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Parental Practices in Early Education: The Necessity of Parental Counseling in Iasi County

Florin Vasile FRUMOS¹, Eusebiu Neculai MUNTEANU²

Abstract

Two complementary approaches in the early education and development of preschool children refer to how important it is for the teachers to know the parental practices used within a family and for the parents to be familiarized with the activities their children are involved in kindergarten. The present article refers to a research study that took place in all public kindergartens in Iasi (November 2009 – February 2010) and focused on three major elements: identifying the parents' perception of their children's behavior, identifying their point of view on the relation between family and kindergarten and determining the need/request of parental counseling. The survey's findings point out there is a series of common perceptions among parents, concerning the kindergarten, most of the respondents showing willingness in taking part in parental counseling activities. In conclusion, kindergartens should diversify their educational programmes and rise the standards of parental counseling services for their beneficiary.

Keywords: parental practices; parental counseling; development; early education; kindergarten-family; partnership.

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Early education, development, parental practices, parental counseling

Early education refers to all the formative influences experienced by children from birth until the age of 6/7 years. This education is focused on “the surviving, the growth, the development and the education of children from birth till the moment when they can start primary school (formal, informal, non-formal), including health, nutrition and hygiene, cognitive, social, physical and emotional development” (ministry of Education, 2008: 10). In this early time, education is a holistic process (Biber, 1987) that refers to the physical, the cognitive and socio-emotional development of the child. A complex relation of inter-determination exists between early education and early development, both being included in a specific socio-cultural context (Rogoff, 2003). The formative processes from early childhood therefore include both the education the child gets within the family and the one within specialized institutions.

The development is seen as a continuous process, integral and multidimensional that favors the child's capacity of movement and interaction to become more complex. The same thing happens with his capacity to think and feel. For the young child, the development represents a permanent process of change, of transformation and adjustment to the environment. The child's development is seen as the amplification of his perceptive, intellectual, emotional as well as behavior capacities and their functioning during childhood. The physical development consists in the child's growth and his capacity of movement. The psychological development refers to the child's capacity to adjust his behavior on a social level, behavior that derives from the voluntary control of the positive and negative emotions experienced by the child and it is doubled by the child's interest in learning (McClelland, Acock and Morrison, 2006). Thus, the security deriving from the relationships within the family and the society stands at the base of the self-regulating systems (Kochanska, Murray and Harlan, 2000). The development of the preschool child includes three dimensions: the child's age particularities, the individual particularities of the child and the social and cultural conditions specific to the child's environment (Getswicki, 1999).

The parent who get involved in the educational process, respecting at the same time all the child's development stages, manage to offer him more opportunities in creating his own knowledge. In this case, the family can have a significant contribution to the learning and developing progress of the preschool child (Zigler, Pfannenstiel and Seitz, 2008; Cojocar, 2009). A certain part of the behaviors, the relationships and the rituals that come to life within a family contribute to the education and the development of children. Parental practices include all the tasks

and the activities involved in bringing up a child in order for him to become an independent adult. Parental practices influence greatly the young child's development (Young, Davis, Schoen and Parker, 1998). There is an important relationship between the intervention programs that encourage parental involvement in early education and the improvement of the cognitive development of preschool children (Brofenbrenner, 1974). More than this, when the communication between parents and teachers is not focused only on the activity from the kindergarten but also on the children's activity within the family, the benefits in the preschool child's development do not take long to appear (Knopf and Swick, 2008).

Considerations on the research

A pertinent analysis of the impact of parental practices on the education and the development of preschool children can be done using the ecological model of human development (Brofenbrenner, 1979). This theoretical model includes five different levels. At the level of the micro-system, the preschool child comes at the kindergarten as a product of his own family. In this context, parental practices have a great influence on the child's development. At the level of the mezzo-system, the relations that exist between the family and the kindergarten structure the behavior and the competences of the preschool child. For example, the preschool children whose parents have taken classes of parental education presented a significant improvement of their behavior in comparison to the preschool children whose parents did not attend such classes (Jones, Daley, Hutchings, Bywater and Eames, 2007; Pfannenstiel and Seltzer, 1985). The 3rd level, the exo-system refers to that environment at which the child does not take part directly but which influences his development, as the family income and the parents' working place. The 4th level refers to the macro-system and focuses on the way the system of beliefs and values, the ideologies and the way the society is organized influence parental practices, and implicitly the child's development. The final level, the crono-system, refers to the life time of the individual. The present study refers only to the first three levels (the mezzo-system and partly, the micro-system and the exo-system), the last two levels – the macro-system and the crono-system – not being included in the research.

Description of the research methodology

The purpose of the research

The identification of the way parents with preschool children in Iasi see their own children, the way they relate with the kindergarten and their need of parental counseling.

Instrument, group, variables and hypothesis

The method used relies on the investigation by questionnaires that were used on the subjects of the present study (N = 1314 parents). The questionnaires were given to the parents (the subjects of the research) in November and December 2009 and they were taken back in January 2010. We mention that there were given almost 4000 questionnaires and only one third of them was completed and given back.

Instrument: The questionnaire was created bearing in mind the fundamental elements that define the relationship between family and kindergarten, from the parental point of view. It has 40 questions with one or more variants of answer. The variants of answer are either of the true/false type, or they offer the possibility to choose one variant from more possible ones. The variables are mainly categorical and this is why the statistic results were limited to general statistic indicators (frequencies and Chi - square distribution).

The items of the questionnaire were grouped in two major categories and sub-categories as follows:

Family ecology: Information related to the child: "My child goes to kindergarten and frequents": (1) the group with small children (small group); (2) the group with children of average age (middle group); (3) the group with older children (big group); (4) the for school (preparatory) group.

Information related to the child's development: "My child was breastfed": (1) in the first 3 months; (2) in the first 6 months; (3) in the first year.

Information related to the relations within the family: "With my child, I spend": (1) at least 3 – 4 hours a day; (2) at most 1 – 2 hours a day. Or "I play with my child or I go with him at the playground": (1) 2 – 3 hours a day; (2) 1 hour a day; (3) 2 – 3 hours a week; (4) I do not have any time at all.

Information related to family rituals: "In my family, meals are served": (1) at fix hours, according to a schedule we all respect; (2) individually, each of us eating as he/she wants.

The relation of the family with the kindergarten: “My child goes to kindergarten”: (1) every day; (2) two – three times a week; (3) one day a week at most.” Or “My child talks at home about what he does at the kindergarten”: (1) yes; (2) no; (3) I do not know.

The child’s behavior and manifestation: hyperactivity, aggressivity, anxiety, etc; item 36: “My child manifests at home and/or at the kindergarten the following behaviors”: (surround one or more variants)

(1) does not pay attention; (2) does not stay still; (3) does not listen to the teacher or his parents and (4) does only what he wants; (5) is very absent and does not take part at activities, does not answer or play with the other children; (6) is always excited, takes the toys from the other children and is aggressive with them etc.

The need of assistance in complementary education: “My child could be helped by the counseling of a”: (1) psychologist; (2) a good kinetotherapist; (3) psycho-educator; (4) another specialist; (5) logopedist; (6) does not need any. Or “If I were offered the possibility, I would go to a specialized centre to rectify my child’s problems”: (1) yes; (2) no; (3) I do not know.

We asked the respondents a series of personal information as: age, gender, civil status, socio – professional status, income level (the questionnaires were anonymous) etc, in order to relate them to the answers regarding the children.

Variables of the research

Independent variables: the characteristics of the group of subjects - age, gender, civil status, socio – professional status, income level, education, foreign languages, computer skills.

Dependent variables: the characteristics and the behavior of children, as well as the nature of the relationship between family and kindergarten, as they are perceived by the parents.

The general research hypothesis

There are differences in the way parents perceive the kindergarten and the behavior of their own children, according to certain characteristics of their own.

Secondary hypothesis

Parents have different opinions on the role of kindergarten in the children’s development. Parents report the existence of an aggressive and/or anxious behavior at their children, according to child’s age. Parents are interested to participate in parental counseling activities.

Table 1. Description of the group of subjects

Characteristics	χ Frequency/percentage (rounded)
Age	
20 – 30 years	225; 17%
30 – 40 years	1075; 82%
Over 40	12; 1%
Gender	
Female	1057; 80%
Male	257; 20%
Computer skills	
Use the computer	344; 26%
Do not use the computer	967; 74%
Foreign languages	
Communicate	401; 31%
Do not communicate	911; 69%
Education	
High school	327; 25%
Post high school studies	252; 19%
Higher education	434; 33%
Post university studies	269; 21%
Socio – professional status	
Employee in the public sector	441; 34%
Employee in the private sector	224; 17%
Has his own business	354; 27%
Unemployed	92; 7%
Income level	
Under 350 lei	166; 13%
Between 350-1000 lei	399; 30%
Between 1000-2000 de lei	312; 24%
Between 2000-3000 de lei	191; 15%
Between 3000-6000 de lei	178; 14%
Over 6000 de lei	33; 3%

Results and discussions

The nature of the data resulted made us use the Chi square association test for the crosstabulation (Labâr, 2008 pages 109 – 113). The results of the test were as follows:

A. The children with parents who declared smaller income tend to go to kindergarden les often than the children with parents with higher income. The high costs of the kindergarden may explain why some parents tend to take their children there less often.

Pearson Chi-Square: $\chi^2=37,209$, df=10, Asymp. Sig. (2-sided): ,000:

Table 2. Residual frequencies and adjustments solved after the correlation of the following variables: the parents' income and the frequency of preschool children at kindergarden.

			Income						Total
			smaller than 350 lei	between 350-1000 lei	between 1000-2000 lei	between 2000-3000 lei	between 3000-6000 lei	over 6000 lei	
FR_GRAD1	every day	Count Adjusted Residual	154 -,9	366 -4,3	305 2,3	190 2,7	161 ,4	33 1,2	1209
	two to three times a week	Count Adjusted Residual	8 ,7	31 4,7	6 -2,1	1 -2,6	4 -1,1	0 -1,2	50
	once a week at most	Count Adjusted Residual	1 1,1	0 -1,2	0 -1,0	0 -,7	2 2,7	0 -,3	3
Total		Count	163	397	311	191	167	33	1262

B. The parents with children aged between 3 - 4 years old and 4 - 5 years old declare that they spend with their children almost the same amount of time every day. On the other hand, the parents with children frequenting the “big group” declare to spend more time with their children than those with children at the preparatory group. Preschool children aged between 6 – 7 years old generally have more emotional, cognitive, social and autonomy competences than those aged between 3 and 6 years old. This fact may be making the parents of the children frequenting the for school (preparatory) group to spend less time with the preschool children from this age segment.

Pearson Chi-Square: $\chi^2=133,089^$, df=4, Asymp. Sig. (2-sided): ,000:*

Table 3. Residual frequencies and adjustments solved after the correlation of the following variables: the parents' daily time spent with children and the age of the preschool children.

GROUP * TIME_C Crosstabulation

			TIME_C		Total
			,00	1,00	
Group	1,00	Count	59	270	329
		Expected Count	83,3	245,7	329,0
		Adjusted Residual	-3,6	3,6	
	2,00	Count	90	363	453
		Expected Count	114,7	338,3	453,0
		Adjusted Residual	-3,3	3,3	
	3,00	Count	14	141	155
		Expected Count	39,2	115,8	155,0
		Adjusted Residual	-5,0	5,0	
	4,00	Count	156	167	323
		Expected Count	81,8	241,2	323,0
		Adjusted Residual	11,0	-11,0	
Total		Count	319	941	1260
		Expected Count	319,0	941,0	1260,0

C. In comparison to the parents with children aged between 3 and 6 years old, the parents with children at the for school (preparatory) group (6/7 years old) declare to be in a greater need of parental counseling. From these parents, 44% declared they could use the counseling of a psychoeducator or a logopedist. This high proportion could be due to the fears regarding the child's capacity to adjust in the 1st school year.

Pearson Chi-Square: $\chi^2=301,326^*$, df=12, Asymp. Sig. (2-sided): .000:

Table 4. Residual frequencies and adjustments solved after the correlation of the following variables: the age of the children and the need of educational counseling of the parent.

			CONS					Total
			1,00	2,00	3,00	5,00	6,00	
GROUP	1,00	Count	12	2	46	33	231	324
		Adjusted Residual	,3	-5,2	-3,3	9,3	2,2	
	2,00	Count	24	1	110	0	304	439
		Adjusted Residual	2,9	-6,9	2,9	-4,5	1,6	
	3,00	Count	5	4	28	1	84	122
		Adjusted Residual	,4	-1,6	,7	-1,4	,6	
	4,00	Count	0	74	62	0	172	308
		Adjusted Residual	-3,8	14,0	-2	-3,5	-4,5	
Total		Count	41	81	246	34	791	1193

D. Almost 60% of the parents (94 of a total of 159) with an income of less than 350 lei declare to be in need of parental counseling. The difficult financial situation makes them say that they are in need of counseling for education their children. The identification of these parents and the intervention thought parental counseling program is, in this case, even more necessary as these families can turn themselves into risk categories.

Pearson Chi-Square: $\chi^2=313,826^*$, df=20, Asymp. Sig. (2-sided): .000:

Table 5. Residual frequencies and adjustments solved after the correlation of the following variables: income level and the parents' need of educational counseling.

			CONS					Total
			1,00	2,00	3,00	5,00	6,00	
INCOME	Less than 350 lei	Count	12	4	73	5	65	159
		Adjusted Residual	,5	-2,2	8,6	,3	-6,4	
	Between 350-1000 lei	Count	27	19	45	8	258	357
		Adjusted Residual	,9	-1,2	-4,3	-,8	4,1	
	Between 1000-2000 lei	Count	41	12	75	1	180	309
		Adjusted Residual	5,5	-2,2	2,0	-3,1	-2,3	
	Between 2000-3000 lei	Count	0	0	38	20	115	173
		Adjusted Residual	-3,8	-3,8	,6	7,5	,8	
	Between 3000-6000 lei	Count	0	33	15	0	130	178
		Adjusted Residual	-3,8	6,9	-4,3	-2,5	2,8	
	Over 6000 lei	Count	0	12	0	0	21	33
		Adjusted Residual	-1,6	7,0	-2,9	-1,0	,0	
Total		Count	80	80	246	34	769	1209

E. The parents with children frequenting the small group, the middle group and the big group are more willing to take part at the activities of an educational resource centre than the parents with children at the for school (preparatory) group. Their low interest in the issue of early education is probably due to the fact that their children are about to start school.

Pearson Chi-Square: $\chi^2=225,907^*$, $df=6$, Asymp. Sig. (2-sided): .000:

Table 6. Residual frequencies and adjustments solved after the correlation of the following variables: the age of the children and the participation at the activities of the educational resource centre.

Crosstab

			CENTRE			Total
			1,00	2,00	3,00	
GROUP	1,00	Count	162	47	32	241
		Adjusted Residual	4,4	-5,7	1,8	
	2,00	Count	240	108	46	394
		Adjusted Residual	3,0	-3,9	1,2	
	3,00	Count	87	10	25	122
		Adjusted Residual	3,9	-6,6	4,0	
	4,00	Count	90	202	5	297
		Adjusted Residual	-10,1	14,2	-5,7	
Total		Count	579	367	108	1054

F. More than half of the parents who send their children to kindergarten daily declare that they would be willing to take part at the activities of an educational resource centre along with their preschool children. This proves that parents are willing to take part at different educational and parental counseling programs.

Pearson Chi-Square: $\chi^2=12,037^*$, $df=2$, Asymp. Sig. (2-sided): .002:

Table 7. Residual frequencies and adjustments solved after the correlation of the following variables: how often they go to kindergarden and the participation at the activities of the educational resource centre.

			CENTRE			Total
			1,00	2,00	3,00	
FR_GRADI	every day	Count	611	343	106	1060
		Adjusted Residual	2,7	-3,5	1,0	
	two to three times a week	Count	14	23	2	39
		Adjusted Residual	-2,7	3,5	-1,0	
Total		Count	625	366	108	1099

G. Almost 2% of the respondents identify at their children the presence of an aggressive behavior, most cases being registered at small children who frequent the “small group”.

Pearson Chi-Square: $\chi^2=50,333^*$, $df=3$, Asymp. Sig. (2-sided): .000:

Table 8. Residual frequencies and adjustments solved after the correlation of the following variables: aggressive behavior and the child’s age.

GROUP * I_36_C Crosstabulation

			I_36_C		Total
			,00	1,00	
Group	1,00	Count	310	19	329
		Expected Count	323,8	5,2	329,0
		Adjusted Residual	-7,1	7,1	
	2,00	Count	453	0	453
		Expected Count	445,8	7,2	453,0
		Adjusted Residual	3,4	-3,4	
	3,00	Count	154	1	155
		Expected Count	152,5	2,5	155,0
		Adjusted Residual	1,0	-1,0	
	4,00	Count	323	0	323
		Expected Count	317,9	5,1	323,0
		Adjusted Residual	2,6	-2,6	
Total		Count	1240	20	1260
		Expected Count	1240,0	20,0	1260,0

H. Almost 7% of the respondents identify their children as being anxious. Most of them frequent the “middle group” (31) and the for school (preparatory) group (58).

Pearson Chi-Square: $\chi^2=86,396^*$, $df=3$, Asymp. Sig. (2-sided): .000:

Table 9. Residual frequencies and adjustments solved after the correlation of the following variables: anxious behavior and the child's age.

GROUP * I_36_E Crosstabulation

			I_36_E		Total
			.00	1.00	
Group	1,00	Count	328	1	329
		Expected Count	305,0	24,0	329,0
		Adjusted Residual	5,7	-5,7	
	2,00	Count	422	31	453
		Expected Count	419,9	33,1	453,0
		Adjusted Residual	,5	-,5	
	3,00	Count	153	2	155
		Expected Count	143,7	11,3	155,0
		Adjusted Residual	3,1	-3,1	
	4,00	Count	265	58	323
		Expected Count	299,4	23,6	323,0
		Adjusted Residual	-8,5	8,5	
Total		Count	1168	92	1260
		Expected Count	1168,0	92,0	1260,0

Conclusions

Most of the parents included in this study declare that their preschool children frequent kindergarten on a daily bases and that they are aware of the activities their children do there. The main reason for most children to go to kindergarten is that there they have the possibility to “socialize and play with other children”. Nevertheless, in the case of the families with smaller income there is the tendency of not going to kindergarten that often. Generally, we can say that as far as the parents are concerned, there are common ideas regarding kindergarten, no matter their gender, age, education level or socio – professional statute. Referring to the inadequate behavior noticed by the parents, most 3 – 4 year children tend to have an aggressive behavior, while those between 6 and 7 tend to be more anxious. The parents with children aged between 6 and 7 years spend less time with them than the other parents. At the same time, they are less willing to take part at the activities of an educational resource centre. Nevertheless the parents with children at the for school (preparatory) group present a greater need of parental counseling than the other parents. Still, most parents are visibly interested in the possibility of taking part at the activities of an educational resource centre. The parents interest in this particular case, highlights the fact that kindergartens should develop their partnership with the families, diversifying the educational offer through the introduction of parental counseling services.

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