



***The Pros and Cons of Preschool and Early School Teachers' Collaboration With Parents in the Light of Their Experiences***  
***Blaski i cie(r)nie współpracy z rodzicami nauczycielek edukacji przedszkolnej i wczesnoszkolnej w świetle ich doświadczeń***

**ABSTRACT**


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**RESEARCH OBJECTIVE:** The objective of the research was to demonstrate the nature of collaboration of preschool and early school teachers with parents, based on the teachers' experiences.

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**THE RESEARCH PROBLEM AND METHODS:** The research sought answers to questions concerning the positive and negative aspects of working with parents of teachers of the youngest children and the significance of these experiences for the functioning of the respondents in their profession. The diagnostic survey was used as the research method, and the research tool consisted of a proprietary survey questionnaire.

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**THE PROCESS OF ARGUMENTATION:** Today the parents are increasingly willing to influence the work of the teachers, which undermines the teachers' autonomy, and leads to numerous conflicts. Teachers of children entering education are in a peculiar situation, due to the specific nature of their collaboration with parents. Determining the causes of difficulties in mutual relations may constitute the basis for implementing corrective actions in this area.

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**RESEARCH RESULTS:** The surveyed teachers appreciate the involvement of parents, but they also require acceptance and appreciation from their side. When faced with comments or claims, they experience stress, which they try to alleviate through maladaptive coping styles. This, in turn, makes them indifferent and discouraged, and even triggers thoughts of leaving their careers.

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**CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND APPLICABLE VALUE OF RESEARCH:** In order to improve the quality of collaboration with parents, teachers need to work on their assertiveness, which will improve their self-esteem and autonomy and allow them to build constructive interpersonal relationships. Universities preparing candidates for this profession and vocational training centers should support teachers in developing the personality dispositions that are required in their work.

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→ **KEYWORDS:** **COLLABORATION WITH PARENTS, PARENTS AT SCHOOL, PARENTS AT PRESCHOOL, PRESCHOOL TEACHERS, EARLY SCHOOL EDUCATION TEACHERS**

Suggested citation: Zubrzycka-Maciąg, T. (2024). The Pros and Cons of Preschool and Early School Teachers' Collaboration With Parents in the Light of Their Experiences. *Horizons of Educations*, 23(66), 61–71. <https://doi.org/10.35765/hw.2024.2366.07>

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## STRESZCZENIE

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**CEL NAUKOWY:** Celem badań było ukazanie specyfiki współpracy z rodzicami nauczycielek edukacji przedszkolnej i wczesnoszkolnej na podstawie ich doświadczeń.

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**PROBLEM I METODY BADAWCZE:** W toku badań poszukiwano odpowiedzi na pytania o pozytywne i negatywne aspekty współpracy z rodzicami nauczycielek najmłodszych dzieci oraz o znaczenie tych doświadczeń dla funkcjonowania badanych w zawodzie. Metodą wykorzystaną w badaniach był sondaż diagnostyczny, zaś narzędziem ankieta własnej konstrukcji.

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**PROCES WYWODU:** Obecnie rodzice chcą mieć coraz większy wpływ na sposób pracy nauczycieli, co podważa ich autonomię i prowadzi do wielu konfliktów. W szczególnej sytuacji są nauczyciele dzieci rozpoczynających edukację ze względu na specyficzny charakter ich współpracy z rodzicami. Ustalenie przyczyn trudności we wzajemnych relacjach może być podstawą do podejmowania działań naprawczych w tym obszarze.

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**WYNIKI ANALIZY NAUKOWEJ:** Badane nauczycielki potrzebują akceptacji i docenienia ze strony rodziców. Kiedy spotykają się z uwagami lub roszczeniami z ich strony, doświadczają stresu, który starają się zniwelować poprzez nieadaptacyjne strategie radzenia sobie. W efekcie pojawia się u nich obojętność i zniechęcenie, a nawet myśli o zmianie pracy.

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**WNIOSKI, REKOMENDACJE I APLIKACYJNE ZNACZENIE WPŁYWU BADAŃ:** Dla poprawy jakości współpracy z rodzicami nauczycielki potrzebują rozwijać własną asertywność, która wzmocni ich poczucie własnej wartości i autonomię oraz pozwoli budować konstruktywne relacje międzyludzkie. Wspieraniem nauczycieli w rozwijaniu dyspozycji osobowościowych niezbędnych w ich pracy powinny zająć się uczelnie wyższe przygotowujące kandydatów do tego zawodu oraz centra doskonalenia zawodowego.

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→ **SŁOWA KLUCZOWE:** **WSPÓŁPRACA Z RODZICAMI, RODZICE W SZKOLE, RODZICE W PRZEDSZKOLU, NAUCZYCIELE EDUKACJI PRZEDSZKOLNEJ, NAUCZYCIELE EDUKACJI WCZESNOSZKOLNEJ**

## Introduction

Efficient collaboration between teachers and parents helps them properly care, socialize, nurture and educate the young generation, and thus determines the optimal development of children and adolescents.

Wincenty Okoń defines collaboration as

partnership between individuals or groups of people performing their partial task in order to achieve a common goal; collaboration is based on mutual trust and loyalty and is subordination to a goal duly realized by all individuals or groups (Okoń, 2007, p. 461).

The collaboration of teachers and parents should be grounded in concern for the welfare of the child, which requires mutual support and consistent efforts for the benefit of the child. This means “a conscious advocacy by one and the other for such a form of interaction in which teachers and parents strive to be on the same side: on the side of the child” (Charczuk, 2015, p. 10). Ensuring that the child has the right conditions for all-round development, and supporting his or her subjectivity and self-esteem requires consistent action by both parents and teachers.

Good, meaningful collaboration between teachers and parents allows a free exchange of opinions on various aspects of school and family life. As a result, teachers can learn more about children's interests, aptitudes and limitations, their family situation, parents' educational competence and their expectations of the school. Parents, on the other hand, can learn how their child functions in a peer group and how he or she copes with the demands of the role of a preschooler or pupil. Teachers do a great service to parents by detecting early abnormalities in their child's behavior or schooling and making effective attempts to overcome the deficiencies. If necessary, teachers can also provide parents with pedagogical advice or encourage them to contact an educator, psychologist or doctor. Proper collaboration thus increases the chances of learning about and meeting the children's developmental needs (Łobocki, 2004; Zubrzycka-Maciąg & Wosik-Kawala, 2012). Mutual respect, kindness and understanding during meetings between teachers and parents brings the added benefit of satisfaction and contentment for both partners.

Although it is obvious that a school/preschool and the family as the primary educational environments need to work together, mutual relations are often far from desirable.

The role of parents in their children's education has changed over the years, and today we can distinguish two main areas of their influence: the first, where they are involved in, i.e.: solving the educational problems that emerge in the school, organizing events and trips, deciding on fees, selecting extracurricular activities, and important financial decisions of the school; and the second, which used to be reserved for professionals, i.e. staffing of teachers, evaluation of their work, including their educational methods and grading approaches, selection of textbooks and the moral values they teach. Research shows (Putkiewicz et al., 1999) that while teachers accept greater parental influence on the first area of school activity, they seek to protect the second. This gives rise to many conflicts; the roots of the disputes lie in values and attitudes that are hard to change, as well as views and expectations about educational and didactic issues mainly. Most conflicts are fueled by miscommunication and powerful emotions, which are stoked by stereotypes in the perception of others, overinterpretation of others' motives and imputing ill intentions to the other party (Szymański, 2009; Ziółkowska-Maciaszek, 2010).

Preschool and early childhood education teachers are in an especially difficult situation, as by virtue of the age of their pupils they are obliged to keep in touch almost constantly with all parents. For many of the parents, on the other hand, putting their child in the care of a teacher is difficult and fraught with many distressing emotions. Parents, on the one hand, want their child to succeed, while on the other hand, they have to rely on the teacher, trusting that he or she will provide the best possible care and conditions

for the optimum development of their child (Nowosad, 2014). Depending on the parents' attitude toward the institution and the teacher's skills in building a reciprocal relationship, the collaboration of school or kindergarten and home can offer invaluable support to both parties, although, if there is no agreement, it can also be a source of anguish and significant stress.

## Research Methodology

The purpose of the study whose findings are reported here was to show the bright sides and dark sides of collaboration with parents of female preschool education teachers based on the teachers' experiences. Thus, when identifying the details of this partnership, the focus was on pointing out the positive and negative aspects of this collaboration and their significance for the psychosocial functioning of the surveyed teachers in their profession. Additionally, in the course of the research, we attempted to find out the needs of the respondents for improving the collaboration between home and school/preschool, in order to make conclusions for pedagogical practice.

The method used in the study was a diagnostic survey, while the tool was a questionnaire of our own design, consisting of a dozen open-ended and closed-ended questions, in which respondents could choose one or more answers.

The research was carried out in 2023. It encompassed 50 female teachers from early childhood education and preschool education institutions, employed in elementary schools (64%) and kindergartens (36%), located in rural areas (38%), small towns (26%) and large cities (16%) of the Lublin Province. Each of the teachers was employed at a different institution, and all of the women were postgraduate students at the time of the survey.

The age of the women surveyed ranged from 24 to 52, with most of them being between 30 and 35 years old or between 41 and 50 years old (26% each). There was 20% each of respondents aged 24 to 29 and 36 to 40, and the remaining women (8%) were over 50. Most of the teachers (44%) had worked in their profession for 6 to 15 years. Thirty-six percent had up to 5 years of seniority, 14% had worked as teachers for 16 to 25 years, and 6% had worked in the profession for more than 25 years. The largest number of respondents held the professional rank of contract teacher (36%), appointed and novice teacher (24% each), and 16% were certified teachers.

## Survey Results

The majority of the surveyed teachers (78%) positively assessed their overall satisfaction with their collaboration with the parents of their students/pre-schoolers, but one in five was not satisfied with this area of work.

Also according to the majority of teachers (74%), parents are involved in the life of the class/preschool group, with their participation being mainly visible in organizing

excursions and special events, during which they look after the children, prepare decorations and costumes or raise money. Parents are also helpful when equipment in the classrooms or toys need to be repaired. The experience of the other women surveyed (26%) led them to negatively evaluate the involvement of parents in activities for their children's group.

All female teachers surveyed regarded the welfare of the child as the main goal of working with parents, the main purpose of which is to obtain information from the parent about the child's problems and limitations, to search together for the sources of the child's difficulties, to learn about the parent's expectations from the teacher, to build mutual understanding and trust and to establish a common line of educational interactions with children, as well as to extend professional assistance to parents.

For the majority of respondents (92%), the most preferred form of communication with parents is face-to-face conversations, as these provide the best opportunity to learn about each pupil, his or her problems and family situation, as well as to provide parents with information about the child's functioning at school.

Apart from individual meetings, the favorite form of communication with parents for almost a quarter of the respondents (24%) are general meetings, in which all the parents can be given important information about the group at the same time. Eighteen percent of the teachers consider occasional meetings useful in bringing the group together and showing the parents the children's art. According to 12% of the teachers surveyed, an electronic diary is a good tool for communicating with parents, and 6% like using Messenger, because it instantly confirms that the parent has read the message and also gives them a chance to think about their response, which is not possible in face-to-face interaction.

Evaluating their dealings with parents in terms of mutual understanding, only 6% of respondents felt that they had a very good relationship with all parents, based on mutual respect and understanding. Nearly half of the respondents (48%) said that they manage to maintain good relations with most of their parents, while 46% of the women revealed that they find it difficult to communicate with as many as half of their parents.

The surveyed teachers listed the following as behaviors/attitudes of parents that positively influence mutual collaboration: regularly contacting the teacher, honesty, being able to admit a mistake and willing to change one's behavior, being willing to solve problems together, being open to accepting help, following established rules, communication skills, positive attitude towards school and teacher, kindness, empathy and forbearance.

When asked to share good, uplifting experiences in the area of cooperation with parents, the vast majority of female teachers surveyed (78%) mentioned situations in which they felt appreciated by parents: "When a parent comes to me with a smile and thanks me for my contribution" (age 30, elementary school, large city); "When a parent notices the child's progress and sees that it is my contribution" (age 41, elementary school, rural area); "When the parents express their gratitude" (age 36, kindergarten, small city); "When they speak well of me to other parents" (age 27, elementary school, small city); "When the parent is satisfied, listens to me and respects my recommendations" (age 38,

elementary school, large city). The respondents said that they experienced the following emotions in such situations: joy, satisfaction, elation, fulfillment, satisfaction, pride, happiness, and excitement. These positive experiences, the respondents said, contribute to their self-esteem and motivation to keep working.

Some female teachers (12%) viewed as good moments of collaboration with parents those situations in which they were able to evaluate themselves positively: "When a conversation with a parent about difficult issues is calm then I have the satisfaction that I have created the right conditions for this conversation" (29 years old, elementary school, small town); "When parents come to me with a problem and I listen to them then I feel needed and am satisfied that I have helped them" (42 years old, elementary school, rural area); "When a parent shares difficulties with me and expects me to help, then I feel important" (44 years old, primary school, rural area); "When I tell parents about their child's progress then I have a sense of a job well done and feel my efficacy" (33 years old, primary school, small city).

For 8% of the respondents, positive experiences in working with parents are associated with the absence of difficult emotions: "When a parent talks to me respectfully, doesn't raise his or her voice and doesn't accuse me of anything, then I feel safe" (39 years old, primary school, rural area); "When a parent jokes, chats, is happy to establish a rapport with me, it feels nice" (31 years old, primary school, large city). For one teacher, the positive experience in dealing with parents is tantamount to the sense of relief after finishing a conversation with the parent (25 years old, kindergarten, large city).

It is obvious that in working with parents, who often have a different idea of their child's educational goals than the teacher, conflicts are inevitable. However, it should be a matter of concern that for many teachers, it is interactions with parents that are one of the key sources of professional stress (see Zubrzycka-Maciąg, 2013). Thus, in view of the above, the surveyed teachers were asked to estimate the percentage to which cooperation with parents is a stressor in their work.

The responses show that for as many as 26% of the respondents, the need to contact parents is the main source of stress at work, accounting for 70% to 90% of overall occupational stress. For another 28% of respondents, collaboration with parents generates between 40% and 60% of overall stress. For the remaining women (46%), relations with parents are the cause of 10% to 30% of stress.

For the largest group of teachers surveyed (70%), interactions with demanding parents, who have unreasonably high expectations of the teacher and require the teacher to meet those expectations, are the most stressful. For a slightly smaller group of the surveyed women (68%), negative emotions are caused by dealing with parents who neglect their children, disregard their issues and needs, and avoid working with the teacher. Another difficult group of parents (for 66% of the respondents) are those who also complain about everything and blame the teacher and the school for all the child's difficulties. Half of the women surveyed (50%) complain about parents who are aggressive, disrespectful or attack the teacher. Almost as many (48%) have upsetting experiences with so-called "professional" parents, who have their own ideas about teaching

and parenting issues and constantly lecture teachers. Fourteen percent of the studied women find it stressful to deal with parents who are helpless, and rely on the teacher in all matters concerning the child, his or her education and development.

Some of the most challenging and frequent behaviors of parents which significantly hinder collaboration, according to the surveyed teachers, include: denying the child's difficulties and ignoring the child's problems; being unaware of the child's real needs; making parenting mistakes and stubbornly sticking to one's beliefs; having a negative attitude toward the school and the teacher; being passive and reluctant to collaborate in any way; criticizing, attacking and slandering the teacher to others; having unreasonable expectations and putting pressure on the teacher.

Emotions that the teachers experience due to difficulties arising in their relationships with parents are irritation (54%), anger (52%), helplessness (50%), discouragement (48%), disappointment (40%), feeling misunderstood (40%), anxiety (30%), disbelief (26%), and sadness (24%).

These emotions are accompanied by distressing thoughts. The teachers surveyed indicated how they feel about conflict with a parent: "I think I'm incompetent" (29 years old, kindergarten, large city); "I'm afraid the parent will complain to the principal, and then I become indifferent and think about quitting" (37 years old, primary school, large city); "I wonder what will happen next, can the conflict be resolved at school, will the parent report it to the governing body?" (37 years old, primary school, small city); "I think it's not worth the effort, because everything will always be wrong anyway" (32 years old, primary school, small city); "I blame myself that I can't talk to people, that I chose the wrong profession" (35 years old, primary school, rural area); "I think about leaving my job, because the stress is incommensurate with the salary" (27 years old, kindergarten, large city).

To offset the stress they feel, 80% of the respondents use coping strategies focused on processing and venting their emotions: "I tell my husband, parents, friends about what happened" (52 years old, elementary school, rural area); "I vent my emotions in conversation with a friend, there are often tears" (39 years old, elementary school, rural area); "unfortunately, I take it out on my loved ones" (37 years old, kindergarten, rural area); "I isolate myself from everyone and in solitude I scream with anger and cry" (33 years old, elementary school, small city); "I let it get to me until a new problem comes up" (36 years old, kindergarten, large city); "I can't cope with difficult emotions and it takes a toll on my personal life" (30 years old, primary school, large city). In a stressful situation, almost one in six of the women surveyed (14%) tries to detach herself from the problem by using avoidant coping strategies: "I unwind when doing physical exercise" (47 years old, kindergarten, rural area); "I practice yoga" (27 years old, primary school, small city); "I do something enjoyable" (35 years old, kindergarten, rural area); "I go out with friends to have a nice time"; (32 years old, kindergarten, large city); "I go dancing" (34 years old, primary school, large city); "I listen to music" (42 years old, primary school, rural area); "I sleep off the problem" (33 years old, primary school, large city). A small group of respondents (6%) focus on the problem and try to solve it: "if I have

made a mistake, I figure out how to fix it or try to learn constructive lessons" (43 years old, primary school, small city).

The respondents were also asked what they would like to ask of parents in order to increase the effectiveness of mutual collaboration for the benefit of children.

The teachers' statements show that they have many requests and demands for parents. Regarding the educational function of the family, they ask parents to support them in raising their children and become more consciously involved in their children's development by: devoting more time to them, learning about their true needs, supporting them in building their self-esteem, helping them build the necessary skills and revise their knowledge, instilling rules of proper behavior, setting boundaries and limiting the use of electronic devices. It is important, the respondents stressed, for parents to be firm in doing so and to abide by the rules they agree on with the teacher. It is also vital that parents help teachers understand the reasons for their children's problem behavior, speak frankly about difficult issues and do not withhold facts that can be useful in working with the child. Aware of their own sincere intentions in supporting all their pupils in their development, the women surveyed expect parents to: respect teachers, believe in the teachers' sincere efforts, appreciate their competence and be open to their suggestions, refrain from judging and accusing teachers for something over which they have no control, not comment on the teacher's decisions and become open to dialogue.

When asked what they would like to improve/change in themselves to improve collaboration with parents, the largest group of the teachers (52%) confessed that they needed to work on their assertiveness in order to become more confident and decisive. Relatively few women felt they were not tolerant enough (14%) and not open-minded enough (8%), and some respondents assessed that they lacked patience, composure and empathy. About one-sixth of respondents (15%) said they had sufficient resources and competencies to build good relationships with parents and work with them constructively.

## Summary and Conclusions

The above picture of collaboration between teachers and parents as seen by female teachers of the youngest children indicates that this collaboration has its bright sides, which give them strength and motivate them to continue working, but it also has dark sides, which can become stumbling blocks if the other party is not open-minded and willing to build understanding and work together.

Our findings indicate that although most of the teachers surveyed are generally satisfied with the collaboration with the parents of their pupils and appreciate their involvement in helping to organize excursions and special celebrations, they need more openness and support from parents in achieving the most important goal of mutual activities of the school/preschool and home, which is the well-being of each child. For this reason, the respondents most value one-on-one meetings with parents, in which they expect



parents to share important and frank information about their child and the atmosphere in their home. In return, they want to relay to the parents their insights and suggestions about the child and together with them decide on the course and goal of the desired educational interactions.

Unfortunately, only slightly more than half of the female teachers have a good relationship with most of the parents, while the rest of the respondents manage to do so with half of the parents. The teachers derive satisfaction and joy from meeting with parents when they are appreciated for their efforts and dedication contributing to the child's success. When they do, they feel important and useful.

For nearly half of the women surveyed, unfortunately, having to deal with parents is a major source of professional stress, and they find meetings with entitled, neglectful and complaining parents the most distressing. The respondents try to reduce this stress mainly through maladaptive coping strategies, which results in indifference and discouragement, and even with thoughts of changing their jobs. To improve mutual relationships, teachers expect parents to become more supportive, respectful and to consciously exercise their parenting roles. In turn, they themselves need to hone their own assertiveness, which will boost their resolve, self-esteem and autonomy in action, while helping them to be tolerant of parents' differing points of view and show empathy for their emotions.

The study shows that teachers sorely need acceptance and appreciation from parents, as this reinforces their sense of importance. However, when they do not receive positive feedback, but negative comments or expectations instead, they feel unfairly treated and experience stress. Focusing on the negative emotions breeds a sense of hurt and not being understood, and this creates distance between them and parents, thus fueling a spiral of mutual resentment.

Our results correspond with the findings of other researchers (Lendzion, 2010; Ziólkowska-Maciaszek, 2010; Papugowa, 2010) and demonstrate the need for teachers to develop such subjective resources as self-esteem, a sense of efficacy, assertiveness or stress management strategies that have, as confirmed by previous studies (Grzegorzewska, 2006; Tucholska, 2009; Zubrzycka-Maciąg, 2013; Nowosad, 2023), crucial importance for the performance of teachers.

Support for teachers is essential, because although parents and teachers are partners in activities for children, it is the teacher's task to take the initiative, define the type of collaboration and get parents on board. This task becomes particularly difficult when parents have an increasing, though not always constructive, influence on the process of children's education and on the functioning of institutions, as well as entitled attitudes towards teachers, while the prestige of the teaching profession is falling. This threatens to upset the balance between parents' rights and expectations of teachers and limit teachers' autonomy in action. Therefore, the principal plays an important role in building a healthy relationship between home and school/preschool. It largely depends on him or her whether teachers feel secure in their roles and dare to stand up for their rights, beliefs and views when dealing with parents.

Although the results of our study, due to the small number of respondents and the inability to make statistical calculations, cannot be considered representative, they indicate the need for more extensive and in-depth research in this area, which would take into account the sociodemographic data of the subjects and their personality dispositions.

The presented study can therefore be viewed as preliminary, and its conclusions as a guideline for further reliable investigations. It is worth undertaking this task, because determining what benefits and what does not benefit the collaboration between home and school will identify the conditions for such teacher and parent partnerships that will not only be satisfactory to both parties, but will serve the children for the sake of whom they are undertaken.

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#### **Source of funding**

Lack of funding sources.

#### **Disclosure statement**

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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