvement (Csák, 2023; Csák & Fényes, 2023), school support staff in family-school partnership (Csók & Pusztai, 2022; Pusztai & Csók, 2023), special needs students and their families (Kovács et al., 2022; Dan et al., 2023; Hrabéczy et al., 2023), denominational schools, religion as a supportive factor (Pusztai, Bacskai & Morvai, 2021; Pusztai & Fényes, 2022; Pusztai, Róbert & Fényes, 2022), sport and health programs (Kovács et al., 2022), social capital from families in higher education (Csók & Pusztai, 2023; Hrabéczy & Csók, 2023), and volunteering (Kocsis et al., 2022).

## Review

The first study included in the issue is titled Value-Creating Pedagogy in Family and Education, written by Gabriella Pusztai and Ágnes Engler. The authors report that the questionnaires of the research were filled out by parents and teachers of 4<sup>th</sup> grade students. The received data represents the pupils according to their homes and social circumstances. The researchers examined the cooperation between schools and parents beside the demographic information.

The essay of Katinka Bacskai discusses the relationship between schools and parents. It focuses on the frequency and the causes of parent-school communication. Moreover, it examines how much support parents need in raising their children. Moreover, the author found that teachers and parents usually communicated face to face during the time of the research. As a conclusion, the author stated that positive parent-school relationship is advantageous for students' development, and the frequency of communication depends on the social status of parents.

Ágnes Réka Dusa's study focuses on pedagogical values. The research showed that most parents highlighted family-centeredness, honesty, and politeness as the most important values. Their value-ranking is

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similar to what was predicted by teachers. However, while parents tended to choose individual values, teachers preferred the ones necessary for successful group activity.

In her paper titled *Family Time on the Scale*, Veronika Bocsi scrutinized how children and parents spend their time, especially focusing on how much time a child spends in school and at several types of study-related activities. The author also examined how much time children spent with their families and friends, and the amount of family activities (for example, playtime or having a conversation), as well. Furthermore, the essay mentions how a child's way of spending free time depends on the parents' social status and the hometown of the family.

The study of Valéria Markos (*The Relation Between Participation in Extracurricular Activities and Social Background*) begins with the grouping of extracurricular activities based on their location, organizer, and goals. The preferences of children were gathered from the results of the research. Apart from sports, students usually attended school-organized extracurricular classes, supposedly because these classes were either free or affordable. Related to education-supporting extracurricular classes, the study also covered the social backgrounds and hometowns of the attending children.

In her work *The Search for Factors that Make Resilient Parents*, Gabriella Pusztai describes ideas that can help parents living in disadvantaged areas to raise their children. Results of the research pointed out that religion can have a significant role in the lives of parents who face pedagogical challenges. The author examined activities carried out together with children, time spent with them and the network that can be involved in the upbringing process. She delved into the differences between religious and non-religious families as well. In all three cases she found that the religious faith of parents is a supportive factor in a child's upbringing.

Tímea Ceglédi draws attention to the most frequent causes of crises students might face during their life in her research paper titled *How the Diving Board Works – Supporting Factors of Disadvantaged Yet Successful, Resilient Fourth Grade Students*. The gathered data shows that students who come from a good background but have faced crises are affected more in their competitive successfulness than students who have worse backgrounds but have gone through the same crises. This means that a group of children from disadvantaged homes are less affected by crises. The researcher also examined what factors could support resilient children. The most important ones were the personality of the child, the parent's opinion about their own offspring, the stability of the family, and the good parent-school relationship.

The title of Ágnes Engler's study (*The Effect and Necessity of Family Policy Legislations Helping Parents and Teachers*) presents the topic of the author's research of 4th grade students' families and teachers. Parents emphasized the role of legislations that somewhat resolve economic issues of upbringing, improve the living standard, or focus on meaningful free-time activities for children. However, preferences differ regarding settlement types and the social status of the parents. The research also collected legislations that parents would be welcome to see in the future. Based on the results a number of ideas have been formed: widening parents' upbringing skills via workshops; courses that help with education and return to work for parents of toddlers; mother-and-baby clubs; community spaces for families with toddlers. Teachers highlighted parental courses about safe media usage, supplementary educational programs, and pedagogical counselling. Regarding school pedagogy, besides the funds required for upholding schools and purchasing educational devices, they also emphasized the involvement of school support staff professionals.

Hajnalka Fényes and Enikő Gál's research topic is given in their study's title: *The Presence of Gender Differences in Primary School*. Although in the students' lives the primary environment of socialization is the family, schools strongly influence their personal development as well. In Hungary, the National Curriculum aims to minimize gender differences, but gender stereotypes are still present in educational institutes. There is no difference between girls and boys regarding cognitive abilities, but at a younger age it is possible that either gender may be better in a specific field. Based on academic literature, girls are usually more disciplined and open-minded, while boys have difficulties with concentration. The assessment showed that gender stereotypes that come from teachers and parents and are aimed at educational success influence children's further studies. That explains the considerable number of male students in STEM courses, while arts and social studies courses are mostly attended by female students. This, however, is not related to the students' own abilities. From the gathered results it was found that teachers usually find boys more problematic, since they are harder to oversee, and cannot concentrate as well as girls do. The child's gender has a low influence on parents' pedagogical values, while, the parents believe that schools' pedagogical values are affected more by the gender of their child. Parents think that schools are more focused on the educational development of girls, thus they (the parents) are more optimistic about their children's further studies. The research also examined which parent spends more

time with the child and whose pedagogical values are more in line with the teacher's. Despite the appearance of the modern father role, it is still the mothers who represent the majority in both matters.

Anett Hrabéczy's study *The Dimensions of Supporting Families Upbringing Special Needs Children* reports on the examination of said families' relational embeddedness, conducted as part of the KINCS research. Results show that most parents with special needs children belong to lower social classes and raise multiple children. These families would often need help but do not receive it, and it is also common that the structure of the family thereby falls apart. There are many possible reasons behind their helplessness: absence of professionals, scheduling problems, difficult travel to developmental activities, etc. The academic success of special needs children would be helped by the presence of a stable family background and their parents' faith in them. Parents would like to get help in spending their children's free time meaningfully, furthermore, they highly demand that the state relieve their burdens.

Cintia Csók's research examined – as the title of her study shows - professionals supporting value-creating education. In recent years there has been a growing tendency of children struggling with social problems and also of the difficulty teachers have communicating with parents. The majority of society expects the educational system to resolve these issues, although it is outside teachers' jurisdiction. As a solution to this, beginning in September 2018 the presence of a kindergarten or school social worker is compulsory in educational institutes. The research sought answers for two main questions: 1. How much can parents and teachers rely on each other in tackling the issues? 2. What professionals can they contact in need of help? One of the main findings of the research was that although parents who live in villages and / or belong to a lower social class would be more entitled to help, although it is often parents from higher classes (living in cities, attended tertiary education) who receive it. This might mean that the area the support staff covers is not equally treated. Interviews conducted with social workers point out that parents are afraid to talk about their difficulties because they do not know what kind of help they could get. Especially in villages, among lower class families it is common that parents take social workers for guardianship authorities. This serves as an obstacle to the cooperation between the two parties. On the other hand, if parents recognize and accept the role of professionals, they are more likely to ask for help. The study also discusses in what areas teachers expect help from social workers and the possible ways these support staff members can help students, their families and their teachers.

### Conclusions

The authors, who all work in the field of educational sociology, highlighted the importance of a strong school-parent alliance through using their own research findings and examining the relationship from different perspectives. They also scrutinized how this alliance can help the educational success and development of children. The studies included in this special issue can serve as a groundwork for programs destined to create efficient communication between schools and parents. It is also a guideline for legislators as to how they can help the future generations. Finally, the articles on this issue can be interesting for anyone with a children-related profession: teachers, support staff members, teacher trainees and even parents can learn a lot of new information that may serve as a blueprint during their work. If every participant of the educational system learns of and accepts the need for more serious co-operation, their willingness to achieve this goal makes education profitable for children.

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