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Cooperation between Parents and Preschool Institutions through Different Concepts of Preschool Education

SANJA BERČNIK*¹ AND TATJANA DEVJAK²

∞ This paper analyses the importance, role, and methods of cooperation between parents and preschool institutions through the different concepts of preschool education and different educational approaches and formal frameworks. Through educational approaches, the authors analyse how cooperation affects the implementation of preschool education in alternative educational approaches, such as the Waldorf, Montessori, and Reggio Emilia approaches, and Slovenian public preschool institutions. They envisage that different educational approaches in preschool education perceive the importance and role of cooperation with parents differently and conclude that there are various models of cooperation, which can be demonstrated through a theoretical analysis of the aforementioned alternative preschool approaches. In their view, partnership promotes a shared commitment to the quality realisation of educational goals; it also develops understanding and an ethos of openness in the relationship between all actors in the process of care and education of preschool children.

Keywords: alternative educational concepts, cooperation between parents and preschool institutions, public preschool institution

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Sodelovanje med starši in vzgojitelji v različnih konceptih predšolske vzgoje

SANJA BERČNIK IN TATJANA DEVJAK

Prispevek skozi različne modele predšolske vzgoje in različne vzgojne pristope ter formalne okvire analizira pomen, vlogo in načine sodelovanja med starši in vrtcem. Skozi vzgojne pristope je analizirano, kako sodelovanje vpliva na izvajanje predšolske vzgoje v alternativnih vzgojnih pristopih, kot so: waldorfski, montessori in Reggio, ter v slovenskih javnih vrtcih. Avtorici predvidevata, da različni vzgojni pristopi na področju predšolske vzgoje različno pojmujejo pomen in vlogo sodelovanja s starši, ter sklepata, da obstajajo različni modeli sodelovanja, ki jih prikažeta skozi teoretsko analizo omenjenih alternativnih predšolskih pristopov ter skozi rezultate nekaterih raziskav, izvedenih v slovenskem prostoru za javne vrtce. Rešitev vidita v partnerskem odnosu med starši in vzgojno-izobraževalno ustanovo. Bistvo partnerskega sodelovanja je v izpostavljanju podobnosti in razlik ter prepoznavanju močnih področij – staršev in strokovnih delavcev vrtca. Po njenem mnenju partnerstvo spodbuja deljeno zavezanost za kakovostno realizacijo vzgojno-izobraževalnih ciljev, oblikuje etos razumevanja in odprtosti v odnosu med vsemi akterji v procesu vzgoje in izobraževanja predšolskih otrok.

Ključne besede: alternativni vzgojni koncepti, sodelovanje s starši, javni vrtec

Introduction

The requirement for cooperation between the educational institutions and parents has a long history. Comenius in the 17th century, Pestalozzi in the 18th century, followed by Dewey and Petersen (according to Schleicher, 1989) highlighted the recognition that the influence of parents is indispensable in the establishment of the care and education of the child. Throughout history, there have been three different views on the cooperation with parents (ibid). First, the right of parents to choose education for their children (private schooling, home schooling) has been at the forefront; second, the active participation of parents (around 1960, a period of democratic reform); third, the cooperation was stressed especially when traditional school methods did not meet the educational requirements (period of progressive pedagogy). There have also been differences in the legal frameworks regarding cooperation with parents and in the organisational structure of cooperation.

This paper aims to analyse the importance of the role and methods of cooperation between parents and preschool institutions in different models of preschool education and to determine how cooperation affects the implementation of preschool education in the Slovenian public preschool institutions and alternative educational approaches, such as Waldorf, Montessori, and Reggio Emilia. We assume that the different educational approaches in preschool education perceive the importance and role of cooperation between parents and preschool institutions differently and, consequently, assume that there are various models of cooperation. We will present forms and models of cooperation, through a theoretical analysis of the aforementioned alternative educational approaches and through the results of some studies that have been conducted in the area of Slovenian public preschool institutions that operate under the Curriculum for Kindergartens.

Models of preschool education

The democratisation of society and scientific findings throughout the world led to new approaches in the field of pre-school education. Let us only mention two that have left their mark on organised preschool education. In the early 1960s, the recognition of early learning and socialisation in groups was enforced regarding children's development (Vonta 2009). Authors (Batistič Zorec, 2003; Devjak, Skubic, Polak, & Kolšek, 2012; Vonta, 2009) note that policymaking about the care and education of preschool children in individual countries has undoubtedly been affected by the perspectives of these countries

on the question of who is responsible for the care and education of children: parents (the private sphere) or society (country recognises childcare as a public issue). In countries where the issue of childcare is perceived as a private issue of working parents, the policies of institutional care are less developed and targeted only at groups of children from families with low social-economic status, children from immigrant families, children with special needs, etc. In contrast, countries that have recognised childcare as a public issue have developed a policy that understands the right to high-quality programmes of preschool education as a universal right. Family policies and the policies of preschool education in the European Union are two areas that are left to the regulation of each Member State; however, at present, certain social problems transcend the borders of individual Member States, and certain decisions or guidelines are also taken at the supranational level, in the framework of the European Union. From the OECD report (2002), a trend towards decentralisation and transfer of powers from the state, to lower levels of government has been observed. The reason for this decision is to approximate the service to the user, better adapt to local needs, the needs of users and increase choice. The report also notes that in some cases this advantage can become a weak area (arbitrariness of local authorities, the question of adequate funding, quality control, etc.). Behind the success of decentralisation, we recognise the political climate and the historical context of a specific system of preschool education (ibid).

Three models characterise preschool education. The first is the most important and applies to the vast majority of preschool education: professionally and institutionally organised preschool education that puts the child at the forefront. This model of preschool education ensures institutional care in accordance with the tradition of childcare, intervention programmes, and preparation for school in the public preschool institutions. Programmes within this model differ according to the time scale, intensity, duration, teaching methods, curriculum, training of teachers, and the ratio between the number of preschool teachers and children. This so-called *institutional model* can be extended further in cooperation with parents, families, and communities, leading to the so-called *combined model*.

The second main model is *child-focused, home-based care and education programmes*, which are most commonly led by relatively unschooled individuals, such as parents or paraprofessionals.

The third model is a set of *parent- or family-focused support programmes* that offer a variety of services and activities tailored to the multiple needs of families.

The most successful are in fact programmes that consist of several models that run under professional supervision, have sufficient funding to be

implemented in small groups, a good ratio between the number of children per adult and adequate income for employees. These programmes consist of intensive, child-centred preschool education together with intensive participation and parental education, programmed educational home activities and measures to support the family (Devjak et al. 2012; Leseman 2009).

To the three presented models, we add some alternative educational approaches, which were developed at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries with reform pedagogy. During this time, many new ideas focused on different areas were born. Among them, the most well-known were 'education for the Arts' (Lichtwark), 'the movement of labour school' (Kerschensteiner), 'education for spiritual renewal' (Steiner), 'school of life - for life - with work' (Freinet), 'life pedagogy' (Decroly), 'scientific pedagogy' (Montessori), and 'education for the happiness of man' (Neill). Some ideas had theoretical and scientific arguments, some not, but most of them remained popular for more than half a century. Some of them remain current as overall concepts (e.g. Waldorf and Montessori) or only as individual elements, which are integrated into the life and work of public education, e.g. skill and spontaneous activity as a means of learning, experiential learning, teaching experiment, the importance of walks and excursions in nature, the meaning of visits to various institutions, Jena-plan, Dalton-plan, project method, and group lessons (Medveš, 1992).

Among these alternative educational approaches, we will, in parallel to the Curriculum for Kindergartens, concentrate on Waldorf Education by Rudolf Steiner, the pedagogy of Maria Montessori and the Reggio Emilia educational approach, whose founder was Loris Malaguzzi. Although these approaches, because of their specific directions, are not intended for all children, they still contribute to the diversification of the full range of public preschool education.

Waldorf preschool institutions, in the words of Batistič Zorec (2003), represent a good alternative to the teaching-oriented programmes emphasising specific academic achievements, but also the individual elements of Waldorf education, such as the play corners and the divisions that offer the possibility of withdrawal into privacy and unstructured material have been transferred into modern educational approaches. Furthermore, many interpretations and principles of Montessori pedagogy, which have been neglected for decades, are once again finding a place in the contemporary curricula of preschool education: age heterogeneous departments, pleasant furnishings, and toys on open shelves. As Devjak, Berčnik and Plestenjak (2008) highlight, unlike the Waldorf and Montessori pedagogies, the Reggio Emilia educational approach includes all the essential foundations that are common to our concept of preschool education,

but differs primarily in the realisation, because in Italy, they have much better objective conditions for realisation than in Slovenia. However, Slovenian preschool institutions take into account some of their positions, among which we would like to highlight documentation, cooperation, project work, the active role of children, and the sensibility of the preschool teachers.

The importance of cooperation between parents and preschool institutions

Researchers (Murphy, 1980; Rockwell, 1995; Sallis 1988) highlight the crucial importance of cooperation between parents and educational institutions. Murphy (1980) and Duch (2005) note that parental involvement is especially significant for young children, children who are less accustomed to entering preschool institutions or primary school, and children in transition from one level to another. The texts *Building parent-teacher partnerships* (2006) and *School connections* (2008) characterise cooperation with parents as one of the key factors for effective education. Sallis (1988), Cotton and Reed (1989), Schleicher (1989) and Ngeow (2006) point out that the involvement of parents affects the conduct and behaviour of children in school, their willingness to learn, and school attendance. Olmstead and Rubin (1982), Cotton and Reed (1989) and Henderson and Berla (1994), note that long-term and more systematic cooperation between parents and educational institutions impacts children's school performance. School achievements are not only correlated with the support of the parents and the socio-economic status of families, but also with the participation of schools and parents. That cooperation with parents is a vital task of preschool institutions and schools is also confirmed by a number of other studies (cf. Mrvar, 2008), which also note that the effectiveness of the preschool institution, preschool teacher, school, teacher and the development and success of children, depends on the cooperation and relationship with parents. It is important, in cooperation with the parents, to be aware that the value system of parents regarding child education is often different from that of preschool institutions. This parental value system is the one that allows interpretation, values, goals, and strategies in childrearing, which reduces the uncertainty of parental education and the one that allows parents to lead the child's development in life situations. Thus, it is crucial that we ensure respect for diversity, choice, and respect for the family and its values and consideration of conflicting interests, which is possible only if we can establish and protect open space for conversation, dialogue, and cooperation. Such open dialogue with parents in the Slovenian public preschool institutions is ensured by the Curriculum for

Kindergartens (1999), in which the principle of cooperation with parents states that it is necessary to respect the private sphere of families, their culture, identity, language, worldview, values, beliefs, attitudes, habits and practices and to consistently account for their right to privacy and protection of personal data.

It is important to highlight that even though the initiators of the dialogue can be parents, preschool teachers are those who bear the primary responsibility for establishing and maintaining relationships that enable cooperation and co-creation of life and work in preschool institutions (Berčnik, 2014). The basic 'media' that help establish a proper relationship between the child and the preschool teacher in the preschool period is not only emotional warmth but also clearly set and expressed expectations to the child, which are, at least essentially, aligned with the expectations of parents. The ethics of participation focused on the fact that an objective observer (parents) is replaced by cooperation in which nobody has the final word, since the consensus is what constitutes the next step. It is important that the expert (preschool teacher) 'resigns' from the position of power and replaces it with a combined search and co-interpretation (Kroflič, 2001). Transferred in the context of preschool institutions, preschool teachers, as professionals, are responsible for the establishment of the dialogue and cooperation with parents. Lepičnik-Vodopivec (1996) examines the problem of cooperation when parents and preschool teachers enter into communication with different needs, desires, and goals. The research (Lepičnik-Vodopivec 1996, pp. 51–52) showed that parents mostly want to feel that their child is accepted and understood; they want to be listened to and recognised as good parents. Preschool teachers expect to be accepted and respected by parents and their children; they want to form a partnership to ensure the quality of life at home and in preschool institutions and receive feedback regarding cooperation. Needs that guide relationships between parents and preschool teachers are often different, which may cause dissatisfaction and discomfort. Resman (1992) also asserts that the expectations of the preschool institution or school and parents regarding the cooperation are those that influence the motivation of cooperation and affect the effectiveness of this cooperation.

Today, therefore, the importance of cooperation between parents and preschool institutions is widely recognised. The organisation of cooperation primarily depends on the traditions and the objectives of cooperation in different countries, as well as the social context, legal frameworks, ideological beliefs and situational needs. Continuity between the family and the preschool institution is one of the principles of the Curriculum for Kindergartens (1999) in Slovenia. Regarding the relationship between parents and educational institutions, diverse authors (Bastiani, 1993; Macbeth, 1993; Meighan, 1989; Munn,

1993; Resman, 1992; Schleicher, 1989; Whalley, 1997) often discuss partnership, as well as client and paternalistic relationships. The client relationship is mainly focused on the right of parents to choose the preschool institution for their child. In the paternalistic relationship experts 'teach' parents who are not in an equal position and, therefore, cannot be equally involved in discussions and decision-making in situations in which it is necessary to use expertise. A partnership involves the sharing of responsibilities, power, showing affection, setting common goals, and working together (Berčnik 2014; Devjak & Berčnik 2009).

Next, we will analyse the role and importance of cooperation between parents and preschool institutions through various educational approaches in preschool education and consequently reveal the dominant model of cooperation (partnership, client, paternalistic) in an individual approach.

Cooperation between parents and preschool institution in various concepts of preschool education

In Slovenia, in the Kindergarten Act (1996, 2005) and the Law on the Organisation and Financing of Education (1996, 2007), the articles that determine the cooperation between parents and public preschool institutions and the rights and duties of parents can be identified. The Kindergarten Act (1996, 2005) states that the preschool institution must define cooperation with parents in the annual work plan, which must be presented to parents in a special publication (Article 11); three representatives of the parents are included in the Council of Public Kindergarten at the level of public preschool institutions (ZOFVI, 1996, 2007, Article 48). For the organised exercise of parent's interest, the preschool institution establishes the Council of Parents, in which each department has one representative, who is elected by parents at the parental meetings³ (ZOFVI, 1996, 2007, Article 66). The importance of cooperation between parents and preschool institutions in the Curriculum for Kindergartens (1999) has been upgraded with the principle of cooperation with parents, which defines the terms of cooperation, which (in our opinion) include elements of partnership. Parents in preschool institutions not only have the right to receive information about the programmes and their child, but they also have the right to participate in the planning of life and work in the preschool institution and in the department, and they even have the right to active participation in

3 The Council of Parents proposes above-standard programmes, gives its consent to the principal's proposal of above-standard services, gives an opinion on the programme of development of preschool and the annual work plan, discusses reports on educational issues, deals with complaints from parents, and elects the representatives for the Council of Public Kindergarten (ZOFVI, 1996, 2007).

educational work (in consultation with preschool teachers). Preschool institutions must also systematically inform parents about their rights and responsibilities. Cooperation in the Slovenian public preschool institutions is conceived as a central aspect of the quality of preschool education, and the relationship particularly stresses the importance of the division of responsibilities and powers, which is the basis for the development of partnership. According to Bastiani (1993), partnership includes sharing responsibility, power, showing affection, setting common goals, and working together. Other authors (Golby, 1993; Macbeth, 1993; Raab, 1993) also write that the partnership consists of equal contributions of something worthwhile on the way to the common goal. The precise balance of power between the two protagonists is of utmost importance. Mrvar (2008) summarised that the partnership consists of the joint efforts of parents and (preschool) teachers for children's development and learning. Partnership is primarily intended for children, but it also helps (preschool) teachers and parents to change and improve their attitude towards the child.

It is also necessary to emphasise that the cooperation between parents and the preschool institution has the provision of services at the forefront, but not interference in their private spheres. As already mentioned, the public preschool institution must take into account and respect the child's parents' culture, identity, language, worldview, values, beliefs, traditions, and practices, but parents must take into account the limits of their involvement, which should not interfere with the professionalism of the institution. Constructive cooperation with parents delivers to the preschool teacher a series of professional obligations but also many professional benefits. Mutual exchange of information and insight into the child's individual needs and development efforts help both parents as well as preschool teachers and form a basis of joint action and solving of problems in childhood and adolescence (Devjak et al. 2010)

In recent years, in the increasingly recognised Reggio Emilia educational approach, the role of parents has become vital, both at the level of department and at the level of the preschool institution. Parents are expected to participate in discussions on a preschool institution's policies, responsibility for the development of children as well as in the design of curriculum and its evaluation. According to Hočevar and Šebart (2010), some authors who analyse the Reggio Emilia approach point out that this involvement of parents and staff in preschool institutions is an example of cooperation with adults and peers for the children. They also write that parents are actively involved in the management of the preschool institution: they are included in the implementation of the educational process and help with collecting information. Preschool institutions in Slovenia also organise various forms of cooperation between parents

and the preschool institution, and parents participate in various activities that establish a link between the preschool institution and parents and between parents, preschool institutions, and the local environment.

If we can, therefore, say that the Reggio Emilia educational approach has developed a partnership with parents, it is necessary to point out that Slovenian preschool institutions are 'on the way' from client cooperation, in which the emphasis is only on the right of parents to choose preschool institution for their child, to the partnership, which particularly emphasises the already mentioned power distribution.

Research (Devjak et al. 2010), conducted in 2009 within the framework of Professional Training for Professionals in the Implementation of Elements on Special Educational Principles of the Reggio Emilia Concept in the field of preschool education, which involved 96 preschool institutions from all over Slovenia, and 1587 parents, showed that 13.6% of parents completely agree with the statement that they are involved in the designing of the rules and regulations applicable to the preschool institution; 37.6% of parents agree with this statement, and 21.1% partially agree. There is probably a reason for the slightly lower percentage of agreement with this statement because, in the opinion of parents, adopted legislation, regulations and acts cannot be changed. Regarding the next question (Are they involved in shaping the programme of life and work in the preschool institution?), the trend of agreement can be seen: more than 73% of parents answered affirmatively. This shows that preschool education in Slovenia is on the path to forming a partnership with parents, since similar research (Devjak & Berčnik, 2009), carried out in 2007 showed, that only about a third of the surveyed parents believed that leadership of the preschool institution often take into account their suggestions in drafting the programme.

Preschool institutions are increasingly aware that the successful realisation of the objectives, principles, and curricula for preschool education depends on the active participation of parents. Partnership is not about reducing the autonomy of preschool teachers and preschool institutions, but 'that extra something in education', the unification of educational approaches, the openness of the curriculum and for democratic pluralism and the education of children. It is essential to be aware that, as pointed out by Katz (1994), the quality of the cooperation of parents in the Reggio Emilia educational approach results in the quality of experience for their children. The author believes that the enthusiasm and desire of children to attend the preschool institution and work on projects is what made their parents want to participate. This is a dynamic phenomenon in which good work with children arouses the interest and desires of parents for cooperation, their integration effects preschool teachers, who then

put even more effort into their work, thereby re-attracting parents. It is a kind of virtuous cycle that has a positive effect on all involved. Kroflič (2010) points out that very democratic relations based on the active participation in the relations between the three main actors (children, teachers, and parents) are the foundation of the design of preschool institutions in Reggio Emilia.

As recorded by Edmunds (1992), the coordination and unification of educational influences of family and preschool education are also of utmost importance in Waldorf pedagogy, which is based on anthroposophy and sees the sense of studying humans in determining the causal link between spirituality and physical development. Particular attention is given to the preschool age, when the environment is organised as an extension of the home. Everything takes place naturally and unobtrusively under the guidance of the teacher. What happens in those first years, in their opinion, conditions individuals' physical, mental, and moral lives. The main method of learning in the preschool period is imitation; as Steiner (1987) says, that care and education in this period mean that people surrounding the child show him what to imitate. For this reason, preschool teachers, as well as parents at home do everything in the presence of children (dust, wash dishes, sweep, water flowers, etc.) and with their help, when possible. It is crucial, therefore, to coordinate the educational influences of family and preschool institutions, because only this offers the child a sense of security, and close contacts to better understand the child's needs. As noted on the website of a Waldorf preschool institution from the Gorenjska region of Slovenia (Waldorf Preschool Institution, 2010), parents have the right to respect and take account of their role as the main actors of the responsibility for the child's upbringing and development, the right to information about the programme and operation of the preschool and active participation in the planned activities, the right to information about the child's well-being and development, the right to expert assistance in bringing up the child, and the right to privacy of the family. They also have some obligations, of which we would emphasise acquaintance with the life of the preschool institution and the organisation of work, cooperation with the preschool teachers according to the child's best interests (information about significant changes in the child and in the family), and adherence to the professional decisions of preschool teachers and an agreed policy on the premises.

As highlighted by Edmunds (1992), the Waldorf educational approach desires that parents, while observing developments in the preschool institution, coordinate domestic life in harmony with that which the child receives in the preschool institution, which implies a paternalistic relationship with parents. Resman (1992) characterises such a relationship as the experts 'teaching'

parents and convincing them of the importance of professional decisions, made by preschool teachers, but at the same time not allowing equal participation in the decision-making in situations where expertise is necessary. In the Waldorf educational approach, cooperation between parents and the preschool institution is essential, because the initiative of the parents is a fundamental form of cooperation. Among the forms of cooperation between parents and preschool institutions, there is pairing with the basics of Waldorf pedagogy and the organisation of the preschool institution (publications, information at the first meeting with the preschool teacher); reception talks, which are attended by parents and their children (first personal contact, at which the preschool teacher receives basic information and impression of the child); parents' evenings, during which pedagogical and other issues are discussed; workshops for making toys and other objects; individual conversations about the child, taking place at the request of preschool teachers and/or parents, visits of children at their home (preschool teacher visits the child if the parents invite her to visit; these visits especially strengthen the bond between the child, preschool teacher, and parents). Parents may visit children in the preschool institution after consultation with the preschool teacher. They are also involved in different celebrations and trips, which can also be promoted by them. They also participate in finding additional financial or material resources for the preschool institution (donations, sponsorships, purchase of materials under favourable conditions, etc.). The preschool institution may also suggest to parents that one of them assume the role of a trustee, which connects the preschool institution and parents, receives and transmits parents' proposals to preschool institution and, vice versa, is responsible for maintaining good relations between parents and preschool teachers, helps in organising job actions, excursions, events and resolving other issues (Waldorf Kindergarten, 2010).

As highlighted by Serajnik (1994), Waldorf preschool institutions explicitly expect parents to regularly attend organised activities, although they have no significant impact on them. From this, we can conclude that parents who have decided to enrol their child in a Waldorf preschool institution, are committed to Waldorf pedagogy (education), which must also be taken into account in home education. This can be accurately seen, for example, in the relation to media literacy, in which, according to Waldorf pedagogy, watching television is harmful to children's physical and mental development. It is believed that the child's soul is dulled by the radio, disc, cassette, video, etc.; therefore, it is expected that parents at home also eliminate watching TV and using other media. If parents do not comply with this, and the child shows the consequent adverse effects (restlessness, aggressiveness, poor concentration, impaired communication

with other children, etc.), they reserve the right to exclude the child from the preschool institution, because they believe that these highly conflicting influences at home and preschool institution will be an additional burden to the child and hinder the child's development (Devjak et al., 2008).

Kroflič (2004) also discussed the problem of inadvisable monitoring of information via other media, especially because the contact of the preschool with the family is so very tight, which means that the child has no chance of receiving different perspectives on the issues of life. Despite close cooperation, we can see the paternalistic relationship with parents, because the parents must take the educational methods of the Waldorf approach as their own; it is not enough to merely accept them as part of a Waldorf preschool institution: they must also be implemented at home.

Unlike the Reggio Emilia educational approach and, in this light, also the Curriculum for Kindergartens and Waldorf educational approach, Montessori pedagogy emphasises that the family is the ideal environment for a young child, but this is confined to the first three years a child's life, when the child, without choosing to, absorbs the feelings, attitudes, and knowledge from parents and other adults in his presence, where the security, love and personal attention of parents are the major contributors (Lillard, 1973). After the third year of age, when the child is beginning to focus on certain impressions obtained by intentional interaction, it is necessary to prepare a stimulating environment, with the possibility of a free, rich, and deliberate selection of activities. The environment in the Montessori preschool institution is particularly original, because the activities are not selected according to the criteria of adults but according to the criteria of children. In designing such an environment, a Montessori preschool teacher (one could also say Montessori adult) has a major role. The preschool teacher is seemingly passive, because he/she acts merely as a trustee of the environment, as a person who helps the child to interact with materials and resources as well as an observer. The Montessori preschool teacher is, therefore, a vital part of the environment in the preschool institution; his main task is to prepare an environment that will allow the natural development of the child and not to teach or otherwise dominate him. Montessori (2006) considers that the child is best assisted only when he is well understood. Examination of the Montessori pedagogy reveals that no explicit role of parents is expressed, only that their mission is to protect the child and to care for him in the deepest sense of the word. The main objective of Montessori pedagogy is, in fact, to liberate children from adult pressures, which seek to impose the content, timing, and rhythm of learning and models of behaviour. (Montessori, 2009). In the Montessori preschool institution called 'Hiša otrok', it is stated

that their mission is to create a suitable environment for the integrated child development and that, as a result, participants in the educational process are children, educators, and parents. Cooperation and integration with parents are regarded as a crucial part of quality preschool education and the creation of the most appropriate environment for the child's development. The parents participate in different ways, from the open houses to personal conversations before enrolling a child in a preschool institution, to training and lectures for parents and conventional consultation hours and meetings with parents. Parents are also included in the production of Montessori materials and in the issuing of the internal magazine of *Hiša otrok* (Parents Cooperation, 2010). In a preschool institution called 'Angelinvrtec', in addition to the aforementioned ways of cooperation, they also organise the evening with the fathers and mothers, bringing flowers at least once a year, picnic at the end of the year, Holy Mass for all families, the possibility of trips with their families, participation of parents in the work of the group (presentation profession workshops), assistance in the supply of certain materials, and the possibility of observation in groups (Cooperation with the Kindergarten, 2010).

Kordeš Demšar (2010) wrote, regarding the first step of Montessori primary school, that it is preferable that parents attend a short, four-day training on Montessori pedagogy, which enables them to understand better when preschool teachers explain what, how, and with what material the child was working. She also wrote that, in principle, parents do not have to be experts on Montessori pedagogy; however, they are expected to participate at different levels. In establishing rules, they require the consent that a child must have limits and that parents will respond to the violations of the rules. It is essential to work in the same direction, because they believe that if they do not reach a consensus, the child cannot be calm and happy and does not develop as well as he can. This shows a paternalistic relationship with parents in the Montessori pedagogy, because it is written that if the parents do not agree with their methods, then it makes no sense that a child be included in a Montessori preschool institution. It is believed that the intellectual level is important, but even more important, in this early period of life, is the child as a whole, for which parental involvement is essential. One condition for the entry to the Montessori preschool institution, which is specifically discussed with the parents is that parents are willing to cooperate actively with the preschool institution or school, which means that they are prepared to contribute according to their knowledge and skills. They are expected to come to the preschool institution at least once a year and spend a day with the children, to see what is happening, how the dynamics of the group are, who the children with whom their son or daughter is spending his/her time with are.

Looking at the Montessori pedagogy, we can, despite the paternalistic attitude, deduce that the main role of the parents is that of a client, since the choice of preschool institution and its educational approach is in the forefront. By choosing the Montessori preschool institution, parents must subordinate themselves to its theoretical starting points. There is, however, a fundamental difference compared to the Waldorf educational approach: in the Montessori pedagogy, they do not advise parents on how to educate at home. It is clear that one of the main factors is a prepared educational environment in which preschool teacher has an active role. How parents educate or raise their children at home is not their concern if they accept their methods in the preschool institution.

Conclusion

Cooperation between parents and preschool institutions is central in both the Slovenian public preschool institutions, functioning under the Curriculum for Kindergartens, as well as in the Waldorf, the Montessori, and the Reggio Emilia educational approaches. Comparatively speaking, from the view of the theoretical frameworks of cooperation between parents and preschool institutions, we can observe a significant difference among them. These differences are not reflected in the forms of cooperation between parents and preschool institutions, since in Slovenia, Waldorf and Montessori preschool institutions are subject to the same regulatory frameworks of cooperation with parents as public kindergartens, but they can be seen in the relations towards parents or the relationship between parents and preschool institution. In the Reggio Emilia educational approach, we discern a partnership, because the parents are very actively involved in the life and work of the preschool institution and in their so-called 'emergent' curriculum. The main advantage, however, is in our opinion, the view of preschool teachers on cooperation. In the Reggio Emilia educational approach, parental participation is not accepted as a burden or even a violation of preschool teachers' professional autonomy but as an element of collegiality and the integration of different skills. Since some (preschool) teachers in Slovenia public preschool institutions still see cooperation with parents as a reduction and obstruction of their professional autonomy, we claim that we are on the path from the client relationship towards forming a partnership with parents. The results of the aforementioned studies also support this statement, since more and more parents feel that they have an active role in shaping the life and work of public preschool institutions.

The client relationship in Slovene public preschool institutions is, however, radically different from that in the Montessori preschool institutions, since

the method of work there is at the forefront of the choice of preschool institution. When parents decide to enter their child in the Montessori preschool, they are expected to become acquainted with the Montessori method and accept it as the sole method of work in the preschool. Parents do not have any influence on the organisation of life and work in preschool institutions, since there is focus on the prepared environment in which preschool teachers have the main role. Again, this cooperative relationship between parents and preschool institutions is different from the Waldorf pedagogy, in which a mainly paternalistic relationship can be detected. The parents are expected to accept their educational method as their own and follow it at home. However, they do not expect parents to become acquainted or specially trained in Waldorf pedagogy. They expect a lot from parents, but do not specifically justify why, and they reserve the right to exclude a child from preschool education if the parents do not enact their educational methods at home (e.g. rejection of media).

Differences in the relationship with the parents in the aforementioned alternative educational approaches can be attributed to their occurrence and the emergence of their first educational institutions. It is known that the emergence of preschool institutions in Reggio Emilia (which form partnerships with parents) was due to the interest expressed by parents of middle-class families, who wanted quality education in an institution for their children. They wanted an institutional care that went beyond the protection function, but later also fought that these preschool institutions came under city administration. The first Montessori preschool institution, called 'Casa dei Bambini', also started as an initiative of the parents and homeowners in slums; however, the reason was not quality education, but the withdrawal of children from the streets, where they were destroying property. In comparison with the parents in Reggio Emilia, they did not care what kind of education their children received, so long as they were off the streets, indicating a client relationship. Waldorf preschool institutions and schools are to this day generated on the basis of interest or associations of parents, who have the same views of education and want to make their children more creative and confident individuals in contact with the environment and themselves. This, however, does not imply close cooperation between parents and Waldorf educational institutions, but can be seen as a paternalistic relationship, which is reflected not only in relation to parents but also, for example in, as pointed out by Kroflič (2004), the public notion that the Ministry of Education and school inspection cannot interfere with the content of their teaching, whereas in Slovenia there are no 'experts' for this particular educational approach. This, of course, also means that the parents cannot interfere with the Waldorf concept.

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