

Cooperation, Effective Classroom Prevention and Intervention Strategies: Teachers' and Parents' Views

DOI: 10.15804/tner.2019.56.2.19

Abstract

Teachers and parents are partners; each has an important role in achieving a common goal, which is rearing and educating children. Research has shown that successful teacher-parent cooperation positively contributes to holistic child development, academic success and behaviour, as well as reducing disciplinary problems. For teachers and parents to acquire a better mutual understanding and support is striving towards this common goal, it is important that each knows the other's views and perspectives. The presented study focused on how teachers and parents perceive cooperation when managing disciplinary problems in the classroom and what they believe are the most successful classroom prevention and intervention strategies. The pooled survey used in this research included 107 class teachers and 291 parents from eleven primary schools in the North-East Region of Slovenia. The research has shown some important differences in the attitudes of teachers and parents, which should be taken into account when improving classroom management.

Keywords: *teachers, parents, cooperation, inappropriate behaviour, classroom strategies*

Introduction

Cooperation between parents and teachers is imperative for the successful and well-rounded upbringing of children. Both perspectives can contribute to successful child upbringing (Addi-Racah & Arviv-Elyashiv, 2008; Dodd & Konzal, 2000; Stone & Chakraborty, 2011). The best approach, according to Epstein (2011), is building a partnership where parents and teachers learn that they each have their own separate and individual but essential role in achieving excellent results (Stone & Chakraborty, 2011). In this partnership, they each play an active role with sharing information, goals and obligations related to educational work and child upbringing. Such a partnership must be planned and directed (Graham-Clay, 2005; Jones, 2001).

Successful cooperation between parents and school does have an impact on child development (Šteh & Kalin, 2011), while aiding and improving school success (Beale, 1985; Jones, 2001; Pape, 1999; Shute, Hansen, Underwood, & Razzouk, 2011; Swick, 1997) and is in general beneficial for children (Birch, 1994; Cankar, Deutsch, & Sentočnik, 2012; Henderson & Berla, 1994). It also improves the child's behaviour (Cordry & Willson, 2004) and reduces disciplinary problems (Beale, 1985). It cannot be overlooked that inappropriate behaviour is correlated with lower academic performance (Himelfarb, Lac, & Baharav, 2013) and that effective cooperation between teachers and parents is key when it comes to children with learning disabilities and challenging behaviour (Darch, Miao, & Shippen, 2004).

Successful cooperation between parents and school presents good prevention of children's inappropriate behaviour (Darch, Miao & Shippen, 2004; Emmer *id.*, 2006; Evertson & Emmer, 2009; Rogers, 2007). A problem-free period is perfect for building a better rapport and respectful relations, and represents a good future investment for the time when problems occur and need to be addressed (Pšunder, 2011). Parents are experts concerning their own children; unlike teachers, parents have access to important information about their children; this is something teachers could really use (Maroney, 1999). Parents have realistic information about how students act outside the classroom; they also have a unique perspective on their child's development and learning process, as well as knowing their needs best (Swick, 1997). Moreover, the learning process of children also takes place at home and not only in school (Camille, 2003). Jinot (2018) believes that parenting styles, work obligations, ineffective discipline and dysfunctional families are the fundamental causes which form within the family environment and affect the lack of discipline in the classroom. It is important for the teacher to become familiar with such situations and better able to understand the student and inappropriate

behaviour, and act accordingly. At the same time, it cannot be ignored that the teacher can also provide parents with useful information regarding the school's holistic approach and their child's functioning in the school. Clearly, children learn and grow at home, at school and in the community (Epstein, 2011). An important step in the right direction is taking responsibility for younger generations (Furedi, 2009).

In addition to successful cooperation between parents and school, many other prevention strategies are discussed in the literature, among which we highlight the following: planning the start of the school year, managing physical space, formulating rules and procedures, establishing good relationships between teachers and children, creating a collaborative departmental community and successful class management (cf., Emmer et al., 2006; Evertson & Emmer, 2009; Pšunder, 2011; Rogers, 2007; Savage and Savage, 2010; Scrivener, 2014). However, even the most effective preventive measures cannot fully eliminate inappropriate student behaviour (Alstot & Alstot, 2015). Addressing inappropriate student behaviour in the classroom is a difficult and inevitable task, and dealing with the problem requires considerable time and skill on the part of the teacher (Yuan, & Che, 2012). The literature mentions a range of classroom intervention strategies: non-verbal signals, proximity, warnings, conversation, 'I' statements during communication, reminders of class rules, redirection of student activity, stimulating the course of action, giving additional instructions and questions, assigning additional tasks, changing seating arrangements and cooperation with the school counselling service and with parents (cf., Cabaroglu & Altinel, 2010; Chaplain, 2010; Cimen & Cepik-Kiris, 2015; Emmer et al., 2006; Evertson & Emmer, 2009; Pšunder, 2011; Savage and Savage, 2010; Scrivener, 2014). The authors emphasize that it is necessary to trust the teacher, who is an expert, to choose the most appropriate strategies depending on the circumstances. In addition, it is also necessary to recognize that an inadequate response to misbehaviour can aggravate the problem and thus jeopardize the teaching and learning process (Yuan & Che, 2012).

To summarize, for the successful management of educational discipline issues, it is important to involve teachers and parents, so that the disciplinary problems can be prevented or appropriately addressed. The basis for successful cooperation between teachers and parents is good mutual understanding. The better parents and teachers know each other, the better they will be able to understand one another and offer support in their mutual efforts (Pšunder, 2011). The aim of this study is to present teachers' and parents' views of cooperation in managing disciplinary problems and their views on successful classroom prevention and intervention strategies.

Research Methodology

Research General Background

Two questionnaires, separate for teachers and parents, were specifically designed for the purpose of this research. The initial study was designed more broadly (Žužek, 2015). However, here we present only a part of the results.

Research Sample

The study was conducted in eleven primary schools, its teacher-parent sample being representative of the North-East Region of Slovenia. From within these schools, the survey included class teachers who teach 6- to 14-year-old students (n=107), and students' parents, who were pooled from one division of 2nd, 5th and 8th grades (n=291).

The sample comprised 14.02% of male teachers and 85.98% of female teachers, along with 19.93% of male parents and 80.07% of female parents. In Slovenia, students in primary school are divided into three educational levels; students at the first educational level are 6–8 years of age; they are 9–11 years of age at the second educational level, and 12–14 years of age at the third educational level. The sample relatively equally represented teachers from the three educational levels (34.58% of class teachers from the first educational level, 33.64% of class teachers from the second educational level, and 31.78% of class teachers from the third educational level). However, the sample slightly less equally represented parents (30.24% of parents had a child at the first, 37.46% at the second, and 32.30% at the third educational level).

Instrument and Procedures

We collected the data used in this study by distributing anonymous individual questionnaires to the teachers and parents. The respondents participated voluntarily and anonymously.

In the first part of the questionnaires, we collected basic information about the teachers and parents. Next, the teachers' and parents' answers were put on a five-point scale. They assessed how they perceived mutual cooperation for managing disciplinary problems (the response scale ranged from "1 – completely disagree", to "5 – completely agree") and the effectiveness of individual prevention and intervention strategies in the classroom (the response scale ranged from "1 – not at all effective", to "5 – very effective").

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed with the statistical software package SPSS. The Cronbach alpha coefficient for the prevention strategies scale is 0.843, and 0.837 for the intervention strategies scale, thus indicating the good reliability of both scales.

Research Results

Perception of mutual cooperation for managing disciplinary problems in the classroom

Table 1 shows that the teachers and parents reported distinct interpretations of their mutual cooperation for managing disciplinary problems in the classroom.

Contrary to the parents, the teachers estimated that they generally cooperated with the parents to a greater extent. Likewise, more than the parents, the teachers agreed that they cooperated with the parents more when it came to preventing and dealing with the already existing disciplinary problems.

Table 1. Results of Mann-Whitney's test for differences in parents' and teachers' views concerning disciplinary problem management.

Statement	Status	N	\bar{R}	U	p
When managing disciplinary problems, teachers cooperate with parents.	Teachers	107	291.20	5756.50	0.000
	Parents	291	165.78		
Parents and teachers cooperate as part of preventive measures to avoid the occurrence of disciplinary problems.	Teachers	107	262.71	8805.50	0.000
	Parents	291	176.26		
Parents and teachers cooperate when disciplinary problems arise.	Teachers	107	254.65	9667.50	0.000
	Parents	291	179.22		

Table 2 shows that the teachers, more than the parents, believe in the effectiveness of the following preventive strategies: creating a positive climate with a relaxed classroom atmosphere, maintaining good interpersonal relations, regular cooperation of parents and school, firmly set rules, boundaries and clear expectations, and precisely defined and consistently applied sanctions.

We sought to find out whether opinions regarding the effectiveness of preventive strategies are consistent in the teachers and parents. Testing for the homogeneity of variance proved justified ($F=2.324, p=0.128$). Calculations from a general

Table 2. Results of Mann-Whitney's test for differences in parents' and teachers' views on preventive strategies.

Statement	Status	N	\bar{R}	U	P
Firmly set rules, boundaries and clear expectations.	Teachers	107	232.02	12088.50	0.000
	Parents	291	187.54		
Early problem detection and early intervention.	Teachers	107	204.93	14988.00	0.517
	Parents	291	197.51		
Maintaining good interpersonal relations.	Teachers	107	216.54	13745.00	0.037
	Parents	291	193.23		
Regular cooperation of parents and school.	Teachers	107	219.14	13466.50	0.018
	Parents	291	192.28		
Precisely defined and consistently applied sanctions.	Teachers	107	236.81	11576.00	0.000
	Parents	291	185.78		
Good lesson planning.	Teachers	107	198.96	15511.00	0.949
	Parents	291	199.70		
Creating a positive climate with a relaxed classroom atmosphere.	Teachers	107	217.14	13681.00	0.031
	Parents	291	193.01		
Increasing student control.	Teachers	107	203.61	15129.00	0.619
	Parents	291	197.99		

t-test ($t=2.981$; $df=243.146$, $p=0.003$) showed a statistically significant difference between the teachers and parents when assessing the effectiveness of preventive strategies. Considering the mean value, we can conclude that the teachers ($=4.35$, $SD=0.37$) are more convinced than the parents ($=4.20$, $SD=0.48$) of the success of preventive strategies.

Detecting the effectiveness of intervention strategies

Table 3 shows that the parents are more confident than the teachers in the effectiveness of the following intervention strategies: having conversation or discussion with the student, finding reasons for inappropriate behaviour, apologizing to the victim after committing an offense, disciplinary warning, additional work, teacher commands, teacher warnings and threats, teacher mockery of or scorn for the student. In contrast, the teachers assessed as more effective taking away privileges, ignoring and drawing attention away from students who behave inappropriately.

Table 3. Results of Mann-Whitney's test for differences in parents' and teachers' views on intervention strategies.

Statement	Status	N	\bar{R}	U	P
Having conversation or discussion with students who behave inappropriately.	Teachers	107	169.00	12305.00	0.000
	Parents	291	210.71		
Praising and rewarding students who behave appropriately.	Teachers	107	191.42	14703.50	0.347
	Parents	291	202.47		
Finding reasons for inappropriate behaviour.	Teachers	107	177.64	13230.00	0.014
	Parents	291	207.54		
Apologizing to the victim after committing an offense.	Teachers	107	163.04	11667.50	0.000
	Parents	291	212.91		
Teacher warnings.	Teachers	107	186.72	14201.50	0.129
	Parents	291	204.20		
Teacher gestures.	Teachers	107	190.09	14562.00	0.290
	Parents	291	202.96		
Disciplinary warning.	Teachers	107	160.30	11374.50	0.000
	Parents	291	213.91		
Paying for damage caused by inappropriate behaviour.	Teachers	107	204.82	14999.50	0.555
	Parents	291	197.54		
Additional work.	Teachers	107	168.12	12210.50	0.001
	Parents	291	211.04		
Teacher commands.	Teachers	107	169.68	12377.50	0.001
	Parents	291	210.47		
Taking away privileges.	Teachers	107	232.72	12014.00	0.000
	Parents	291	187.29		
Teacher warnings and threats.	Teachers	107	173.38	12774.00	0.004
	Parents	291	209.10		
Teacher verbal reprimand.	Teachers	107	159.04	11239.00	0.000
	Parents	291	214.38		
Transferring a student to another school.	Teachers	107	215.60	13845.50	0.068
	Parents	291	193.58		
Ignoring and drawing attention away from students who behave inappropriately.	Teachers	107	228.53	12462.00	0.002
	Parents	291	188.82		
Teacher silence.	Teachers	107	213.29	14093.00	0.134
	Parents	291	194.43		
Teacher mockery of or scorn for the student.	Teachers	107	167.48	12142.50	0.000
	Parents	291	211.27		

We were also interested in how the teachers and parents assess the effectiveness of intervention strategies in general. Because testing for the homogeneity of variance proved violated ($t=7.922$, $p=0.005$), we used the approximate method of the t-test. Calculation ($t=-2.688$; $df=241.645$, $p=0.008$) showed a statistically significant difference between the teachers and parents when assessing the effectiveness of intervention strategies. Considering the mean value, we can conclude that the parents ($=3.41$, $SD=0.54$) tend to have more confidence than the teachers ($= 3.27$, $SD=0.42$) in the success of corrective strategies.

Discussion

The study showed that the teachers and parents have different perceptions regarding mutual cooperation for managing discipline in the classroom. Contrary to parental perception, the teachers estimate that they more often cooperate with the parents in general and when it comes to preventing and resolving disciplinary problems. It seems that the teachers assess the mutual cooperation in terms of what it should be, while the parents evaluate it more by the forms that this collaboration actually takes. The explanation for such divergent answers could be that the parents and teachers take different positions. The teachers cooperate with all the parents from an entire class (with the parents of all the children they teach), which gives them the impression that there is plenty of parent-teacher cooperation. They know what good professional cooperation should look like. On the other hand, the parents evaluate their cooperation with the school based on their own perspective, in terms of how much they actually work with the teachers.

Some authors emphasize the need for schools and parents to re-examine the policy of cooperation (Porumbu & Necșoi, 2012), and to change the school into an environment where family involvement is welcomed (Hoover-Dempsey & Walker, 2012). We agree that it would be beneficial for both parents and schools to re-examine the mutual cooperation policy together. This process would be seriously affected by the fact that each party has its own idea and perceptions of what their cooperation should look like. The fundamental goal for parent-teacher cooperation should be establishing and maintaining communication space, which is much more than just a simple information exchange (Graham-Clay, 2005). Teachers and parents need each other to accomplish one of the most important tasks: qualifying new generations (Dusi, 2012). At this point, we would like to emphasize that our study focused on teachers' and parents' views regarding their mutual cooperation when managing disciplinary issues in the classroom. We are aware that teachers

and parents are also involved in other ways and on other occasions, which are equally important for the successful functioning of students at school.

The results also show important differences in the parents' and teachers' views emerged when assessing the effectiveness of classroom prevention and intervention discipline strategies. The teachers considered prevention strategies as more successful; in contrast, the parents believed that intervention strategies were more effective. Such answers could imply that the teachers, as experts, are aware that discipline at school cannot be addressed by intervention techniques alone, but more importantly, must involve preventing discipline problems even before they occur (Pšunder, 2011). On the other hand, the parents might be thinking of such ways of establishing and maintaining discipline in the classroom that they experienced as children themselves. Those discipline guidelines that were established and used while the parents were young have now significantly changed. For that reason, it might be beneficial to organize a lecture or workshop on this subject and present it to the parents. The parents could, thus, better understand the teachers' reasons for seeing preventive strategies as more effective and using them more often when working with children in the classroom. Additionally, such a training programme would allow the parents to gain a better understanding of why, in specific situations, the teachers react in a certain way when it comes to inappropriate student behaviour. This should make the parents more supportive of the teachers and their efforts.

Conclusions

With this article we seek to draw attention to the fact that teachers' and parents' views may diverge on mutual cooperation and effective prevention and intervention classroom strategies. The latter can lead to disagreements and misunderstandings between teachers and parents, and thus have a negative impact on how the child functions in school. It is important that teachers and parents understand the differences in views. This helps both parties to mutually understand what the views, needs and philosophies are in the field of cooperation and management of disciplinary issues in the classroom. Knowing what each party's expectations are, helps both teachers and parents, as they are able to understand and support each other in order to achieve a common goal – rearing and educating children.

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