



DIMENSIONS OF COOPERATION WITH PARENTS OF STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS IN THE WORKSPACE OF A TEACHER OF GRADES I–III

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Abstract. This article discusses the teacher's cooperation with parents of pupils with special educational needs located in the teacher's workspace. The various conditions of this cooperation are presented, resulting from a multidimensional approach to the understanding of work. The interpretative perspectives applied made it possible to identify many of the activities that fit into this area of the teacher's work. Cooperation with parents of pupils with special educational needs thus appears, on the one hand, as an activity, the institutional and structural framework of which is defined by the provisions contained in the normative acts, and, on the other hand, it is a space which brings out the dialogical nature of the teacher's work. The interpretive potential of the category of cooperation between parents and teachers, considered in the context of the concern to meet the special educational needs of early school pupils, also points to the need to link this area of teacher's work to the continuous professional development of the teacher, whose creative potential has a significant impact on the shape of relations with parents.

WYMIARY WSPÓŁPRACY Z RODZICAMI UCZNIÓW
O SPECJALNYCH POTRZEBACH EDUKACYJNYCH
W PRZESTRZENI PRACY NAUCZYCIELA KLAS I–III

Słowa kluczowe: praca nauczyciela, współpraca, specjalne potrzeby edukacyjne

Streszczenie. W niniejszym artykule poruszono temat współpracy nauczyciela z rodzicami uczniów o specjalnych potrzebach edukacyjnych lokowanej

w przestrzeni pracy nauczyciela. Przedstawiono różnorodne uwarunkowania owej współpracy, wynikające z wielowymiarowego podejścia do rozumienia pracy. Zastosowane perspektywy interpretacyjne pozwoliły na wskazanie wielu działań, które wpisują się w ten obszar pracy nauczyciela. Współpraca z rodzicami uczniów mających specjalne potrzeby edukacyjne jawi się więc z jednej strony jako działanie, którego instytucjonalno-strukturalne ramy dookreślają zapisy zawarte w aktach normatywnych, a z drugiej strony jest przestrzenią, która wydobywa dialogiczny charakter pracy nauczyciela. Potencjał interpretacyjny kategorii współpracy rodziców i nauczycieli, rozważanej w kontekście troski o zaspokojenie specjalnych potrzeb edukacyjnych uczniów w wieku wczesnoszkolnym, wskazuje również na konieczność wiązania tego obszaru pracy nauczyciela z nieustannym rozwojem zawodowym nauczyciela, którego potencjalność twórcza istotnie oddziałuje na kształt relacji z rodzicami.

Introduction

Using space as a category which is to describe the cooperation of an early school education teacher with parents of children with special educational needs makes it possible to notice numerous dependencies within this area of a teacher's work.

According to Katarzyna Rychlicka-Maraszek, work is understood as the purposeful and conscious action of a person aiming at satisfying their needs and exerting influence not only on shaping the world but also on their own development. The author emphasizes the fact that work is a kind of activity that always takes place in some space. It can be perceived as a space – a place of work, but also as a kind of a socially produced construct which has its actors, roles, narrative, as well as mechanisms of action, control and power (Rychlicka-Maraszek 2016, p. 8).

Such an approach enables us to introduce two levels of interpretation into the discussion on the dimensions of cooperation of an early school education teacher with parents of children with special educational needs in the space of a teacher's work. The first of those levels includes understanding space as a material place limited by borders. What is important in this case is the specific form of a school building in the context of a territory, which requires a reflection on its spatial values, as well as a review of normative regulations that influence the shape of such cooperation.

The second layer of interpretation is based on the conviction that space may also be understood as a space produced and named by social actors who give meaning to such space through various kinds of activities and practices (Rychlicka-Maraszek, 2016, p. 8). In this case, we can consider what meaning early

education teachers give to their cooperation with parents of children with special educational needs. The analysis of that meaning may be carried out by a teacher from a collective perspective, i.e. from the point of view based on the teacher's belonging to a specific professional category connected with requirements consistent with a specific ethos of work, or from the individual perspective that is built on placing one's own functioning within intuitively outlined borders.

Formal conditions of cooperation between teachers and parents of children with special educational needs

Cooperation between a teacher and parents of children with special educational needs is carried out within institutional-structural frames specified by the regulations included in normative acts. One such document is the regulation of the Ministry of Education and Science (MEN) of 9 August 2017 concerning the conditions for the organization of education, upbringing and care for children and youth who are disabled, socially maladjusted or vulnerable to social maladjustment (Journal of Laws of 2017, item 1578). Paragraph 6, point 6 of the regulation clearly indicates the necessity for cooperation between teachers and specialists with students' parents in the fulfilment by the school of tasks mentioned in § 5 of the regulation. Therefore, teachers are obliged to cooperate with parents in the:

- 1) fulfilment of suggestions included in the decision to implement special education,
- 2) provision of conditions for studying, specialist equipment and didactic aids adjusted to students' individual developmental and educational needs, as well as their psychophysical abilities,
- 3) provision of classes adjusted to students' individual developmental and educational needs, as well as their psychophysical abilities; in particular revalidation, social rehabilitation and socio-therapeutic classes;
- 4) integration of students with peers, including students without disabilities;
- 5) preparation of students for independent life in adulthood.

Also, according to the regulation, parents are to participate in working on the preparation of the Individual Educational and Therapeutic Programme, so they have the right to:

- obtain from the school principal a written notice on the date of each meeting of the team and on the possibility to participate in such a meeting,

- participate in making an evaluation of the student's functioning by various specialists,
- receive a copy of IETP and all kinds of evaluations.

In the regulation of MEN (Ministry of National Education) of 9 August 2017 concerning the principles of organizing and providing psychological and pedagogical support in public preschools, schools and other educational institutions, it was clarified that such support is organized and provided in cooperation with students' parents. What is important, in § 5 of the regulation, it was written that psychological-pedagogical support in kindergartens, schools and other educational institutions may be provided upon the initiative of a student's parents. Also, according to the regulation, the principal of a given institution is to inform parents in writing of the need to provide psychological-pedagogical support to the student, of the forms of such support, the period in which such support will be provided, and the number of hours in which particular forms of support will be implemented (Journal of Laws of 2017, item 1591).

Therefore, entering into cooperation with parents of students with special educational needs seems a necessary area in the work of a teacher of grades I-III. Taking into account the fact that such cooperation takes the form of practice which occurs in specific conditions, one should mainly pay attention to the forms of cooperation with parents specified in the school's statute. Such forms include meetings with parents, individual contacts with teachers and specialists initiated by both parties, as well as other meetings related to particular circumstances.

The above-mentioned forms of cooperation with parents exert an important influence on the shape of the "system of spatial practices", i.e., as Małgorzata Dymnicka says, repeatable everyday activities taking place in a specific space (Dymnicka 2011), related to building the parent-teacher relationship¹.

¹ Good practices in teacher-parent cooperation have been the subject of research by many authors. Worth mentioning are the results of research by Bożena Dusza, which focuses on the preferred forms of contact between teachers and parents and the actions taken by teachers to encourage parents to cooperate with the school (Dusza, 2018); research by Małgorzata Banasiak on knowledge of the rights and duties of educational entities (Banasiak, 2013); the findings of Mikołaj Winiarski in the form of a three-dimensional model of teacher-parent cooperation, assuming the constant presence of teachers and parents in the form of accompanying children-pupils in the process of their education and upbringing, the community of action and the proximity of the subjects (spatial, temporal and social-emotional) (Winiarski, 2013); the research of Danuta Opozda emphasising the importance of a friendly atmosphere and dialogue for the quality of the relationship between parents and teachers (Opozda, 2009); Dorota Smykowska's research on the postulated actions of parents and teachers to meet the developmental needs of students with mild intellectual disability (Smykowska, 2008); Patrycja Młynek's research on mutual expectations of parents and teachers regarding school cooperation (Młynek, 2018); Olimpia Gogolin's and Eugeniusz Szymik's research focusing on the facets

The external nature of that cooperation is influenced by the specific features of the place in which a meeting of a teacher with parents occurs. The space of a classroom influences the mood and feelings of interlocutors.

According to Wiesław Boryś, space, i.e. an area, field, layer, or surface, is one of the basic features of matter described as “the totality of relationships existing among material objects (things), i.e. their placement (distances), sizes and shapes specified by the layout of matter in movement” (Boryś 2005, p. 494).

The spatial properties of a school building are revealed in the dimension of durable and semi-durable space typical of such objects. According to the definition by Aleksander Nalaskowski, the durable space includes structural properties of school rooms expressed in their measurement and placement of windows and doors. The creation of a semi-durable space, in turn, consists in placing movable/removable elements (equipment and decorations typical of a classroom) into the durable space. Such elements do not generate any permanent changes within the durable space (Nalaskowski 2002, p. 11).

Thus, the geometrical personality of a classroom is characterized by certain properties. Sometimes it makes parents shy and uncertain. They may feel that they are on a foreign terrain, while the teacher is “at home”, in his/her classroom the interior of which they designed themselves. In the centre of the classroom, there is a board near which the teacher’s desk is situated. The classroom is full of colourful desks and chairs. In the back of the classroom, there is a rug which is a place for play and relaxation, as well as cabinets in which children keep books and stationery supplies. The decorations in the classroom refer to the current season, and the walls are covered with boards presenting children’s pictures.

The teacher invites parents to cooperate which, on the one hand, is to be based on legal regulations, and, on the other hand, takes place within the unique conditions of a classroom. The place of parent-teacher meetings influences the atmosphere of such interactions. According to the definition by Grażyna Gajewska, the atmosphere “is a state of intersubjective, cognitively-emotional experiences of individuals that constitute its community” (Gajewska, Bazydło-Stodolna 2005, p. 57). Whether the atmosphere felt by participants of a meeting is perceived

of cooperation between parents and early childhood education teachers (Gogolin, Szymik, 2016); research by Małgorzata Dubis, which aimed to find out the opinions of parents and teachers about their mutual contacts and the various forms of cooperation between parents and school (Dubis, 2019); research by Anna Mikler-Chwastek, in which the teachers surveyed distinguished three types of parents (those with whom cooperation is very good, indifferent and absent, and difficult, oppositional parents (Mikler-Chwastek, 2020).

as positive, is determined by a set of factors that influence the shape of the atmosphere in general. Zdzisław Dąbrowski claims that the most important of such factors are the personal properties of the participants of a given system (teachers, parents) and their sense of success in performing their roles (Dąbrowski 2000, pp. 242-243). Thus, building an effective relationship with parents is related to the answer to the questions: Why am I making the effort to enter this cooperation? How cooperation with the parents can help me in performing my professional obligations? Therefore, relationships between teachers and parents, as well as the classroom space which is a specific background for social relationships between teachers and parents, are very significant for building the atmosphere of cooperation.

The significance of cooperation with parents of students with special educational needs for the organization of a teaching-learning environment by teachers

While trying to answer the question concerning the meaning of teacher-parent cooperation for the organization of teaching-learning environment by teachers of grades I-III, we should start by attempting to characterize the profession of a teacher. Based on the idea of Krzysztof Konarzewski, Iwona Chrzanowska writes that “a teacher should effectively teach, but not stress; he/she should demand, but not force; maintain discipline, but without pressure; be fair, but find something good in each student; he/she should help the weaker, but without neglecting the talented ones. And first and foremost, he/she should be devoted to working, to self-education and self-improvement, and to caring for each student’s school and after-school life” (Chrzanowska 2019, p. 247).

Taking into account the complicated dimension of a teacher’s work and axiological dilemmas related to answering the question of how a teacher may justify his/her decisions often made under the pressure of time, to the intention of supporting the child in general development, and to the lack of certainty as for their full success, we may search for the solution for those dilemmas in the space of the parent-teacher cooperation. A competent teacher who, according to the definition by Małgorzata Zalewska-Bujak, is a person with the ability to do what is right, which results not only from learned skills but also from skills created by the teacher himself/herself that help him/her effectively play their role (Zalewska-Bujak 2013, p. 285). Such a teacher will try to make parents their allies in achieving the common aim, i.e. concern for the provision

of conditions that make it possible for early school children to achieve educational success adjusted to their abilities. Chrzanowska emphasizes the fact that “parents are able to provide the teacher with necessary knowledge related to, e.g. effective motivational methods, the child’s efficiency in action, their habits and preferences that may facilitate the process of adapting the child in a school class and arranging situations connected with including the child into the school life” (Chrzanowska 2019, p. 321). This is why a teacher will use the remarks and ideas of parents while making decisions related to:

- preparing the plan for overcoming difficulties faced by the child during educational activities,
- supporting the fulfilment of the ways of integrating the student with the peers, i.e. through inviting friends to the student’s house in order to carry out various school tasks together (project, presentation, team task),
- didactic aids and specialist equipment that may make it easier for the student to function at school (Słupek 2019, p. 177).

As emphasized by Kazimierz Słupek, the teacher’s cooperation with parents also includes taking up actions aimed at supporting parents in providing care and education to children with special educational needs, which may include:

- giving advice on how to work with a child at home,
- organizing consultations with specialists employed at school,
- providing parents with support in applying for additional specialist classes in other institutions,
- informing parents of people or institutions to which they may apply for help and reliable information (Słupek 2019, p. 177).

The above-mentioned dimensions of parent-teacher cooperation are the basis for the valuation of such cooperation based on the teacher’s conviction of the importance of cooperation with parents as something that exerts an influence on the child’s school performance. Also, these dimensions show a deep meaning of the concern for building cooperation between parents and a teacher or team of teachers and specialists working with a student with special educational needs. As emphasized by Kaja Kazimierska, the act of giving meaning to various kinds of actions is characteristic of interpretative work (Każmierska 2012, p. 367). The same author further writes that making an effort in interpreting biographical experiences with reference to one’s own identity, self-image, behaviours and activities one takes up (or fails to take up) (Każmierska 2012, s. 367) is of great importance in crystallizing the image of one’s own professional

role. In the dimension of a teacher's workspace being the subject of this article, i.e. in cooperation between teachers and parents of students with special educational needs, interpretative work will be based on the analysis of individual professional experiences of a teacher related to cooperation with parents. This is the innermost nature of cooperation in which, as K. Rychlicka-Maraszek writes, practices taken up in the spaces of work are constructed and fulfilled by the individual himself/herself (Rychlicka-Maraszek 2016, p.10).

Individual approach to making and maintaining good relationships with parents may be expressed in the teacher's belief in the importance of:

- arranging meetings dates that are convenient for parents,
- carrying out talks that support parents in overcoming everyday difficulties connected with satisfying children's specific needs,
- organizing consultations with parents and teachers in order to solve the child's school problems together.

The attitude of being open to parents and inviting them to cooperate may result from the awareness of the fact that parents play a very important role in the process of effective inclusion. Such an approach of a teacher may, in accordance with Anna Szkolak-Stępień, be expressed in:

- perceiving cooperation as an added value in education,
- using methods based on cooperation,
- making parents involved in supporting their children's learning process,
- effective communication with people is important for the child who may come from various cultural, ethnic and linguistic communities, and may be different in terms of social and economic status (Szkolak-Stępień 2017, p. 82).

A teacher comes across various barriers in starting effective cooperation with parents. Such barriers include parents' demanding attitudes, as well as their fears and anxiety. Thus, the teacher's task is to listen carefully to the parents' voices and try to discover what their approach results from. In making a relationship, the first contact with parents is particularly important, which, as Kinga Kaleta claims, should be the opportunity to express the wish to meet the parents and use their knowledge of the child in the process of searching for the best solutions together (Kaleta 2013, p. 59). It is important for the teacher to arouse parents' trust, reduce their fear of being judged, and make them interested in the teacher's suggestions. Such aims match four dimensions of interpersonal relationships related to psychosocial skills enumerated by Jerzy Mellibruda:

- mutual understanding and learning of each other,
- creating an atmosphere of mutual trust,

- helping and exerting influence,
- solving problems and conflicts (Mellibruda 2003).

To sum it up, such a form of teacher-parent cooperation can, as Maria Mendel says, be described as an alliance, i.e. a form in which they are trying to stand together on the same side: on the side of the student; and not in opposition to each other or only in coalition with the child (Mendel 2007, p. 8).

Conclusions

Workspace creates an area of deepened analysis of cooperation between teachers of grades I-III with parents of children with special educational needs. The discussion on the cooperation of teachers and parents of children with special educational needs is connected with the way of understanding the status of a parent and teacher in the system of psychological and pedagogical support which is to be provided to such children at school.

What is more, the fact that teachers see the importance of cooperation with parents although it is just one of the areas of an early education teacher's work, reveals a specific feature of a teacher's professionalism that is perceived in a broad manner and, as Henryka Kwiatkowska notes, manifested in a critical attitude to oneself which encourages a teacher to aim at self-development and going beyond algorithms in thinking and acting (Kwiatkowska 1992, p. 45). Cooperation with parents enables a teacher to better know and understand the child, and if the child has educational problems, such cooperation makes it possible for the teacher to accurately adjust the programme and teaching methods to his/her needs and abilities. Also, it helps the teacher select the principles of organizing social spaces that have a good influence on the process of learning.

Therefore, cooperation with parents within the space of work of an early education teacher still has a great interpretative potential, which is why it is necessary to take up scientific research on such cooperation as well as its formal, organizational and ethical conditions.

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