Nursery School Cooperation with the Family in the Field of Media Education in Children

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Abstract:

Introduction: The paper focuses on a narrowly specific topic of the family cooperation with an institution of pre-school education - the nursery school (or also just the nursery), concentrating on a specific topic of "media education". It considers the determining factors and presents partial findings of a research survey aimed at the field of media education in nursery schools.

Methods: The paper contains the results of our own questionnaire research, which was carried out online in nursery school teachers. It also contains a theoretical definition of media literacy and media education in the context of the target group.

Results: The result is an analysis of the obtained findings and formulated proposals for measures in the given field, which are usable and applicable in practice.

Discussion: The individual presented results are continuously discussed with regard to the findings from the field of media education in the nursery school. Today, the world of the media is a common part of life even for children of pre-school age, and therefore it is necessary to teach them to orient themselves in it, which should be one of the tasks of the nursery school. In the Czech Republic, this issue has not yet been addressed at a significant level or to an appropriate extent. Our results are therefore closely linked not only to the discussion comments, but also to the conclusions drawn from them.

Limitations: The results of the empirical research may be influenced by the attitudes and prejudices of nursery school teachers in relation to media in pre-school children.

Conclusion: An early intervention can teach children to use media for their benefit and prevent media from negatively affecting them. The negative consequences of unrestrained effects of e.g. the television or

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mobile phones have been empirically proven. This information about the negative consequences is very general, distorted or superficial for the general public (parents), though. We consider the implementation of media education into the "teaching" process in nursery schools to be inevitable, even with regard to a closer cooperation between the institution and parents. However, this also places increased demands on training pedagogical staff in nursery schools in the subject area, creating methodological materials, etc.

Key words: nursery/nursery school, media education, media literacy, pre-school age, family, cooperation.

Introduction

The importance of media education for children is currently constantly growing. However, the rate of increase in this need often does not correspond to the rate of emergence of systems and the very reaction of the institutions that should implement it. We could discuss this paradox for a long time, as there are many factors affecting this fact. We would like to focus only on one of them, which is important from our point of view, and that is the area of cooperation between educational institutions - the family and the nursery school. This is based on an idea built on the respect for the principle of unity of educational requirements, which significantly affects the effectiveness of mutual efforts. However, it is not always easy to follow this principle in practice. In our opinion, significant (but not exclusive) variables here are the following:

- the nature of the cooperation itself (determined socially, and especially by the nature of the setting/management of the nursery realized in the direct work of a teacher),
- parents' personalities, their teaching style, way of life and attitudes,
- similarly, the teacher's personality,
- the level of society-wide perception of the issue of media education in the group of pre-school children.

From our point of view, all these factors are interconnected.

The issue of cooperation between the family and the educational institution (in our case, the nursery school) and parent education is actually a historical return to the original purpose of Fröbel's "children's gardens", which were to serve as not for educational work with children, but for educating their parents how to "work" with them (Hábl & Janiš Jr., 2010).

Historically, however, the general thematic area of the paper (cooperation between the family and the educational institution) is generally older. A parent cannot be an expert in all areas of today's modern world, know all the risks, etc. He/she must be "acquainted" with and educated in the area of new challenges that significantly and exclusively affect his/her children. We believe that parents

should also be offered education by the educational institution that their child currently attends. Although this is, from the point of view of some people, an obvious activity, the environment of media education and the media in general is indeed a dynamically changing area that requires knowledge of current scientific findings. Therefore, high demands are placed not only on parents, but also and primarily on nursery school teachers. They need (should) not only possess the required information, but also seek and use various ways of communication, cooperation and education of parents.

1 Cooperation with the family in the field of media education

In practice, we encounter different models of cooperation. Germany can provide some inspiration, where cooperation between the nursery schools and families is intensively supported (Schubert, 2018). In many facilities, the purpose is to conclude "educational" partnerships with parents based on mutual trust and recognition; their competencies are respected. Parents wish to leave the house with the feeling that they have found a good place for their child. Parents also participate in the "story" of the given facility. Cooperation (ideally, full of trust) is a prerequisite for a successful partnership between teachers and children's parents. Parents are also as welcome as children in the "KiTas" (Kindertageseinrichtungen) and they find space and opportunities for meetings and support (counselling). The parents' competencies are recognized and the needs of the family are taken into account in the provided services. Parents are offered a dialogue and counselling. The competencies of parents are the key points of pedagogical treatment (Hinke-Ruhnau, 2013). In most cases, this corresponds with the appearance and modification of the physical environment of the given facility.

At the same time, it is necessary to say that teachers (in Germany) are aware of the importance of cooperation with the family also in the field of media education; still, individual action hardly takes place in this respect (Friedrichs-Liesenkötter & Meister, 2015).

In the Czech Republic, cooperation with the family is also supported, but in some facilities, in our opinion, a certain distance persists, a kind of an invisible barrier, which is often created by the teachers themselves (perhaps subconsciously) and intuitively perceived by the parents. The perception of these subtle nuances of differences is frequently very emotional and rather difficult to grasp. In the Czech Republic, not as many materials have been published on this topic (cooperation of nurseries with families) yet as in Germany, for example. However, it is not that this is a neglected area; recently, the number of different educational opportunities (support) for teachers has been increasing. Still, the reflection in practice very much depends, among other things, on the situation of a particular facility and on the personalities of the teachers who work there. It would certainly be beneficial to direct more research attention to this area than before. There is practically no research that compares the view of parents and

teachers in relation to the given institution. Ordinarily, both groups are examined separately, or there is a more frequent research group, that is the group of teachers.

Textor (2018) distinguishes four developmentally older concepts of working with the child's family not only within the nursery school (as we understand it in the Czech Republic) (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Older concepts of cooperation with the family (adapted from Textor, n.d.)

Traditional work with the family (still appearing in some facilities) often takes place in nursery schools when entering the classroom. The work with parents is often limited to occasional scheduled "parent evenings" (in our country, meetings for parents) and, if necessary, pre-scheduled work with the family.

Intensive work is related to a critical view of the family education from the position of teachers (educators) and the associated tendency to provide parents with professional pedagogical knowledge. A typical topic for "family evenings" is, for example, dangerous effects of television, etc. Teachers are defined here as competent pedagogues, while parents are largely considered incompetent.

The third concept is "work with the family as a service". Here, the parents are perceived as clients whose needs are met through "working with the family". Typical activities within this concept include, for instance, various inquiries about the needs and wishes of parents, offers such as "coffee for parents", "round tables for parents", barbecues, etc.

The current latest concept of cooperation with the family is an educational (and pedagogical) partnership, which confirms the above explained. Mutual openness is crucial; all partners must find time to exchange important information. The child is perceived comprehensively - not only his/her competencies and abilities, but also strengths and weaknesses, interests, behaviours and habits, friendships, joys and problems (Textor, 2018). This kind of development describes the

situation in Germany, but it cannot be said that the same is true in other countries. There are high demands on teachers; it is not easy to adopt such a partnership in all circumstances. Both parties need to take on the partnership role and comprehend that it is in the best interests of the child. We should also build on relevant research findings, even though, as already mentioned, there is a lack of them in the Czech environment, or they only deal with partial areas.

Various forms of cooperation are applied within individual models. Schubert et al. (2018) consider - in particular - the following suitable forms of cooperation between schools and families in media education:

Informative format:

- documentation as one of the most important forms (photographs, a video, portfolio, etc.),
- letters to parents on the topic of media education (note: this form is not widely used in the Czech environment; these are thematically oriented letters for parents, which do not convey a strict pedagogical theory, but focus on the daily life of parents with children),
- a nursery newsletter (magazine),
- information materials for parents (brochures, leaflets on the topic of media education),
- recommendations of suitable and pedagogically valuable applications for digital media.

Consulting format:

- (developmental) dialogues (individual),
- dialogues on the arrival and departure of the child from the nursery,
- parent evenings on media topics (ideally supported by an expert on the topic; information, as well as examples),
- "parent days", where the parents can see the nursery school's work with (digital) media.

A survey – identifying the needs and wishes of parents in the field of media education.

Cooperation is always a reciprocal affair; on one hand, there is the offer (strategy) by the given facility, on the other hand, there are the above mentioned ideas, needs and settings of parents. In this case, we can also work on the assumption suggested by various surveys dealing with the characteristics of the types of parental approaches or focus. E.g., the survey School My Project for Idea Sense (2019) distinguished between four groups of parents (500 respondents - parents of children aged between 4-7 years old) according to the identified needs of the parents:

- those engaged with a clear idea (22%);
- those orderly with the need for control (28%);
- those communicative with an emphasis on relationships (26%);
- those undemanding without special expectations (24%).

We can perceive the differences among parents even more intensely in the following three approaches to media based on the DIVSI study (2013) (Lepold & Ullmann, 2018):

- Digital outsiders (37%) - these parents often perceive the risks of digital media in particular; they often raise their children in a space without digital media (authors' note: And, therefore, they may have problems with the implementation of media education in pre-school education, if not properly presented and understood.).
- Digital immigrants (19%) - these parents are aware of the pros and cons as well as the threats; they are often open to an offer of counselling or actively seek information themselves.
- Digital natives (44%) - these parents perceive the world of digital media mainly as entertainment; they often have a low or very low perception of risks; they do not limit their children in media consumption in any way.

From the above stated it is clear that it is necessary, not only in media education, to work with parents not as a homogeneous group, but to perceive the differences of individual groups and, based on that, to set a "strategy" of cooperation. Some elements may still appear to be common. E.g., as a part of a survey focusing on parents' perceptions of a nursery school teacher's personality, Váchová and Vítečková (2017) found out, among other things, that parents especially tend to appreciate sincerity, concreteness and clarity in relation to themselves. Which should also be applied to the level of cooperation in the field of media education in the child.

The results of some research (MPFS [online]) provide interesting data specifically focused on media in relation to young children (2-5 years). This study, which involved a sample of 623 parents, found out, among other things, that:

- only 50% of parents described the educational field "children and the media" (among other fields) as important; however, regardless of that, 10% of parents would greatly appreciate and 55% of parents would appreciate information on this topic,
- 15% of respondents rated their own subjective awareness of the topic "children and the media" as very good, 57% as good, 25% as not very good, and 4% as insufficient,
- provided that the child had attended a pre-school facility, 66% of parents confirmed the offer of a consultation on the topic of "children and the media" as part of parent evenings or individual consultations,
- only 43% of respondents perceive a nursery school teacher as an important source of information on the topic of "children and the media".

Schubert et al. found out that pre-school teachers (in Germany) are little aware of how the parents use media at home, but observe the parents' media behaviour in a nursery (for instance, using a mobile phone when a child is trying to communicate with a parent). In addition, they pay attention to information from

children, which they communicate directly to them or which they communicate to one another (e.g., the names of games, television programmes, etc.) as well as children's behaviour (role-playing games) (Schubert et al., 2018).

What the cooperation will look like and how it succeeds, depends on the mentioned teachers (as well as the management) in the nursery school as well. It is not just about the acquired competencies, but the foundation is laid in the very personality (personality traits) of the particular educator. We assume a connection with his/her attitudes to the actual implementation of media education in the nursery, to the media activity of children at the given age and, last but not least, to the level of their own media competencies and habits.

The area of competencies themselves is very extensive, and it is not in the possibilities or goals of this paper to address them in detail; consequently, for the area of interaction with a family with impaired functionality, we will only emphasize the social, communication and counselling competencies. We can also find some inspiration in social counselling; here, adapted according to Bobek & Peniška (2008):

- trust in the abilities and resources of parents;
- unconditional acceptance and respect for parents, no matter what they are like;
- non-expertise, avoiding being directive;
- self-confidence;
- flexibility in changing one's own attitudes and perspectives;
- willingness and ability to build a partnership;
- authenticity.

The cooperation between nursery schools and parents in the field of media education is a new topic for both parties. It is closely related to cooperation and communication in general. The failure to respect the importance and urgency of this issue can have fatal consequences on the lives of individuals, but in a broader context, also for the society as a whole. It is impossible to lean towards the naive idea, which unfortunately sometimes appears in the society, that the issue of the media and thus also media education does not apply to children in nurseries.

2 Research

In our survey (Kocourková & Janiš Jr., 2019; the project Support for Media Literacy in Pre-school Children), we obtained data from 251 respondents (nursery school teachers in the Moravian-Silesian Region of the Czech Republic as the location of the project). As a type of selection, we chose a survey selection, i.e. self-selection. We concentrated on finding out about the situation in media education and its context. Attention was paid - among other things - to:

- finding out about the situation in media use by children in the home environment (its existence confirms the need for media education in pre-school age with regard to the media used),
- the existence of communication between the school and the family on issues of media education,
- the form of communication between the school and the family on issues of media education.

We used only absolute and relative frequencies to describe the gathered data. We understand our survey primarily as an insight and input into the subject matter, and we will use the obtained data in other research as background data to identify the moderating variables and mutual relations among the variables, which also result from the tables. However, due to the low frequency of some groups of respondents, we did not address the above described. In some questions, the respondents could choose more than one option, so the sum of the relative frequencies is more than 100%.

The first four tables contain data for further identification of the respondents. Tables No. 1 to 4 imply that we interviewed relatively experienced teachers who work in medium to large nursery schools. In fact, a comparison of their experiences can be viewed positively, because they can reflect changes in the behaviour of the children and their parents, and thus evaluate the possible impact of media influence. At the same time, however, there may be a risk that practical knowledge of media is the ultimate condition for education in the field of media education. Although we do not intend to present stereotypical ideas that older people "work in a more difficult way" with media, we still assume that the knowledge of online games, YouTubers, etc. is more a matter of younger people.

Table 1

Characteristics of the respondents in terms of practice

<i><u>Length of practice in years</u></i>		
0-3	20	0.080
4-5	18	0.072
6-10	34	0.135
11-15	22	0.088
16-20	19	0.076
21 and more	138	0.550
Total	251	1.000

Table 2

Characteristics of the respondents in terms of the type of nursery where they work

<u>Type of school</u>		
Public	242	0.964
Private	9	0.036
Total	251	1.000

Table 3

Characteristics of the respondents in terms of the environment in which the nursery where they work is located

<u>Location</u>		
Town	152	0.606
Village	99	0.394
Total	251	1.00

Table 4

Size of the nursery where the respondent comes from

<u>Number of children in the nursery</u>		
Up to 28	34	0.135
29-59	39	0.155
60-120	131	0.522
More than 121	47	0.187
Total	251	1.000

The above data have a descriptive character and serve to describe the research sample in more details, that is why we consider these data important and significant for the interpretation of other findings.

The fact that media education is already important at this age of children is evidenced by our partial findings. They prove the necessity of nursery schools' cooperation with families in the field of media education. Unfortunately, even among educators, there are those who do not perceive it as such, or take this topic only as a marginal issue, which was also confirmed in our research.

Table 5

Data on the use of digital media by children in the home environment as found out by the teachers

<u>Use by children</u>		<u>Absolute frequency/n = 251</u>
Tablet	213	0.849
Mobile phone	182	0.725
PC or laptop	198	0.789
I do not know	22	0.088
Other	2	0.008

Table 5 obviously shows that pre-school children use digital media. It is not surprising in this table that tablets and mobile phones are dominant media, as these are the devices, which are user-friendly for children with regard to their size and relatively simple operation, for example in games. What is important for us, a high percentage of teachers know what media children use in their home environments. However, the fact that 8.8% of respondents stated they did not know whether children use digital media at home is striking. This evokes a lack of interest in this educational area, or an insufficient competence in its implementation, which must be based on the diagnosis of the condition and needs.

A relatively surprising finding is the high number in the PC or laptop category. Although the child may accidentally work his/her way up to an inappropriate content or activities on any type of a device, mobile phones and tablets, as well as activities on them - can be more under the control of parents. We assume that if a parent is engaged in another activity, the child can "do something" on a mobile phone or a tablet near him/her. By contrast, PCs or laptops usually have their given place. Although a laptop is logically also portable thanks to its construction, we do not believe that the child moves with it around the apartment, or that parents actively carry it to their child.

Table 6

Types of activities that children do on a computer/tablet

<u>Type of activity</u>		<u>Absolute frequency/n = 251</u>
Playing games	180	0.717
Playing online games	34	0.135
Watching YouTube videos	117	0.466
I do not know	65	0.259
Other	11	0.043

According to educators, the content of media consumption in pre-school children is often games and watching videos on YouTube. The risks include not only the fact that the child may accidentally click his/her way through to the content that is inappropriate for him/her, but also that watching even seemingly harmless videos can have a demonstrably negative effect on his/her development (Janiš Jr. & Kocourková, 2019). In our opinion, an early start to media education is an absolute necessity. As mentioned above, there is a significant percentage of parents who do not know how to deal with this on their own. In our opinion, as a result, the role of nurseries is crucial. Teachers (educator) should not only have appropriate competencies to implement media education, but should also be familiar with the "media environment" in which the children operate (i.e. know what children prefer, be familiar with the applications used, etc.). We are aware of the fact that this places high demands on the teacher, but it is not possible to argue that there is no space for it, and so on. It is an area whose importance is constantly growing and the reaction of the school must not be left behind. What we also perceive as an important finding, which was also reflected in this item, is that some educators do not know, that is, do not seek information about children's media behaviour and experiences.

Table 7

<i>Possession of a mobile phone by a child</i>		
<u><i>Possession of a mobile phone</i></u>		
Yes	44	0.175
No	107	0.426
I do not know about it	100	0.398
Total	251	1.000

The last one of the introductory tables (Table 7) only illustrates the above stated. Progress can be neither stopped nor denied; it is necessary to perceive reality and face it.

As for the cooperation between the nursery schools and children's parents, we aimed to discover whether they communicate with the parents about media issues.

Table 8

<i>Targeted communication with parents about the media</i>		
<u><i>Communication with parents about media</i></u>		
Yes, we have a positive response, parents welcome it	40	0.159
Yes, but we have a negative response (parents perceive it as control and restriction)	20	0.080
No, but we consider it	102	0.406

No and we do not consider it	89	0.355
Total	251	1.000

The results in Table 8 prove that communication with parents on the topic of media is rather marginal. It is a fact that 76.1% of teachers stated that they do not communicate with the parents on the topic of media in a targeted manner. Why they do not want to communicate with parents about the media issues is currently the subject of a further research. We can only speculate about the possible reasons: "Do teachers consider themselves (in)competent? Do they consider the topic of media education to be an important area?"

This is in stark contrast to the above stated data, which assume this necessity. The fact that children are growing up in a media (digital) world is not a state that has now emerged; it has been a continuous development for some time and the response from the point of view of pre-school institutions is insufficient in this respect. However, in order to defend educators, it is also necessary to say that they do not have enough support to do so, which some teachers would appreciate, based on the findings of our research.

Table 9

Form of communication with parents on the topic of media education

<u>Form of communication</u>	<u>Absolute frequency/n = 60</u>	
Personal conversation with the parent	48	0.8
Personal communication with a group of parents	24	0.4
Information on the notice board	18	0.3
Information on the school website	13	0.217
Information leaflets	10	0.167
Other	5	0.083

It is clear from the table that teachers most often use a personal conversation with a particular parent; we can estimate that this happens in the case of a specific situation or a problem. In the frame of this topic, communication with a group of parents is used very little, which indicates a low occurrence of activities such as seminars, workshops, discussions, etc. on the given topic. We see the reason in the small emphasis on the importance of media education in pre-school age again. (Only 69.3% of respondents believe that the topic of media education in the nursery is significant.)

Table 10

<i>Contact with parents via social networks</i>		
<i>Communication via social networks</i>		
Yes	94	0.375
No	154	0.614
No, but we consider it	3	0.398
Total	251	1.386

We were also interested in whether the school is in contact with parents via social networks; in other words, whether it itself uses digital media in communication. Only 37.5% of teachers confirmed this fact. Educators are often reserved and have unnecessary concerns about this way of communication.

Although we are aware of all possible risks of social networks, we consider them to be an important present-day communication tool, which, in some respect, can be the fastest tool (apart from phone calls) - for the purpose of sharing information, video conferencing, video calls, private messages, etc. Of course, it is not possible to predict a change of posts, but the share of those who do not communicate via social networks and do not even consider it is significant, not negligible. We believe that this fact needs to be changed in relation to both communication as well as cooperation in general, and in relation to media education.

However, it is a fact that even here educators are not given sufficient support to explain the possibilities/benefits and risks of various communication platforms.

3 Discussion

In this part of the paper, we would like to list a few selected scale items on which the teachers were to comment and which directly or indirectly complete the picture of the situation of cooperation or its importance in the nursery school.

Table 11

<i>Selected scale items</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>5</i>	
Prevention in the area of possible negative influence of mass media is sufficient in the Czech Republic.	002	0.06	0.29	0.42	0.21	1
Education of nursery school teachers is sufficient in the given topic.	0.04	0.21	0.26	0.36	0.13	1
I believe that some of the problem behaviours that occur in our nursery school are caused by the child's inappropriate access to the mass media.	0.15	0.4	0.25	0.16	0.04	1

Working with parents in this area/with this topic is challenging for me.	0.08	0.28	0.37	0.22	0.05	1
Primary prevention of the negative effect of the mass media is sufficient in our nursery school.	0.09	0.39	0.28	0.2	0.04	1
It is difficult for me to be aware of all the games or films that children are talking about.	0.27	0.37	0.15	0.16	0.05	1
Children are usually excluded from the group of others in connection with the mass media (they do not have a tablet, do not know a game, have not seen a film, etc.).	0.03	0.15	0.16	0.35	0.31	1

The values in the table are given as a percentage: 1 - strongly agree, 2 - agree, 3 - unresolved opinion, 4 - rather disagree, 5 - disagree.

A total of 63% of respondents are of the opinion that the situation in prevention of possible negative influence of mass media is not sufficient in the Czech Republic. Despite that, 48% of respondents believe that it is sufficient within their nursery. However, the rest of the data obtained are not consistent with this statement (e.g. the fact that 76.1% of respondents do not communicate with the children's parents about the topic of media). In the context of the above tables, we get into a situation where some statements are fundamentally contradictory. It is difficult to say what causes this discrepancy. Teachers probably do not perceive the full breadth of media education and its connection with the primary prevention of the negative effects of the mass media. They realize that primary prevention "must" be addressed, but they may perceive the area of media education in a detached way. This actual fact surprised us and it will require further specifying survey effort. The actual evaluation of the difficulty of communication in the field of media education with the family is related to this. It was probably difficult for educators to assess this scale, as in reality, many of them do not communicate with children's families on this topic.

In the item focused on finding out whether educators observe the connection between the negative effect of mass media and problematic behaviour of children, but no significant polarities were manifested. We attribute this to the fact that it is not a "mass" phenomenon, but these are often individual cases that are dealt with in practice.

We perceive positively the finding that children are not excluded from the collective of other children in connection with mass media, even though we expected the predominance of the opposite experience.

Our assumption has been confirmed in the survey. First, the teachers themselves perceive their support in the topic of media education as insufficient. Second, as we expected, it is difficult for many educators to know all games, films or applications that children use.

Conclusion

In this paper, we tried to reflect on the importance of cooperation between nursery schools and families in the field of media education and present the partial findings of our research in this area. Our starting point was the presented models of cooperation and the assumption of the highest effectiveness of cooperation (also in the topic of media education) within the educational model. Reflecting on these models and the obtained data, it can be assumed that the above unfortunately does not suggest the existence of an "educational partnership" between families and schools. Media education is often not perceived as a key educational topic. Some educators do not have appropriate competencies and they also lack significant institutional support for the development of these competencies. The educators themselves are usually aware of this.

To conclude, the situation is not very optimistic. Unfortunately, as we assumed in the introduction, the system's response lags behind the social needs. In our opinion, what needs to be changed in particular is the following:

- to pay attention to the very nature of the family-school partnerships in pre-school education institutions (self-evaluation; moving towards an educational partnership - mutual inspiration, examples of good practice, etc.);
- to be aware of the need for media education in pre-school education (especially on the part of the nurseries themselves);
- to create an offer of a quality support for teachers in this area (education, online support, etc.);
- to support teachers' learning activities (by the school headmaster),
- to apply meaningful supervision.

It would seem that it is "only" five points; however, it is five very comprehensive points that need to be reflected and implemented in practice, mainly with the help of individual partial steps.

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