

Siniharju, Raili Marjatta

University of Helsinki
Department of Teacher Education

Cooperation between home and school in the first two years of comprehensive school

Appreciation for and implementation of cooperation in the first two years of comprehensive school in the city of Helsinki during the school years of 1983 - 1984 and 1998 - 1999

Abstract

The aim of the study was to research the appreciation for and implementation of cooperation between home and school as well as related factors. Cooperation was examined from the viewpoint of teachers and their experiences. Beyond these teacher-specific variables, the contextual factors of cooperation were also analysed. Another aim of the study was to develop a model of home and school interaction. The most important starting points were Epstein's model of the overlapping spheres of influence of family, school, and community, and Arfwedson's contextual factors influencing schoolwork.

The target group of the study included all teachers of the first two classes of comprehensive school in Helsinki. In the school year of 1983 – 1984, a total of 307 teachers from 62 schools took part in the research; in 1998 – 1999, teachers were involved 250 and schools 72. The data for the study was collected using similar questionnaires. Only a few new questions were added in 1999. Data was also collected from the schools' annual reports and curricula, as well as from available statistics on the school district concerned. The methods of analysis used were percentual distribution, factor analysis, composite variables, the χ^2 -test, the one-way analysis of variance, and the multilevel model. Free-form responses were categorized by content. In the school-specific analysis, the schools were divided into two groups: those that were positively disposed to and those that had a negative attitude towards home and school cooperation.

Cooperation between home and school was analysed on a school-specific level, a class-specific level and a personal specific level. From 1984 to 1999, the use of most forms of cooperation has statistically increased very significantly. The biggest change has occurred in the private talks between teachers and parents. This form of cooperation had been adopted by virtually all teachers by 1999. Of the new items proposed in 1999, the participation of parents in guiding their children's studies was considered important, whereas the inclusion of parents in the planning of teaching was not thought of as significant. In 1984, the largest obstacle to cooperation between home and school was the absence of remuneration for the extra work involved; in 1999 it was lack of time on the part of the parents. The differences between the two sets of data were statistically very significant. The obstacles caused by the school community were significant in the data of 1984, but carried little weight in 1999. In both sets of data, the teachers' ideas on interaction were gained from their own teaching experiences and they considered the influence of their teacher training college to be of little importance. In the opinion of the teachers, most parents had taken a positive view of cooperation, even though they felt that parents seldom took the initiative.

There were marked differences between schools in their appreciation for and implementation of cooperation between home and school. These differences were

particularly large in class-level co-operation in 1999. In both 1984 and 1999, the activity of the parents had a statistically very significant relationship with almost all areas of home and school interaction. Interaction between the teachers had a very positive effect primarily on school-level cooperation. The socio-economic level of the school district had no significance. In the 1984 data, the school community's negative attitude towards cooperation was significantly related to cooperation. A school-specific analysis and the teachers' free-form responses further supported the results obtained. In school-specific curricula the quantity and quality of the information on home and school cooperation varied. There was no clear relationship between the information and implementation of cooperation between home and school.

Key words: cooperation between home and school, the first two years of comprehensive school, school community, model of home and school interaction