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**STUDY ON DIFFICULTIES IN BUILDING OF THE SCHOOL-  
FAMILY PARTNERSHIP**

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*Abstract*

The present study aims to address the school's difficulties in addressing school-family educational partnerships based on equality, trust, mutual respect, sincerity, assertive communication, listening to each other's perspective, acceptance, decision-making, focus on common interests, sharing information etc. Research in recent years has identified at least two major problems structure issues - limited time for communication, communication only in moments of crisis, limited collaboration with lack of skills and knowledge; psychological problems - low trust, blame and labeling, inappropriate strategies in conflict situations, misunderstanding of differences in perspective on students performances, cultural differences, low empathy, negative experiences of family-school relationships etc. Based on these considerations, the study presents teachers 'and parents' answers from a gymnasium school in Constanța, România, to a questionnaire on parental involvement in school. The affirmative responses of teachers show that they are open to the idea of including parents in the educational process and encouraging them to play an active role in school.

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**Keywords:** Educational partnership, school-family collaboration.



## 1. Introduction

The educational partnership involves open and collaborative relationships between family, schools and the community. The educational partnership is based on the creation of a valorizing educational environment, based on equality, trust, mutual respect, assertive communication, listening to the perspective of the other, acceptance, decision making, focus on common interests, sharing information, etc. "Partnership with the family must be understood as an attitude and not as an activity to be implemented" (Bonchiş, 2011, p. 96). PARTNERSHIP = common goals + common contributions + joint actions + assumption of responsibility.

The researches have demonstrated the positive relationship between the existence and effective functioning of educational partnerships and the success of students in the academic, social, behavioral and emotional sphere. The family, the school and the community influence children's growth and development at the same time. "The main reason for creating such partnerships is the desire to help students succeed at school and later in life. When parents, students, and other members of the community consider themselves as partners in education, a support community is set up around the pupils to start functioning "(Agabrian, 2006, p. 7).

The most common theories that support the need for educational partnerships are the following: *social networking paradigm* (Barnes, 1972); *social capital theory* (Coleman, 1987); *the theory of intersection of spheres of influence* (Epstein, 1990).

The social networks are means by which community members interrelate and create the feeling of community, attachment and belonging, security and social responsibility. Starting from this definition, the social networking paradigm shows that social networks are strengthening when community members gather and discuss important issues of their community. It is important that the relationships between them are based on trust, understanding and equality.

The social capital theory describes and analyzes the level of social trust and active relationships present in the social networks of a community. The concept is related to "the cultural capital" (Pierre Bourdieu), which designates the knowledge stocks that a person acquires through informal social networks (parents, friends, mass media, etc.).

The theory of intersection of spheres of influence emphasizes the importance of joint action by schools, families and communities to meet the needs of children. The theory highlights the effects of the family, school, community environment on student outcomes.

## 2. Problem Statement

As for the school's difficulties in addressing school-family educational partnerships, the researches in recent years identified at least two major problems (Christenson, 2002): structure problems - limited time for communication, dialogue; communication only in moments of crisis; limited contact for building trust in the family-school relationship; limited collaboration due to lack of skills and knowledge etc.; psychological problems - low trust, blame and labelling; inappropriate strategies in conflict situations; misunderstanding of differences in perspective on students performance; cultural differences; low empathy; negative experiences of family-school relationships etc.

In their turn, the parents describe the following barriers in their cooperation with school (Agabrian, 2006, pp. 140-141): lack of time, the feeling that they have nothing to contribute to, the misunderstanding of the system, the lack of care for children, cultural differences, the means of transport, the difficulties / conflicts of programming the activities, the feeling that they are not welcome etc.

### 3. Research Questions

Based on these considerations, this study aims to address the school's difficulties in building school-family educational partnerships. Also, to present some suggestions school-family collaboration. The study presents the answers of teachers and parents from a gymnasium school in Constanta, Romania, to a *Questionnaire on the involvement of parents in school* (adaptation after Agabrian, 2006, pp. 119-120). In this study participated volunteers 20 teachers and 30 parents.

### 4. Purpose of the Study

The aim of the study is to provide teachers and parents with solutions for building a real educational partnership. In this sense, we relied on a series of recommendations from the literature.

In order to develop a real partnership, based on communication, mutual respect, responsibility and equity, the following strategies are recommended for teachers (McCubbins-Lynn, 2004):

- establishing positive relationships with all families;
- communication through a variety of means with the family - the effective communication is a face-to-face communication; other ways are remote (tel, e-mail, social networks, etc.);
- communicating school performance to parents;
- identifying the individual needs of parents;
- listening to parents' concerns.

An important role is played by the teacher in creating psychological support for the family. Mircea Agabrian (2006) recommended several action lines:

- highlighting the strengths of the family;
- assign the role of family expert; all families are important for the school success of their children;
- supporting of family needs;
- encourage the family to participate in decision-making;
- focusing on family expectations etc.

### 5. Research Methods

The *Questionnaire on the involvement of parents in school* has the following structure:

*For the purpose of conducting this survey, I answer as:*

- Parent
- Teacher

*Section 1: Please evaluate the following statements by ticking "yes" or "no".*

1. *There should be more school activities (cultural programs, sports events and celebrations, etc.) involving students, parents and teachers.*

- Yes
- No
- 2. *The parents should be encouraged to work as volunteers in school.*
  - Yes
  - No
- 3. *The parents need to supervise children when they are doing themes.*
  - Yes
  - No
- 4. *The parents should visit the weekly school.*
  - Yes
  - No
- 5. *There should be education classes so parents can learn how to help their children succeed at school.*
  - Yes
  - No
- 6. *The parents should attend school management meetings.*
  - Yes
  - No

Section 2: Please answer the following question:

*The program of the Representative Council of Parents in our school should be:*

- extensive
- maintained the same
- reduced

## 6. Findings

The teachers 'and parents' answers to the *Questionnaire on the involvement of parents in school* show the difficulties in building school-family educational partnerships. These are the following:

*Section 1: Please evaluate the following statements by ticking "yes" or "no". (Table 01)*

*1. There should be more school activities (cultural programs, sports events and celebrations, etc.) involving students, parents and teachers.*

**Table 01.** The answers to question 1

Respondents	Yes		No	
Parents	30	100%	-	-
Teachers	20	100%	-	-

From the stated answers, we deduce that the teachers and the parents show the need to carry out more activities to promote the relationship between school and family. We deduce that school initiates too few educational partnerships with the family.

2. *The parents should be encouraged to work as volunteers in school.* (Table 02)

**Table 02.** The answers to question 2

Respondents	Yes		No	
Parents	20	66,66%	10	33,33%
Teachers	15	75%	5	25%

From the stated answers, we deduce that the teachers and the parents show the need for volunteering for parents. We deduce that there are too few volunteer activities for parents in school.

*3.The parents need to supervise children when they are doing themes.* (Table 03)

**Table 03.** The answers to question 3

Respondents	Yes		No	
Parents	25	83,33%	5	16,66%
Teachers	20	100%	-	-

From the stated answers, we deduce that the teachers and the parents show that the parents need to supervise children when they are doing themes.

*4.The parents should visit the weekly school.* ( Table 04)

**Table 04.** The answers to question 4

Respondents	Yes		No	
Parents	5	16,66%	25	83,33%
Teachers	12	60%	8	40%

From the stated answers, we deduce that teachers, in a high percentage, show that the parents must to visit the school weekly. On the contrary, the parents feel they do not have to visit the school weekly. This indicates a very important difficulty in implementing a real education partnership: lack of time devoted to dialogue with the school.

*5.There should be education classes so parents can learn how to help their children succeed at school.* (Table 05)

**Table 05.** The answers to question 5

Respondents	Yes		No	
Parents	23	76,66%	7	23,33%
Teachers	11	55%	9	45%

From the stated answers, we deduce that more than half of the teachers believe that there should be more parental counseling hours. Many of them do not know how to help their children in learning. Also, the parents, in a large proportion, consider that the educational counseling hours are necessary.

*6.The parents should attend school management meetings.* (Table 06)

**Table 06.** The answers to question 6

Respondents	Yes		No	
	Parents	27	90%	3
Teachers	7	35%	13	65%

From the stated answers, we deduce that a large percentage of teachers believe that the parents should not attend school management meetings. This shows that there are still psychological barriers (lack of trust in parental decision-making capacity) in building a real educational partnership. On the contrary, the parents, in a large proportion, consider that the parents should attend school management meetings.

*Section 2: Please answer the following question:*

*The Program of the Representative Council of Parents in our school should be. (Table 07)*

**Table 07.** The answers to question section 2

Respondents	extensive		maintained the same		reduced	
	Parents	10	33,33%	15	50%	5
Teachers	2	10%	15	75%	3	15%

From our stated answers, we deduce that a large percentage of teachers and parents believe that the *Program of the Representative Council of Parents* in the school should be maintained the same.

Based on these responses, as well as some suggestions of collaborating teachers-parents, school-family from the literature, we formulated some directions of action. An effective educational partnership strategy requires a long-term written partnership plan. The plan must: to defines desired goals and results; to describes the means by which the proposed objectives will be achieved; to emphasizes the role each partner has in achieving their goals; to anticipates possible obstacles and solutions; to identifies strategies to assess of the achievement of objectives.

The first step in drafting the partnership plan is to achieve a detailed study of the issues that will influence the possible success / failure of the partnership (SWOT analysis). Also, it is investigated the needs, options, attitudes and opinions of parents, teachers and administrative staff about parent / community involvement in school. It is analyzed the answers obtained from applying questionnaires to parents and teachers about the perception of partnership and what activities they want to take place in school. It is elaborated the agenda of activities. It is specified the objectives and desired outcomes, the action and evaluation strategies. The partnership activities are announced for to be known by all families (letter of invitation addressed to parents - briefly presents data on the program of activities and objectives).

## 7. Conclusion

"The school-family-community partnerships are effective to the extent that they go beyond the objectives of a program and turn into a lifestyle of the school community made up of students, teachers, parents and members of the local community" (Agabrian, 2006, p. 48).

The parents' affirmative answers to the questions in section 1 show that they appreciate more the involvement of parents in school and that they have an important role in the school environment. The affirmative responses of teachers show that they are open to the idea of including parents in the educational process and encouraging them to play an active role in school. We recommend the following constructive attitudes of teachers / parents: consultation in decision making on the children's educational program, listening to each other's opinions, focusing on common interests, sharing information, joint intervention strategies, recognizing and respecting the skills and knowledge of each other, creating programs to help families guide their children's learning process from kindergarten to high school, developing programs that involve parents in working with their children to develop specific skills, developing relationships of trust and mutual respect between families and community members etc.

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