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DIALOGUE WITH PARENTS OF STUDENTS ACCORDING TO FUTURE TEACHERS

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Abstract. The article stresses on the importance of dialogue with the parents of students in teacher's work. A qualitative study was conducted in order to show the characteristics of dialogical interaction between the teacher and parent from the perspective of students training to become professional teachers. The study, which involved students of pedagogy at Ignatianum University in Krakow (Poland), was carried out in the academic year 2022/2023. The research was exploratory and examined how future teachers perceive dialogue with students' parents. The concept of three-layer data analysis by Maria Szymańska was helpful in capturing the different shades of the studied reality. Based on a qualitative analysis of student surveys, the study identified the facets of teacher-parent dialogue with students' parents, the skills that teacher trainees believe are useful in building teacher-parent dialogue, and the advantages of dialogue in the teacher-parent relationship that prompt teacher trainees to develop their skills. It was shown that good teacher-parent communication helps in working with the pupil. Hence, it is crucial for a teacher to be able to initiate communication and then sustain it. He or she should know how to create community processes and build the school's organizational culture in such a way that it is conducive to establishing constructive and close relationships with pupils' parents. The survey respondents mentioned the following as skills conducive to building teacher-parent dialogue: creating an atmosphere of trust, empathy, encouraging cooperation, and the ability to reduce feelings of discomfort, anxiety and powerlessness in parents. From the analysis of the data obtained in the course of the study, it is advocated that communication skills need to be improved in teachers, as well as in pedagogy students. This recommendation is also consistent with the findings from the theoretical analysis of the scientific literature. Improving skills to establish constructive cooperation with parents is a response to the existing barriers in the teacher-parent relationship, especially in view of the fact that modern realities pose a challenge to the partnership between family and school, rendering the relationship between teachers and parents increasingly complicated.

Keywords*: parents, dialogue, teacher-parent cooperation.

1.   INTRODUCTION

Working on the assumption that "modern pedagogical practice should be based on learner-oriented education, from the point of which the child is regarded as the subject of pedagogical process, where the most attention is paid to creating optimal conditions for the intellectual, social and emotional development of a growing personality" (Abdigapbarovaa, et al., 2016, p.1344), it is crucial to discover the needs and capabilities of each student. This presents the teacher responsible for organizing the education process with the task of understanding the child, discovering why the child has difficulties at school, and then developing and implementing supportive measures. These are tasks for which a good cooperation with the parents of students seems to be imperative. By virtue of their professional role,

feeling obliged to care about establishing effective communication with parents, a teacher can use their leadership, conceived as a specific type of interpersonal relationship (Valli, Stefanski & Lacobson, 2016), as a useful tool in organizing dialogic interaction, which is determined by the goals, conditions and circumstances of the interaction (Kovalova, et al., 2021).

Keeping in mind that the perception of pedagogy as a science, which is connected not only with understanding and explaining, but also with shaping and improving practice, emphasizes the importance of clues and conclusions obtained in the course of empirical research (Arnold & Pätzold 2002), an attempt was made to determine how future teachers perceive dialogue with students' parents.

As Śnieżyński has argued, "to create a platform for revealing the constantly occurring interpersonal interpretation of the educational partners is to create a convenient ground for changing or negotiating the roles these partners play, treating these roles flexibly, as well as the possibility of transforming the interaction into a dialogue" (2003, p. 19). Thus, it is important for the student, their parents and the teacher to negotiate situational meanings, and for them to reveal their expectations and feelings. This allows a better understanding of the intentions and explanations pertaining to the behavior displayed by educational entities.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Based on the findings of Gisewhite, Jeanfreau and Holden, healthy teacher-parent relations translate into students' success at school (2021). Hence, initiating dialogue, and building warm, understanding and trusting relationships with students' parents are important requirements for teachers (Stroetinga, Leeman, Veugelers, 2019). It is on the foundation of dialogue that the idea of mutual support and joint decision-making can develop as a way of achieving educational and educational goals, which, as Raviv points out, is particularly important when dealing with exceptional children (2016).

In order to be able to meet such demands, communication competence should be part of teacher trainee programs (Gisewhite, Jeanfreau, Holden, 2021, Kachak & Blyznyuk, 2023), as well as occupy a priority place in curricula for future teachers. Teachers should improve on effective ways to communicate with parents. Indeed, the benefit of communication training for teachers mostly lies in the ability to overcome barriers in the teacher-parent relationship (Budnyk, Fomin, Novoselska, et al., 2020).

The problem seems even more significant because, as Chen and Letzter note, the relationship between teachers and parents these days is more and more complicated (2018). Some of the difficulties include parents' unpleasant memories of their own education, which have a bearing on their relationship with teachers and disillusionment with the functioning of the education system in general (Chen, & Letzter 2018), as well as parents' tendency to remain silent on educational issues (Stroetinga, Leeman, & Veugelers, 2019). Other factors that tend to complicate the establishment of dialogue between teachers and parents include parents' cautiousness and defensive attitudes (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2003), misunderstandings and conflicts (Guo & Mohan, 2008), and misunderstandings with regard to hierarchies of values (Basyuk, & Ternopilska, 2022).

The psychological and pedagogical underpinnings of interaction in dialogue also depend on the teacher's paradigm. Paradigms that are not conducive to dialogue include normative didactics and instructional didactics (Klus-Stanska, 2018). On the other hand, one of the paradigms that leaves space for the dialogue of educational subjects in the practice of teaching and education is humanistic didactics, distinguished by Klus-Stańska, which is part of the group of interpretative-constructivist paradigms (2018). Dialogue is defined within this context as "opening up to diverse meanings, ways of understanding the world and making sense of it" (Klus-Stańska, 2018, p. 120).

Drawing on Easen, Kendall and Shaw's concept of "developmental partnership," according to which the mutual actions of children, parents and teacher are pivotal to a child's development (1992), and recognizing the joint responsibility of parents and teachers (Chen, & Letzter, 2018), it is worth appreciating the impact of a supportive and beneficial relationship with parents on teaching and parenting practice. According to Laughlin and Turner's research, daily communication with a child's parents is especially important when the child exhibits multiple difficulties in school and peer group functioning (2014). Through conversations with

parents, a teacher can get an idea of what communication between children and parents is like, how much time they spend together in their leisure time, which activities offered by extracurricular and recreational organizations the child enjoys, or how much parents involve their children in doing homework (Mendelová & Gužíková, 2023).

The teacher-parent relationship therefore calls for a tremendous amount of empathy (Chen and Letzter,2018), social, communication and language processing skills, which is a reference to Garcia -Winner's (2008) model of social thinking, and as shown in Tveit's qualitative research, mastery of the rules of deliberation, which include the core values of deliberation and the procedural aspects of deliberation for participants' perceptions of the dialogue (2014). Collaborative and Proactive Solutions (CPS), preceded by the Assessment of Lagging Skills and Unsolved Problems (ALSUP) and the drafting of a Deliberation Plan, can also be applicable (Greene, 2019). This methodology, which involves looking for a solution to problems that would be realistic and satisfactory to the student, parents and teacher, comprises three stages: empathy, clarification of the adult's concerns and invitation (Greene, 2019). Thus, by its very nature, it provides a rationale for treating students as different individuals (Tomlinson 1999), not only in terms of learning, but also emotional, social or behavioral difficulties (Greene, 2019).

Given that the dynamics of the relationship between parents and teachers are complex, one cannot stop at polite and proper conversations (Lawrence-Lightfoot 2003), it is worth learning how to conduct dialogue across differences (Guo, & Mohan 2008), and most importantly, take measures to engage parents in working with teachers. As Delgado-Gaitan showed in his study, parents are not always aware that they can team up with the school to effect change, thereby influencing the improvement of children's functioning at school (1991). Nor are they always aware of the benefits of dialogic interaction, such as, according to Kovalova, Prokofieva and Chorna, cooperation geared toward promoting a child's educational performance, two-way communication, recognition of the importance of diversity in creating a positive learning environment, clearly defined roles, trust and kindness in mutual relationships (2021).

3. RESEARCH OBJECTIVE, METHODOLOGY AND DATA

With the goal of learning about phenomena that are still insufficiently explored in science, and taking into account Morse's view, I used an approach that allows for a better understanding of the subject under study (1991). An exploratory qualitative study was conducted, which examined how future teachers perceive dialogue with students' parents.

Written statements of 15 students of education at Ignatianum University in Krakow, Poland, on different aspects of teacher-parent dialogue were collected in the 2022/2023 academic year. The collected data were anonymized. The cases were given names that do not match the identities of the students participating in the study. The statements were organized using the QDA Miner qualitative data software. Coding, which, according to Gibbs, is a way of managing raw research material was used. It means that all the original data have been preserved. The codes (and the analysis notes relating to them) supplement the raw data with interpretations and theoretical suggestions (2015, p. 24). The software facilitated the analysis of qualitative data as it enabled searching for and analyzing coded portions of the text, as well as writing notes related to individual codes (Gibbs, 2015).

The process of assigning codes to successive text passages was preceded by a framework analysis, which, according to Ritchie, Spencer and O'Connor, involves making a list of key themes before the researcher codes the text (2003). As King notes, this allows for the creation of a template that organizes potential codes (1998).

The analysis of the collected data was carried out based on Szymańska's (2019) concept of three-layer data analysis and followed the following steps:

● I looked for a point in the collected material that "can be defined in terms of formative central consistency" (2019, p. 198) and identified the different facets of dialogue with the parents of students,

● I used the conclusions resulting from the first stage of analysis during the second stage of analysis, whose essence was to merge the data into categories; I identified categories of skills, which, in the opinion of teacher trainees are useful in building dialogue between teachers and parents,

● I treated the collected material holistically, which helped me show the research issue in a new perspective: the focus was on the values of dialogue in the teacher-parent relationship, which encourage students of education studies to develop their skills.

Wanting to match a paradigm, defined as a set of established and socially accepted views, ways of arriving at solutions to scientific problems, cultivated and legitimized principles, and rules for carrying out scientific research (Kuhn, 2001) with the object of research, I selected the interpretative paradigm. This paradigm, as emphasized by Burrell and Morgan corresponds to the humanistic approach (1979). As, Sławecki writes, "*this perspective is oriented towards understanding reality as it appears to its participants (social actors). It seeks explanations by referring to the consciousness, experiences, beliefs and perceptions of people who are constantly constructing and reconstructing their actions*" (2012, p. 78). The research approach, referred to by Flick as the research perspective (2010), allowed capturing the peculiarities of dialogue with students' parents as understood by students training to become teachers.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

According to the survey, the teacher's dialogue with students' parents comes in various guises. During meetings with parents, school issues are discussed, which, according to the respondents, should encourage parents to talk, to open up to the teacher, as these are issues that connect everyone (Ewa). The positive and negative qualities of the student are talked about during the meetings (Iga). The teacher has the opportunity to share his or her own feelings and concerns about the student's progress (Iga), as Gurlua's (2015) study also showed.

Through effective communication with parents, in the opinion of the respondents, teachers can get to know their students better, establish common ground with students, based on knowledge of their interests, thoughts or feelings (Ewa). Conversations with parents facilitate insight into students' emotions, getting to know them and focusing on their needs (Eve), which has a bearing on the organization of the educational process and the communicative component of the learning process (Kovalova, et al., 2021).

The reason that leads the teacher to talk to parents is also the student's behavior that disrupts his/her functioning in the school community (Iga). The teacher has an opportunity to ask the parent for help (Dagmara), can make the parent aware of the seriousness of the problem and make them think about the issue (Jadwiga). Understood in this way, dialogue is part of a methodology that Greene calls Plan B, which is part of Collaborative and Proactive Solutions (CPS) (2019). The teacher, like a good leader (Heifetz, 1998), can encourage the parent to be inventive, think outside the box, and motivate him or her to confront persistent problems. The main goal of the parent and teacher dialogue is developing the child's sense of self-efficacy: "I want!", "I can do it!", "I am able to!" (Ulzharkyn et al., 2016, Ferland, et al., 2014).

Another major reason for teachers establishing a dialogic relationship with parents, according to the pedagogy students surveyed, is the desire to protect children from dangers, especially the dangers of the digital age, which the respondents mentioned most often. Those surveyed viewed dialogic interaction as an opportunity to develop tools and mechanisms that are part of creative and defensive prevention (Beauregard, 2014, Greenberg 2006). The studies by Lievens, Livingstone, McLaughlin, O'Neill and Verdoodt (2018) and Potter and Steemers (2017), which provide evidence of the need to regulate the audiovisual environment with the intention of protecting children, also supported the urgency of such measures. Through constructive dialogue, it is also possible to draw parents' attention to the importance of active involvement in consumer and parent organizations that work with regulators and distributors to expand the scope of child protection (Labio-Bernal et al., 2020).

The surveyed pedagogy students mentioned the following skills as useful in building a teacher-

parent dialogue:

- creating an atmosphere of trust (Ewa)
- stimulating the willingness to cooperate (Iga) and overcoming disengagement (Joanna)
- ensuring favorable circumstances for building relationships (Dagmara)
- ability to express one's thoughts (Klaudia)
- sensitivity and empathy (Klaudia)
- ability to reduce parents' feelings of discomfort, anxiety and helplessness (Joanna).

Thus, the study showed the importance of developing communication skills in teachers, including teacher trainees, which is in line with the findings of Kachak and Blyznyuk (2023). Sometimes teachers can be defensive when dealing with parents, as they do not feel fully prepared to deal with a so-called "difficult parent." Lawrence Lightfoot also cites other barriers to teacher-parent relations, such as the parents' feeling that they are unwelcome at school, the belief that teachers are incompetent, and tension in parent-teacher relationships (2003). Therefore, in order for parent-teacher communication to be effective and bring positive results (sometimes deferred), teachers need to be trained to establish constructive dialogue and create a classroom culture in which the parent and teacher help each other. It is worth showing parents that the classroom is a community (Kohn 1996, Gibbs 2001, Charney, 2002) in which the student is safe, respected and valued (Greene, 2019) and that working together for the good of the student requires perseverance and a vision of teacher-parent cooperation.

The effort invested in building dialogue between teachers and parents is balanced by the benefits of dialogue in the teacher-parent relationship. Respondents mentioned the following among them:

- an atmosphere of trust, mutual acceptance and understanding (Ewa)
- the parents' and teachers' confidence that they are not being judged, so they feel more confident in their roles as teachers/parents (Halina)
- learning about many situations and being able to use this information to draw conclusions about how their child functions at school (Natasza)
- reflection on the role of parent and teacher (Weronika)
- less awkwardness, increasing parents' involvement in their relationship with the teacher (Weronika)
- teacher's knowledge of how much the parent is involved in the child's life and the nature of their relationship (Weronika)
- carrying out joint projects, plans (Natasza)
- regularity of efforts, of interactions (Katarzyna).

The aforementioned benefits of interaction in dialogue prompt students of education to develop their skills. In Poland, they can do this by taking advantage of a wide range of courses and workshops addressed to teachers as part of in-school and out-of-school teacher training. Ukrainian teachers are also interested in such courses, as shown by Kachak & Blyznyuk (2023). In Ukraine, as in Poland, communicative competence is considered a mandatory element of a teacher's professional skills. As Kachak and Blyznyuk demonstrate, effective development of communication competence correlates with learning linguistic norms and rules, rhetorical culture, and speech and communication skills in various situations (2023).

Thus, there seems to be a strong belief that good teacher-parent communication helps in working with students. Teachers and parents exchange information about the child, which results in a better understanding of the child, and, as Lawrence-Lightfoot, (2003) argues, is the foundation for appreciating each other. Thus, it is a factor that helps avoid blaming each other, as well as imposing one's will on the other. It gives parents a sense that they are involved in something that is happening at school.

5. CONCLUSION

Ukrainian researchers, Kovalchuk and Kogut, whose findings are cited by Palka, distinguish three aspects of the structure of pedagogy: the aspect of science (which has its object, subject matter, principles and regularities), the aspect of practice (isolating the components of the pedagogical problems of the teaching-education process) and the aspect of art, based on the assumption that the work of a teacher needs creative inspiration so that he or she can achieve mastery in educational influence on students (Palka, 2018, p. 14). The pedagogical underpinnings of dialogic interaction have an important place in each of these aspects.

The child is at the center of the teacher's interests, and therefore also at the center of the teacher-parent interaction. Hence, there is a need for continuous work on dialogic interaction between teachers and parents. The need to improve this dialogue in the teacher's work, so that it becomes an alliance, that is, a relationship in which, according to Mendel, parents and teachers try to be on the same side together: on the side of the student, and therefore not against each other, and not in coalition only with the child (2007).

Perfecting skills to establish meaningful cooperation with parents is one of the recommendations from this study, and is consistent with the postulation of Kovalov, Prokofiev and Chorn, who believe that not only teachers, but also higher education students should be taught methods of organizing dialogic interaction (2021). From this perspective, it is important to train teachers' social skills in communication and language processing (Garcia -Winner, 2008) and to develop a vocabulary of unresolved problems (Greene, 2019), which is the foundation for implementing the System of Proactive Collaborative Solutions in working with students (Greene, 2019).

Such activities will help teachers and teacher trainees understand how important it is for them to build fruitful relationships with parents. Thus, teachers need both theoretical knowledge, practice, and reflection on their knowledge and experiences to develop the confidence that they are ready to construct positive relationships with the parents of their students. Such teacher background will be a base for overcoming many of the barriers to relationships with parents, such as avoiding labeling parents, challenging common opinions of parents about the school and, importantly, raising parents' awareness of the importance of their working with the teacher and involvement in joint activities.

What is especially important in seeking multilateral agreement among educational entities is to keep in mind Greene's suggestion for teachers: "remain calmly optimistic and tenaciously persistent despite all odds" (2019, p. 358), since, as the results of the survey show, students of education view building dialogue with parents as a challenge: a task that is of utmost significance for ensuring optimal conditions for children at school, but that nevertheless requires knowledge, skills, considerable effort and tact on the part of the teacher.

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У статті висвітлено важливість діалогу з батьками учнів у роботі вчителя. Проведено якісне дослідження з метою виявлення особливостей діалогічної взаємодії між вчителем і батьками з позиції підготовки студентів до професійної педагогічної діяльності. Дослідження, в якому взяли участь студенти-педагоги Університету Ігнатіанум у Кракові (Польща), проводилося у 2022/2023 навчальному році. Дослідження мало розвідувальний характер і вивчало, як майбутні вчителі сприймають діалог з батьками учнів. Концепція тришарового аналізу даних Марії Шиманської допомогла охопити різні відтінки досліджуваної реальності.

На основі якісного аналізу опитувань студентів у дослідженні були визначені аспекти діалогу вчителя з батьками учнів, навички, які, на думку студентів, є корисними для побудови діалогу вчителя з батьками, а також переваги діалогу у відносинах між вчителем і батьками, які спонукають студентів розвивати ці навички. Було показано, що ефективна комунікація між вчителем і батьками допомагає в роботі з учнем. Отже, для вчителя дуже важливо вміти ініціювати комунікацію, а потім підтримувати її. Він повинен знати, як створювати громадські процеси та будувати організаційну культуру школи таким чином, щоб вона сприяла встановленню конструктивних і тісних стосунків з батьками учнів. Серед навичок, які сприяють побудові діалогу вчителя з батьками, респонденти назвали наступні: створення атмосфери довіри, емпатії, заохочення до співпраці, вміння зменшити почуття дискомфорту, тривоги та безсилля у батьків. Аналіз даних, отриманих у ході дослідження, дозволяє стверджувати, що комунікативні навички потребують вдосконалення як у вчителів, так і у студентів педагогічних спеціальностей. Ця рекомендація також узгоджується з результатами теоретичного аналізу наукової літератури. Удосконалення навичок налагодження конструктивної співпраці з батьками є відповіддю на існуючі бар'єри у взаємовідносинах вчителя і батьків, особливо з огляду на те, що сучасні реалії ставлять під сумнів партнерство сім'ї та школи, ускладнюючи взаємовідносини між вчителями та батьками.

Ключові слова: батьки, діалог, педагогічно-батьківська співпраця.