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Review paper

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COOPERATION BETWEEN PRESCHOOL INSTITUTIONS AND PARENTS WITHIN EARLY CHILDHOOD ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

The goal of this research was to explore the perceptions of cooperation between preschool institutions and parents within Early Childhood Environmental Education activities, primarily within the dimension of including parents in preschool activities. In the theoretical framework of the study, we discuss the major aspects of cooperation between families and preschool institutions and the significance of learning about the environment for the cooperation process. Many authors agree that cooperation between families and preschool institutions comprises the following dimensions: information sharing between preschool teachers and parents, including parents in preschool activities, parents' involvement in supporting the child's development at home, and parents' participation in preschool institutions executive bodies. In this paper, we focus on the dimension of including parents in preschool activities through Early Childhood Environmental Education. The results show that the majority of questionnaire items exposed statistically significant differences between the perception of parents and the perception of preschool teachers when it comes to including parents in Early Childhood Environmental Education activities. We consider that a series of planned actions is necessary for including as many parents as possible in the Early Childhood Environmental Education activities. One of the main reasons for such an initiative is the veracity of such activities and the possibility for children to create and develop their creative abilities through research.

Keywords: Early Childhood Environmental Education; children; parents' involvement; preschool teachers

INTRODUCTION

Cooperation between family and a preschool institution reflects itself in the quality of mutual information sharing between preschool teachers and parents aimed at improving pedagogical competencies of the parents and their more efficient involvement in the upbringing of their children at home. This two-way process is accompanied by a series of specific circumstances, but the child's wellbeing should always be in the focus of such a partnership.

Involving parents into the life and work of preschool institutions is an issue which always gains special importance during the education system reforms. When new Fundamentals of the Curriculum of Preschool Education¹, metaphorically named The Years of Ascent, (The name represents a period of one's life usually associated with many open possibilities, and in which a person is characterized by energy, perseverance and enthusiasm) were passed in 2018, this issue attracted academic attention because parents have been considered as key partners in reaching the goals of institutionalized preschool education. The reform was implemented through a document: The new preschool curriculum framework² (Basis of the Program) was developed in partnership with the Ministry of Education, Science and technological development, the Institute for the Advancement of Education, UNICEF and the Institute for Pedagogy and Andragogy of the Faculty of Philosophy, University of Belgrade, and refers to the Republic of Serbia. The significance of the reform is reflected in the theoretical-value postulates on which the concept is built: how we see a preschool child and what kind of preschool practice we want. Upon its publication in the Official Herald in 2018, the document officially became the national framework for preschool education in Serbia (Breneselovic and Krnjaja 2021.)

¹ In Serbia there are:

- Compulsory pre-school upbringing and education is one year before starting school, at the age of six. In Serbia, preschool education is not obligatory until the age of six.
- From the school year 2019/20, the New Basics of the "The Years of Ascent" program will begin.
- On September 1, 2022, the last cycle of transition to the New Fundamentals of the program will begin, which will cover the entire system of upbringing and education on the territory of Serbia by September 1, 2023. The focus of this program is a project approach to the learning of preschool children.

² It is now in the last phase of implementation on the territory of the whole of Serbia. It is regulated by the following rulebook and law:

Pravilnik o osnovama programa predškolskog vaspitanja i obrazovanja – Osnove programa – Godine uzleta. *Službeni glasnik RS/Prosvetni glasnik*, 16/18. (Rulebook on the basics of preschool education programs - Basics of the program - The Years of Ascent. Official Gazette of RS / Education Gazette, 16/18.) According to law: *Zakon o osnovama sistema vaspitanja i obrazovanja* (2017). *Službeni glasnik RS*, br.88/2017. (*Law on the Fundamentals of the Education System* (2017). Official Gazette of RS, No. 88/2017.)

This fact further calls for more thorough research into this issue and questioning of all the relative factors which determine the parents' active positioning in the process of education of young children. In this context, in previous research (Marković, Stanisavljević-Petrović & Mamutović 2020: 111), it is very important to determine the parents' self-assessment of their involvement in the preschool education process. By being included in the preschool activities, parents become more competent in communication with their children, gain pedagogical knowledge which positively affects their parenting competencies, which in return has a positive effect on all the aspects of the child's development. Previous research on the matter has also shown that through involvement in preschool activities parents gain knowledge and practical skills on how to develop their child's abilities. (Powell et al. 2010, in: Jelić, Stojković & Markov 2018)

The possibilities for including and encouraging parents to cooperate in the process of their children's preschool education can be divided into six types: a) contributing to parents' competencies, b) communication with parents and informing them on the programs and the child's development and progress, c) including parents into volunteering activities with the support of the teachers, d) supporting teachers in designing homework that will encourage parents to get involved and help children, e) including parents into decision making through various bodies and parental associations, f) cooperation with the local community (Daniels and Stafford 2001).

Some authors emphasize that preschool teachers, in addition to other competencies, should also possess the competence for cooperation with parents (Samardžić & Travar 2016), because the teacher monitors the child's development and progress, informs the parents, and in case an intervention is needed, improves the parents' pedagogical and parenting competencies by including them in preschool activities.

Previous research has also shown that both parents and preschool teachers, each from their own perspective, participate in building this partner relationship that will directly influence the child's development. Preschool institution is a good place for a parent to ask questions and seek advice on successful parenting and raising their pedagogical competencies (Slunjski 2008 in: Vasiljević Prodanović et al. 2021), and parents in most cases prefer to turn to preschool teachers first. One of the most important factors defining the cooperation between preschool institutions and parents are the teachers' competencies for cooperation with parents and their attitudes towards this process (Samardžić & Travar 2016; Visković & Višnjić Jevtić 2017).

Early Childhood Environmental Education as a college course through the curriculum offers a range of possibilities for strengthening cooperation between families

and preschool institutions, especially within the dimension of including family into preschool activities. The following section of the paper explores in further detail the importance of Early Childhood Environmental Education for encouraging parents' involvement in preschool activities.

Cooperation between parents and preschool teachers was also the topic of research Vasiljević-Prodanović et al. (2021).

EARLY CHILDHOOD ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

Early Childhood Environmental Education is a pedagogical discipline that deals with exploring education in the field of environmental studies at preschool age. (Early Childhood Environmental Education is the formal title of the course. It is a compulsory course in Preschool Teachers' Training College.) In addition to the given definition, there is a more comprehensive one which includes the ways in which the child learns about their environment in the most suitable ways and grows into an individual useful to their community. For this goal to be achieved, the children are offered adequately used, diverse methodological approaches when in contact with people, animals, plants and objects in their natural environment and real-life situations, as well as when conducting various experiments and practical activities (Mihajlović & Mihajlović 2011). It is a pedagogical discipline because, in addition to the content, it is primarily interested in the ways of presenting teaching content. Early Childhood Environmental Education is a discipline that entwines all the content areas of preschool education. It integrates early music education, early physical education, early art education, speech development and the development of early mathematics skills.

Preschool-aged children's learning and Early Childhood Environmental Education are best realized in interaction with the children's environment. In this way, the child gains new experience which then plays a part in the formation of their life attitudes, values, behaviour patterns and the realization of their identity in general.

The subject of research of Early Childhood Environmental Education is the preschool child's environment, which is a very broad and comprehensive field. The task of Early Childhood Environmental Education is to introduce preschooler³ to the world around them in the most suitable way so they could grow into people who understand the natural and social phenomena around them. This can be achieved through

³ Preschool age is the period of a child's life before starting school. This period can be divided into younger (age 3 to 4 years), middle (age 4 to 5 years) and older (age 5 to 6 years, until starting school)

an easy and uninhibited cooperation between parents and preschool institutions. One of the goals of Early Childhood Environmental Education is to enable parents to support their children and help them develop their knowledge and skills, which will then help them gain a better understanding of the world around them (Mihajlović & Mihajlović 2011: 18). The development of children's observation, anticipation, questioning, research, repetition, deduction, decision making, practical application of tools and materials, is achieved through an adequate use of different methodological approaches in contact with people, animals, plants and objects in their natural environment, life situations, as well as through various experiments and practical work. Practice has shown that the outcome will be successful if the parents are willing to cooperate with the preschool teacher. In preschool age, the main learning areas are nature and natural phenomena, society and social phenomena and the products of human effort. The areas listed are also the natural environment of the parents, so it is very easy for them to get involved in the theoretical learning and the activities of the preschool group their children are in (Mihajlović & Mihajlović 2011: 43).

The college course, Early Childhood Environmental Education, is a good basis for involving parents in children's activities. This is because the subject of research in Early Childhood Environmental Education has a wide range of topics that it deals with, in which parents can be actively involved. For example, presenting one's own occupations, going with children and a preschool teacher in nature and recognizing plants or animals, including cleaning the environment, etc.

The role of adults, both parents and teachers, in the development and education of preschool-aged children is to promote emotional and social development of their children, to make the child's integration in the preschool group easier and to be constantly involved in the children's upbringing. The goal of the research is how successful it is.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

During the last decade, raising public awareness on the importance of environmental protection has received worldwide attention. When it comes to preschool-aged children, this can most efficiently be done by preschool institutions and parents. The main research question on which the research problem is based is to what extent parents are aware of the importance of the need to raise their children's environmental awareness and their role in this process.

The problem researched is the cooperation of families and preschool institutions on important issues related to environmental protection, and whether there is a consensus between parents and preschool teachers on the importance of this issue for the community as a whole. It is considered necessary that both factors (parents and preschool teachers) participate in this process as equal partners and cooperate towards the shared goal of achieving positive outcomes in educating children on environmental protection.

The main goal of the research is to determine whether there are statistically significant differences in the opinions of preschool teachers and parents on the importance of environmental protection.

In accordance with the set research goal, the following hypothesis was formulated:

There are statistically significant differences in the opinions of parents and preschool teachers related to the issues of environmental protection and the need to educate children on environmental protection from the earliest age. Based on the general hypothesis, the following sub-hypothesis was formulated:

There are statistically significant differences in the opinions of parents and preschool teachers related to information sharing on preschool activities and activities of parents focused on environmental protection.

Sample

In order to understand cooperation between parents and preschool teachers through the prism of Early Childhood Environmental Education, it is important to analyse the perceptions of the main participants in this two-way process and always keep in mind the children's well-being. After obtaining consent from the preschool institutions in several locations in the municipality of Kikinda in Serbia, the research was conducted with 45 preschool teachers and 63 parents whose children were at the time of research included in the educational process (they were present in the preschool when the questionnaire was conducted) organized by the preschool teachers who participated in this research. The analysis included eighteen preschool institution "Dragoljub Udicki". The preschool institutions located in the municipality of Kikinda, which consists of a large number of settlements. The consent of the director of the institution and the parents of the children was requested and obtained. Questionnaires were forwarded in sealed envelopes.

Research instrument

In order to evaluate the quality of cooperation between preschool institutions and families within the field of Early Childhood Environmental Education, a questionnaire was designed based on theoretical analysis and in accordance with the goal of this research – Questionnaire for evaluating the quality of cooperation between preschool institutions and parents within the dimension of including parents into preschool activities.

In this paper, we approach the study of the cooperation between family and preschool institutions from the point of view of Fantuzzo and associates (Fantuzzo et al. 2000). This position is based on the model of cooperation between the school and the Epstein family (Epstein 1996). The partnership between the preschool institution and the family is determined as the structure of the relationship. This implies a relationship between equals who have agreed on common goals, jointly determined their roles and have equally distributed authority in decision-making, for the benefit of the child.

The questionnaire consists of the demographic part intended for collecting basic information on the respondents (gender, employment status, place of residence and age) and a set of 9 items related to the cooperation analysis within the field of including parents into Early Childhood Environmental Education activities. The Questionnaire was designed in two versions: a) for preschool teachers (example item for teachers: *I encourage parents to participate in preschool activities as observers*) and b) for parents (example item for parents: *The preschool teacher encourages me to participate in preschool activities as an observer*).

The respondents answered the questions formulated in accordance with the research goal. The survey was anonymous and closed. The respondents indicated their level of agreement or disagreement with each item on a three-point scale (3 – “often”, 2 – “sometimes”, 1 – “very rarely”) with the option of adding a short comment. There were no comments in the returned questionnaires.

RESEARCH RESULTS WITH DISCUSSION

In this section of the paper research results are presented and interpreted.

Table 1. Encouraging parents to get involved in Early Childhood Environmental Education activities as observers

Respondents	often	Percentage	sometimes	percentage	very rarely	percentage	χ^2	p	C	total
Parents	5	7,94	50	79,37	8	12,70	36,721	0,000	0,25	
teachers	27	60%	12	26,67%	6	13,33%				

After analysing results presented in Table 1, we have come to the conclusion that the first item *The preschool teacher encourages me to participate in Early Childhood Environmental Education activities as an observer* (Item version for the preschool teachers: *I encourage parents to participate in Early Childhood Environmental Education activities as observers*) scores are as follows:

The findings show a statistically significant difference in the preschool teachers' and parents' responses to this first item, given the score $\chi^2=36,721$ ($p=0,000$; $df 2$) and contingency coefficient $C=0,25$ ($C_{max} 0,81$), which means that there is weak correlation between the two variables. We can claim that there is 99% certainty of statistically significant difference.

In the few comments added, the parents claimed that they had not been informed of this possibility, whereas a number of teachers wrote that they had encouraged parents to get involved in all the activities, but that the parents rarely exercised that right. There is an unease and there are often stereotypes in parents when it comes to their involvement in preschool activities (Daniels & Stafford 2001; Markov, Stepanov & Jelić 2016). This practically points us in the direction in which preschool institutions should guide and educate parents and help them understand the importance of observing preschool activities as an opportunity to observe their child and their behaviour in the peer group, their ability to solve problems, offer support to other children and develop social competencies. When being involved in preschool education becomes a more common practice among parents, children will become more relaxed and the parents will be able to better perceive their psycho-social development because they will be given the opportunity to observe their children in various situations.

Table 2. Encouraging parents to directly participate in Early Childhood Environmental Education activities

Respondents	often		sometimes		very rarely		χ^2	p	C	total
	count	percentage	count	percentage	count	percentage				
parents	20	31,75%	33	52,38%	10	15,87%	0,547	0,760	0,07	63
teachers	16	35,56%	24	53,33%	5	11,11%				45

After analysing results presented in Table 2, we have come to the conclusion that the second item *The teacher encourages me to directly participate in Early Childhood Environmental Education activities / I encourage parents to directly participate in Early Childhood Environmental Education activities* scores are as follows:

Analysis of the preschool teachers' responses to the same item leads us to the conclusion that 16 (35,56%) preschool teachers opted for "often", 24 (53,33%) for "sometimes", and 5 (11,11%) preschool teachers opted for "very rarely".

The findings show no statistically significant difference in the responses of preschool teachers and parents to the second item, given the score $\chi^2=0,547$ ($p=0.760$; $df 2$). That means there is a very weak correlation between preschool teacher and the parents. We can claim that there is no statistically significant difference.

Respondents from both groups stated in their comments that all the parents who were asked to come to the preschool and present their career, hobby, old crafts, sports they practiced, etc. accepted the invitation and actively participated in Early Childhood Environmental Education activities organized in preschool.

We can conclude that in times to come preschool teachers, when trying to directly include parents in Early Childhood Environmental Education activities organized in the preschool, will need to invite several parents to observe an activity, in order to free them from stereotypes and thus ensure that parents would accept their invitations to participate in and observe Early Childhood Environmental Education activities organized in the preschool. Research results show that parents need strong encouragement and support in order to become active participants in preschool activities (Vasiljević Prodanović, Krneta & Markov 2021). In that sense, teachers' competencies for cooperation with parents need to be strengthened.

Table 3. Organization of outdoor Early Childhood Environmental Education activities in preschool for children and their families

Respondents	often	percentage	sometimes	Percentage	very rarely	percentage	χ^2	p	C	total
parents	12	19,05%	45	71,43%	6	9,52%	2,396	0,301	0,14	63
teachers	14	31,11%	26	57,78%	5	11,11%				45

After analysing results presented in Table 3, we have come to the conclusion that the third item *The teacher encourages outdoor Early Childhood Environmental Education activities in preschool with children / I encourage parents to get involved in outdoor Early Childhood Environmental Education activities in preschool with children* scores are as follows:

The results of the preschool teachers' responses are as follows: 14 (31,11%) preschool teachers opted for "often", 26 (57.78%) for "sometimes", whereas 5 (11.11%) respondents opted for "very rarely".

The findings show no statistically significant difference in the responses of preschool teachers and parents to the third item, given the score $\chi^2=2,396$ ($p=0,301$; $df 2$), which means that there is weak correlation between the two variables. We can claim that there is no statistically significant difference.

Few parents stated in their comments that outdoor Early Childhood Environmental Education activities organized in preschool were very interesting and that such activities should be organized more often.

Several preschool teachers stated that these types of preschool activities can lead to friendships being made among parents and that Early Childhood Environmental Education activities such as keeping an eco-garden, a greenhouse and such entice creativity in parents and encourages cooperation between families and preschool institutions. Several authors have pointed out that play in the yard (outdoors) is suitable for establishing cooperation and developing friendship between parents (Stojković, Markov & Jelić 2017). Games organized within Early Childhood Environmental Education offer a wide range of possibilities for including parents in preschool activities. A high percentage of preschool activities in Scandinavian countries is organized outside. Through these activities, the children, together with their parents, discover the world around them in the most direct way possible.

Table 4. Organization of activities for children, parents and preschool teachers outside the preschool

Respondents	often	percentage	sometimes	percentage	very rarely	percentage	χ^2	P	C	total
parents	18	28,57%	35	55,56%	10	15,87	12,131	0,002	0,30	63
teachers	24	53,33%	10	22,22%	11	24,44%				45

After analysing results presented in Table 4, we come to the conclusion that the fourth item Organization of activities for children, parents and preschool teachers outside the preschool (walks, day trips, visits to the theatre, etc.) scores are as follows:

The results of the preschool teachers' responses are as follows: 24 (53,33%) preschool teachers opted for "often", 10 (22,22%) for "sometimes", whereas 11 (24,44%) respondents opted for "very rarely".

The findings show a statistically significant difference in the responses of preschool teachers and parents to the fourth item, given the score $\chi^2=12,131$ ($p=0,002$; $df 2$) and contingency coefficient $C=0,30$ ($C_{max} 0,81$), which means that there is moderate correlation between the two variables. We can claim that there is 99% certainty of statistically significant difference.

In their comments, a number of parents stated that they do not seem to be able to find the time to participate in these activities.

Several preschool teachers left comments similar to those added to the previous item, since this type of activities is believed to contribute to the bonding of families and developing supportive and friendly relationships.

Results of several studies emphasize the importance of parents' socializing for cooperation with preschool institution and strengthening friendships among parents (Daniels & Stafford, 2001; Jelić et al. 2018).

Table 5. Involving parents into planning and structuring of the Early Childhood Environmental Education activities

Respondents	often	percentage	sometimes	percentage	very rarely	percentage	χ^2	p	C	total
Parents	14	22,22%	38	60,32%	11	17,46%	8,876	0,011	0,26	63
Teachers	22	48,89%	16	35,56%	7	15,56%				45

After analysing results presented in Table 5, we have come to the conclusion that the fifth item *Including parents into planning and programming Early Childhood Environmental Education activities* scores are as follows:

The results of the preschool teachers' responses are as follows: 22 (51,11%) preschoolteachers opted for "often", 16 (35,56%) for "sometimes", whereas 7 (15,56%) respondents opted for "very rarely".

The findings show a statistically significant difference in the responses of preschoolteachers and parents to the fifth item, given the score $\chi^2=8,876$ ($p=0.011$; $df 2$) and contingency coefficient $C=0.26$ ($C_{max} 0,81$), which means that there is moderate correlation between the two variables. We can claim that there is 99% certainty of statistically significant difference.

A number of parents stated that they had contributed to planning and structuring of the activities by sharing their ideas with the preschool teachers at parent-teacher meetings.

Several preschool teachers stated that they felt that in this area in most cases parents who were educational professionals were the most active participants, but that ideas for activities did come from other parents as well. The importance of planning and structuring of educational work which will also include the parents is emphasized by the authors Krnjaja and Miškeljin (2006).

Similar results were obtained in the research conducted in Croatia and these also point to the fact that parents who are educational professionals have different beliefs in comparison to parents employed in other fields and professions. These findings show that the level and type of parent's education can directly or indirectly influence cooperation between parents and preschool teachers (Mandarić Vukušić 2018).

Table 6. Including parents into monitoring and documenting of children's development and progress

Respondents	often	percentage	sometim	percentage	very	percentage	χ^2	p	C	total
parents	48	76,19%	10	15,87%	5	7,94%	24,013	0,000	0,42	63
teachers	13	28,89	23	51,11%	9	20%				45

After analysing results presented in Table 6, we have come to the conclusion that the sixth item *Including parents into monitoring and documenting children's development and progress* scores are as follows:

The results of the preschool teachers' responses are as follows:

The findings show a statistically significant difference in the responses of teachers and parents to the sixth item, given the score $\chi^2=24,013$ ($p=0,000$; $df 2$) and contingency coefficient $C=0.42$ ($C_{max} 0,81$), which means that there is moderate correlation between the two variables. We can claim that there is 99% certainty of statistically significant difference.

The highest percentage of parents (51.11%) are satisfied with their participation in monitoring and documenting of their children's development and progress, but the preschool teachers stated that they felt that parents needed to get more involved in this area and inform preschoolteachers, in written or spoken form, on everything related to their children's behaviour and their children's development in general. Some studies emphasize the importance of monitoring and documenting the children's development (Pavlović Breneselović & Krnjaja 2017).

Table 7. Group parent-teacher meetings and accepting innovations in activities

Respondents	often			sometimes			χ^2	p	C	Total
	often	percentage	sometimes	percentage	very rarely	percentage				
parents	47	74,60%	11	17,46%	5	7,94%	4,585	0,101	0,19	63
teachers	25	55,56%	12	26,67%	8	17,78%				45

After analysing results presented in Table 7, we have come to the conclusion that the seventh item *Group parent-teacher meetings and accepting innovations in Early Childhood Environmental Education activities* scores are as follows:

The results of the preschool teachers' responses are as follows:

The findings show no statistically significant difference in the responses of preschool teachers and parents to the seventh item, given the score $\chi^2=4,585$ ($p=0.101$; $df 2$), which means that there is weak correlation between the two variables. We can claim that there is no statistically significant difference.

The highest percentage of parents participate in the group and individual parent-preschool teacher meetings and accept innovations which they, as equal participants of the process of cooperation with the preschool institution, perceive as positive for the well-being of their children.

Table 8. The teacher uses simple procedures to include parents into Early Childhood Environmental Education activities

Respondents	often	percentage	sometimes	percentage	very rarely	percentage	χ^2	p	C	total
parents	21	33,33%	32	50,79%	10	15,87%	10,578	0,005	0,29	63
teachers	24	53,33%	9	20%	12	26,67%				45

After analysing results presented in Table 8, we have come to the conclusion that the eighth item *The teacher uses simple procedures to include parents into Early Childhood Environmental Education activities* scores are as follows:

The findings show a statistically significant difference in the responses of preschool teachers and parents to the eighth item, given the score $\chi^2=10,578$ ($p=0.005$; $df\ 2$) and contingency coefficient $C=0.29$ ($C_{max}\ 0,81$), which means that there is moderate correlation between the two variables. We can claim that there is 99% certainty of a statistically significant difference.

The highest percentage of parents (50.79%) believe that the teachers sometimes use simple procedures to include parents into Early Childhood Environmental Education activities in the preschool. Most preschool teachers believe that the procedures they apply are simple and encouraging for the parents and their involvement in Early Childhood Environmental Education activities. This proves the need for preschool teachers to master communication skills which will encourage parents to get involved in the activities.

Results of similar researches emphasize the need for parents and preschool teachers to monitor the children's development together (Daniels & Stafford 2001).

Table 9. Acquiring pedagogical knowledge and strengthening parenting competencies

Respondents	often	percentage	sometimes	percentage	very rarely	percentage	χ^2	p	C	total
parents	21	33,33%	32	50,79%	10	15,87%	10,578	0,005	0,29	63
teachers	24	53,33%	9	20%	12	26,67%				45

After analysing results presented in Table 9, we have come to the conclusion that the ninth item *Involvement in Early Childhood Environmental Education activities in the preschool helps parents acquire pedagogical knowledge and strengthen their parenting competencies* scores are as follows:

The findings show no statistically significant difference in the responses of preschool teachers and parents to the ninth item, given the score $\chi^2=1.578$ ($p=0.457$; $df 2$), which means that there is weak correlation between the two variables. We can claim that there is no statistically significant difference.

Respondents in both groups are aware that parents' involvement in preschool activities can significantly contribute to their acquisition of pedagogical knowledge and the strengthening of their parenting competencies. However, the parents who added their comments in the Questionnaire find that the lack of time and insufficient encouragement for involvement are the main reasons for poor cooperation. In fact, parents still do not perceive themselves as a factor which has the right to observe and get involved in preschool activities. The preschool teachers list constant changes they need to keep in touch with as the reason why they are not left enough time to organize workshops which would emphasize the importance of this area of cooperation between preschool institutions and families.

The general hypothesis is partially confirmed given that five items have shown statistically significant differences in the opinions of preschool teachers and parents on environmental protection. Other items did not reveal statistically significant differences in responses of the research participants. A study from 2017 (Pavlović Breneselović & Krnjaja) produced similar results and emphasized the importance of environmental protection and the importance of cooperation between preschool teachers and parents on this important issue. Relationships built between preschool teachers and parents and their interaction offer an opportunity to collaborate on developing positive environmental attitudes in children (Pavlović Breneselović 2012).

Experts agree that the best information are obtained when the child is observed in the environment in which they behave spontaneously, preoccupied by routine activities. The preschool teacher's role is in that sense of great importance, since they can be the first to notice changes in the child's behaviour, respond to such unusual behaviour and share information on their observations. When it comes to assessment, the preschool teacher is considered the most objective source of information on the child's behaviour which is why the majority of assessment systems is based on the data collected from the teachers. The importance of the preschool-aged children's behaviour assessment and timely discovering of risk factors relies, among others, on

the preschool teacher and their role in the assessment process (Vasiljević Prodanović 2018). All of the above speaks in favour of including parents in preschool activities since these key participants could use this cooperation to identify internalized and externalized problems of their children. Early Childhood Environmental Education activities offer a wide range of possibilities.

CONCLUSION

Cooperation between preschool institution and family is a complex and multidimensional process reflected in the quality of information sharing between preschool teachers and parents aimed at improving pedagogical competencies of parents and their more efficient involvement in their children's upbringing at home. This two-way process if accompanied by a series of specific circumstances, but this cooperation should always focus on the child's well-being. Direct and indirect involvement of parents in preschool activities, in this research within the field of Early Childhood Environmental Education, are the way for the parents to gain pedagogical knowledge and strengthen their parenting competencies, with the support of preschool teachers. Teachers' competencies for cooperation with parents and their attitudes towards this process are also important factors of cooperation between preschool institutions and families (Samardžić & Travar 2016; Visković & Višnjić Jevtić 2017). The research findings show that there is a need for planned actions focusing more closely on environmental activities within the following dimensions: information sharing between parents and preschool teachers, including families in environmental activities in preschool and nurturing children's environmental awareness at home. Activities organized at the level of local community would help raise the awareness of the importance of ecology and environmental protection in children from the earliest age. This awareness could further be actualized through everyday activities during the period of adolescence and later in life. Environmental awareness benefits the whole society and affects the quality of life of all of us.

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SARADNJA PREDŠKOLSKE USTANOVE I RODITELJA U OKVIRU METODIKE UPOZNAVANJA OKOLINE

Sažetak

Cilj ovog istraživanja je bio da se utvrdi saradnja između porodica i predškolske ustanove u okviru metodike upoznavanja okoline, u dimenziji uključivanja roditelja u aktivnosti vrtića. U teorijskom okviru istraživanja razmotrili smo osnovna pitanja saradnje između porodice i predškolske ustanove te značaj metodike upoznavanja okoline za proces saradnje. Uzorak je činilo 45 vaspitača i 63 roditelja čija su deca školske 2018/19. pohađala predškolske ustanove u više vrtića u Kikindi. Kvalitet saradnje (u dimenziji uključivanje roditelja u aktivnosti vrtića) ispitan je primenom upitnika uključenosti roditelja kreiranog i prilagođenog za potrebe ovog istraživanja. Saradnju porodice i predškolske ustanove, prema mnogim autorima, čine sledeće dimenzije: međusobno informisanje između vaspitača i roditelja, uključivanje roditelja u aktivnosti vrtića, učesće roditelja u podršci razvoju dece u porodici, učestvovanje roditelja u organima upravljanja na nivou predškolske ustanove. U ovom radu smo se usredsredili na dimenziju uključivanje roditelja u aktivnosti kroz metodiku upoznavanja okoline. Rezultati ukazuju da kod većine tvrdnji postoje statistički značajne razlike u percepciji roditelja i vaspitača kada je u pitanju uključivanje roditelja u aktivnosti metodike upoznavanja okoline. Smatramo da je neophodno učiniti niz planskih akcija kako bi se što više roditelja uključilo u aktivnosti metodike upoznavanja okoline. Pre svega zbog egzaktnosti ovih aktivnosti i mogućnosti da deca putem istraživanja stvaraju i razvijaju svoje kreativne sposobnosti.

Ključne reči: metodika upoznavanja okoline; deca; uključenost roditelja; vaspitači

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