THE SCHOOL - FAMILY PARTNERSHIP AS EDUCATIONAL PROJECT

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Abstract: *Two premises have regulatory role in ordering the ideas of this paper. On the one hand, the awareness of the importance of the training status: the school must be prepared for the student's family and the family must be prepared for school. On the other hand, the awareness of the meaning and the usefulness in particular pedagogical and psycho-social (not the bureaucratic and administrative ones) that a real school - family partnership. Data obtained by questionnaire proves that teachers have a set of benchmarks, that can be improved, which refers the school – family partnership.*

Key words: *school-family partnership, educational project, project management.*

1. Introduction

To build a child-friendly environment and to be qualitative and interesting, the school needs the consciously support and partnership of the parents. Throughout the preschool period it is necessary to have an agreement under which the parents collaborate with the educational institution attended by their children. Educational institutions understand the role of parental involvement and the cooperation with them is one of the major objectives of the school.

The partnership has a formative (and educational) meaning for the student involved and for its' parents (family) thereof and teachers participating (since this collaboration between school and home is not only about exchanging information on everything related to the orientation child's parents but also handling all the problems posed by this action) (Petre, 2010).

The current trends of early education require partnerships that are constructive and effective between school, family and other educational actors, with an eye to socialize and train the child to school and social life. Educational partnership is one of the key - requirements of contemporary pedagogy, is "a concept and an attitude" (Vrânceanu, Terzi-Barbăroşie, Turchină & Cojocaru, 2010, p. 186). The partnership roles are diverse helping teachers with their work, improving the educational skills of the students, improving curricula and school climate, improving educational skills of parents, developing leadership skills of parents, connecting families with community members and school, fostering community service for the benefit of the school, "providing services and support to families, creating a safer environment in schools" (Agabrian, 2006, p. 7).

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The project, no matter its type (scholar , educational, for institutional development, for financing, for intervention, for marketing, technical, etc.), can be regarded as "a complex system, consisting in a set of interdependent elements in constant interaction, progressing to a final objective/purpose, determined in conformity with the objectives established in the status of an organization, with its development strategy, but also with the context in which the project takes place, with community needs and issues" (Gherguţ & Ceobanu, 2009, p. 66).

Educational partnership aims to become a central concept for curricular type approach, flexible and open to educational problems, identifying the need for knowledge, respecting and valuing diversity. In a world more and more isolated, less willing to socialize, cooperation between educational factors - school, family - becomes necessary and as a moral obligation of them to encourage socialization of children, to teach them through examples and models, the true values of human spirituality.

For establishing a partnership, there are required some necessary forms. So, the four conditions to embodiment of this process of this process: communication, coordination, cooperation and finally, partnership. These distinctions are important for the decision on the type of relationship that can count, for a "specific partner in the community" (Boca, Nicolae & Secrieru, 2008, p. 14).

2. Objectives

The purpose is shaping: the argued confirmation of the fact that a school – family partnership approach as educational project promise to optimize the auto- and inter-regulator scenarios of the school and family for a useful interaction of the pupil. The objectives derived from this purpose are:

a) Knowing the representations that teachers involved in the investigation have made about how the families relate with school.

b) Outlining a set of arguments for a design view in a managerial perspective about the school-family partnership as an educational project.

3. Material and Methods

It has been used a questionnaire for teachers for collecting data as base for certain statements (N=30). Thru it, we tried to capture information concerning, among other, about: strategic and technical instrumentation (self-evaluated) for designing the partnership with the family, the invested role of such an interactional experience, the main reasons that generates various personal representations about the school – family partnership. So, this provides a blended content analysis, both qualitative and quantitative. Also, the nature of the theoretical approach has been supported by using qualitative methods for the collection of data: bibliographic study supported by an interpretative approach that generates new conceptual alternatives (close approach to the hermeneutics).

The questionnaire that was used aims to outline an interiorized image that teachers questioned have formed, based on professional experience, about the attitude of the parents relative to the school. Compositionally, this dimension has three parts. First one, the most elaborate, aims to identify the level of involvement of parents in relation to school, as he is evaluated by teachers questioned, based on their professional experience. The second seeks to capture, based also on the professional experience, quantitative distribution of the types of attitudes that parents of the students have in their relationship with the school. Last size

seeks to identify situations in which parents of students expressed immediate reactions to requests from school / teachers.

It has been used a focus group. Its purpose was twofold: on the one hand, to identify the opinion of teachers about the essence of the partnership school - family as educational partnership (the goal was to identify the level of theoretical instrumentation of the teachers involved in study), on the other hand, to identify the self-evaluated level of the competence to design school – family partnership from a project management perspective.

4. Results

The Focus group generated the following conclusions:

- most of the teachers (80%) do not know which are the essential elements of a partnership project
- more than half of teachers (63.33%) have difficulties to make a SOFT analysis
- many teachers cannot offer more than one argue for the educational nature of a partnership school – family
- the main difficulties that teachers have in designing a family partnership are (outside SOFT analysis): the establishment SMART set objectives, to anticipate some efficient and effective activities derived from each objective, to identify the assessment techniques and indicators,
- the majority of them, teachers recognize that they would not propose partnerships with the family especially because 1. the negative attitude of parents and 2. the uselessness of these projects (this reason is generated by the negative attitude of students),
- for most of the teachers (76.66%) the partnership with family means an administrative type obligation, not an opportunity to generate optimizations at the level of the students,
- many teachers consider that they need for technical information regarding how to design a partnership.

The questionnaire was organized around the six ways of the participation of the families to the partnership relationship proposed by Epstein: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, collaborating with the Community. The teachers had to express the measure of practice by parents each partenerial behavior. The results shall communicate the following:

- the variants of the answer corresponding to a negative attitude of parents have obtained the bigger values, no matter what behaviour was assessed: parenting - 36.67%, communicating - 43.34%, volunteering - 53.33%, learning at home - 80%, decision-making - 63.33%, collaborating with the community - 36.67%,
- the bigger positive value was registered by the behaviour of communicating (40%), then, in descending order collaborating with the community (36.67%), the decision-making (36.67%), parenting (33.34%), learning at home (30%), volunteering (26.67%).

It is to be noticed the fact that learning at home is the behaviour which has not got an answer "strongly agree" (fig. 1).
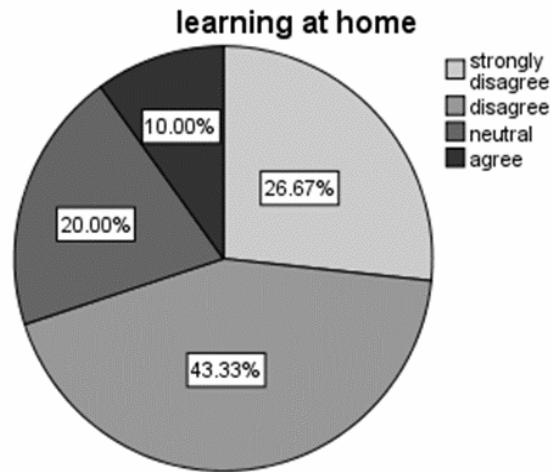
learning at home

Fig. 1. *The answer at "Learning at home" as parent behaviour*

In the "mirror", the decision-making has not obtained an answer strongly disagree (fig. 2).
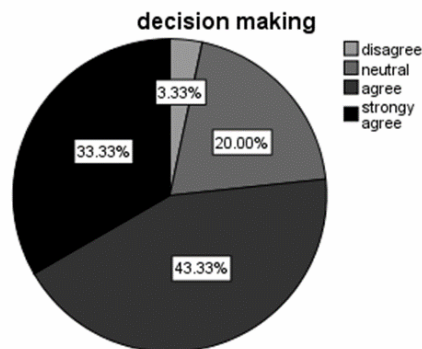
decision making

Fig. 2. *The answer at "Decision making" as parent behaviour. Percent*

Most "neutral" answers are associated with "parenting" behaviour (30%) (fig. 3).
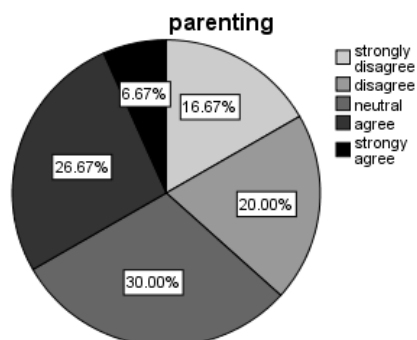
parenting

Fig. 3. *The answer at "Parenting" as parent behaviour*

The more homogeneous distribution of variants of reply has been obtained by collaborating with the community (fig. 4).
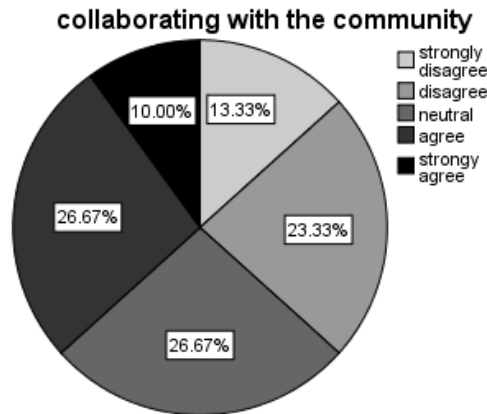

Fig. 4. *The answer at "Collaborating with the community" as parent behaviour*

Interesting are the statistical analysis of results (of correlation level) between years of teaching variable and the each type of parental partnership behaviour. Such, two behaviours correlate with the aforementioned variable: communicating and parenting. Correlation coefficient in the case of communicating is -0.60, significant at the 0.01% level, and in the case of parenting r= -0.38, significant at the 0.05% level. Both values are negative, which shall communicate to the fact that the teacher with poor experience choice the answers from the positive terminal (to the agreement), while the teachers with more years as teacher choose predominantly answer from the negative area (a disagreement).

Data obtained by questionnaire proves that teachers have a set of benchmarks, that can be improved, which refers the school – family partnership. Most answers prove strategic and technical inability to design such a partnership, the tendency to avoid involvement in such interactions.

5. Conclusions and Discussion

When parents, students and other community members consider each other partners in education, is created a "supporting community around the students which starts operating" (Agabrian, 2006, p. 7).

An efficient school makes a partnership with the school, by valuing and respecting its identity with family, recognizing its importance and attracting them in the educational process, with all the educational resources of society, which they identify, involve and use actively. Recognizing the importance of informal and incidental issues besides the formal ones, in forming the personality of the child, leads to the development of the idea of permanent communication, collaboration and cooperation in his favour. Henripin and Ross (1976) identify two main dimensions of mutual involvement of school and family to the good of the child (Vrasmas, 2008):

1) the size of the parent-child relationship, aiming the frequency control, the learning outcomes, the homework and, more generally, the performance of their tasks, and also the material and spiritual support of educational activities of the child;

2) the family-school relationship size, which lies in choosing the department and the school unit, as well as direct touch/contacts of the parents with the representatives of the schools, teachers and administrators. These contacts can be made as meetings collective within a formal framework of negotiations between the school administration and parents' associations, as well as informal meetings of parents regarding the content and methods of school, schedules classes, the demands of teachers or open classes for parents, as practical workshops, etc. In this informal setting, parents can collaborate with the school on the occasion of excursions, visits, celebrations, shared meals, etc.

The school-family partnership is not as ephemeral project, but means a lasting interaction, by default setting up a relationship which associates their whole dynamic of communication, the sympathetic, the inter-knowledge and functionality. An interesting perspective on the partnership is specified by Voiculescu (2004). According to the author, as attitude, the partnership includes:
  - acceptance of differences and tolerance of different options;
  - equalization of opportunities for participation in a shared educational activity;
  - interactions accepted by all partners;
  - effective communication between participants;
  - collaboration and cooperation.
No matter the type of project, its management will respect the following principles (Scarlat, & Galoiu, 2002):
  ▪ the uniqueness of the objective: a project has a single overall target (main). This is why the project exists. Reaching this objective means solving the problem that has been identified at the beginning of the project lifecycle;
  ▪ the existence of a project manager (coordinator / project director) which, depending on their managerial capabilities, talent and style of work, can delegate to team members the decision making;
  ▪ the structural decompose of the project: depending on the complexity of the project, it is divided into sub-structural (sub tasks, group activities, activities)
  ▪ top-down approach, starting with the objective to resources;
  ▪ assessment and reassessment of the project in all its phases;
  ▪ continuous monitoring: projects should be permanently monitored internally by the team manager or project managers, or monitored externally by the evaluator, from outside the project.
Moreover, it is recognized by specialists that initiation, design, proposal, implementation, progress and completion of the project follows a series of precise steps that, at the rigor, may be designed as a general paradigm.

In the first category are specified: the statement of the problem and establishing the project scope, objectives, activities, evaluation and budget. Among the extra components are included: "information on the educational establishment (identification data, its mission), the justification issue, sustainability (possibly late financing), introduction, title page, summary, annexes" (Gherguţ, & Ceobanu, 2009, pp.181-182).

The project can be viewed as a complex system consisting of an assembly of interdependent elements in constant interaction, progressing to an end, established in accordance with the objectives contained in the status of an organization, with its development strategy, but also with context, where the project takes place, with community needs and issues.

Partnerships can be thought of as an example of what Nóvoa (as cited in Franklin, Bloch & Popkewitz, 2003) calls "planetspeak," his term for an almost magical concept that seems to offer the solutions to all problems while at the same time rooting out all evil. Planetspeak, according to Nóvoa, brings with it a new expert who creates and circulates international discourses that seem to exist without structural roots or social locations. He views such discourses as a "worldwide bible" whose vocabulary serve as "banalities universally accepted as truths that have no known origin and do not need to be questioned. Invoking the notion of a partnership seems, then, to suggest that there exists a consensus among the various parties charged with the solution of any problem " (Nóvoa, as cited in Franklin, Bloch & Popkewitz, 2003, pp. 3-4).

The partnership means different realities:
- liaison / community / communality;
- common needs, common goal(s);
- a dimension of involvement in education / an antidote to the resignation of educational responsibilities;
- a proof of the interest, but also of care, even of worry;
- a regulatory mechanism, the optimizer of formative efforts undertaken by the school;
- sharing governance of education;
- a special collaborative effort to solve problems;
- an attenuation of ideological differences, even methodological;
- a negotiation of the strategies;
- an agglutination of experiences, resources and visions;
- an expression of mutual respect;
- a "venture";
- a bridge between institutions;
- mutual services;
- reversibility;
- a natural dynamic: Invitation / Invitational vs. volunteering;

Partnership provides satisfaction for parents, for family members and offer them valorisation opportunities, engages them in activities that "touch" the intimacy of the children's daily experiences (Petre, 2010).

Practically, the study confirmed the need for assuming the partner status and possessor of expertise in the field of partnership with the family by the school. It also confirmed the need, on the one hand, of understanding partnership remembered as a valuable educational experience and on the other hand, its management as an educational project. More often, in pedagogy is used the formula "educational services". These are, from a certain perspective, "a set of specialized activities made by methods and techniques developed and deployed within public institutions or organizations belonging to a community, which seeks to resolve various types of problems that concern education and training of different categories of beneficiaries in the respective community" (Gherguț & Ceobanu, 2009, p. 11).

The claim of scientifically any educational approach associated with such services specific criteria and norms of project management, as its evolutionary process, conducted scientifically, which organizes and uses appropriate resources to achieve these objectives, aimed generic the reduction of deficiencies to zero by increasing the efficiency of the organization and implementation of project management teams.

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