# INCLUSIVE PARTNERSHIPS FOR DEVELOPING CREATIVITY IN PRE-SCHOOL CHILDREN

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## ABSTRACT

*This article aims to explore how inclusive partnerships can facilitate and enhance the development of a pre-school child's creativity by highlighting the importance of teachers and parents working together to find solutions to common problems and uniting their efforts towards common goals. The paper presents a quantitative study which has revealed that educators recognise the importance of inclusive partnerships, as collaboration improves the relationship between parents, children and educators, which allows for a comprehensive development of children's personality and creativity, encouraging them to create, explore and discover. Educators believe that inclusive partnerships would be more effective if parents were more encouraged to take an interest in their children's creative talents, progress and achievements in an educational institution. The empirical study has revealed that parents understand that cooperation between teachers and parents is crucial for the development of children's personality and creativity, but they believe that teachers do not appreciate the support parents provide in helping to develop their children's creativity in pre-school education.*

**Keywords:** creativity, inclusive partnership, preschool children, cooperation.

## Introduction

The creation and maintenance of an inclusive partnership and safe environment in pre-school education is directly related to the cooperation between the family, the teacher and the community as a whole, which is regulated by the United Nations *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (1989) and various documents issued by UNESCO, the United Nations, the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, etc. The recommendations of the *Global Education Monitoring Report* (2021) place particular emphasis on the need not only to implement the principle of inclusion, but also to change the concept of inclusion, emphasising that the aim should be to include not only children but also the whole pre-school community, including children

People's lives are made up of interactions with each other in a variety of environments. Researchers (Child et al., 2016; Talts et al, 2017; Petrokaitė, 2017) emphasise that in today's society, one of the essential features of a modern, learning and surviving organisation is collaborative activity, as well as the fact that a close partnership between parents and educators in an educational institution establishes a relationship of equal partners who assess and educate children according to the same criteria and values, and who make the same demands both in the educational institution and at home, creating an important basis for the effective

families, in the inclusive education process. Researchers (Udrėnaitė, 2002; Dapkienė, 2003; Želvys, 2003; Banevičienė, 2005; Lindberg et al., 2006; Pirchio et al., 2013; Gross et al., 2015; Child et al., 2016) have described the modern pre-school as an equal partner of the family, with an emphasis on the interaction between parents and teachers, the alignment of their interests and the unity of their views on the development of achild. Research talks about educational institution-community partnerships as meaningful relationships with community members, organisations and businesses that are committed to working together and taking shared responsibility to promote children's intellectual, social and emotional well-being, creativity, critical thinking and more.

formation of children's skills. Pirchio et al. (2013) argue that child development is best understood in the context of interconnected systems that simultaneously influence the child. Thus, the developmentof the child depends not only on individual factors, but also on the interaction of other factors in the living environment of thechild. Inclusive partnerships can facilitate child development and strengthen the continuity of education within the family and the educational institution. Poulos et al. (2013) argue that it is essential to find ways to make the educational institution and its culture a collaborative

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environment in which leaders and teachers set expectations for parents and the wider community to share responsibility for the improvement of the institution and its activities.

In today's changing society, we need flexible and creative people who understand the ever-changing nature of life, thus it is essential to address the fundamental educational changes in the younger generation to foster the development of a creative personality. *The Description of Achievement for Preschool Children* (2016) identifies creativity as a distinct area of children's developmental achievement, which is integrated into all areas of learning to ensure successful personal development of a child. Child's creativity is enhanced by the need for cognition, which encourages a deeper understanding of oneself and the world around him or her, and the natural need for self-expression. What a child experiences in this space and period of life often determines the direction of his or her personality development, which is why it is so important to start nurturing children's creativity from the very first steps in the family, by creating opportunities for them to play and to express their creativity. It is important that the development of children's creativity is child-centred, realised through dialogue and collaboration, just as it is important to make the educational institution and its culture a collaborative environment in which leaders and teachers set expectations for parents and the wider community to share responsibility for the improvement of the whole institution and its activities (Poulos et al., 2013).Teachers and parents can help children learn to think and solve problems creatively by giving them the freedom to make mistakes and respecting their ideas. This happens through greater mobility and the use of language in modelling and allowing experimentation without fear of failure. Suparmi (2014) suggests that teachers and parents could encourage children's creative thinking and behaviour by allowing children to make choices, by creating a stimulating environment, by allowing more play and fantasy, by encouraging, by giving fair criticism, etc. The future goal of parents is to teach children to feel, think, search and find not only the right but also humane solutions to various life issues, to improve their nature, to develop their personality, to communicate and cooperate constructively, to rely on common human values, to organise their own and their children's lives in a purposeful educational way (Dapkienė, 2003).

According to Paccaud et al. (2021), cooperation between educational institutions and families should be differentiated: for educational institutions, this means involving parents at different levels. This should be done taking into account the characteristics and life situations of thefamily's (e.g., the level of education and cultural background, pedagogical beliefs, profession, etc.). In order to keep parents active in the educational process, communication with them must no longer remain merely formal. The current period poses challenges for the educational institution and the family that can only be met through joint effort. Continuous and close cooperation between parents and educators is needed to make parents and educators equal partners in the educational process (Lindberg and Swick, 2006).

Today's educational institutions face a twofold challenge: to produce not only educated children, but also creative ones, i.e., capable of debate and questioning, of thinking critically and freely, of adapting to constant change, of influencing new ideas or works, and at the same time enriching people's spiritual and material world (Petrulytė, 2001). Creativity, creative thinking, as one of the most valuable personality traits, must be developed from a young age (Grakauskaitė-Karkockienė, 2010). Parents spend much time during the day with their children, so they have to take responsibility for their children's education. However, parents often think that general education and creativity development are specific activities that should be taken care of professionals. Such view by parents, inattentiveness to their child's development, create barriers to creativity education, which in turn can affect the process of creativity education in the educational institution (Ahmadi et al., 2014). Communicative competence, i.e., communication abilities, knowledge and skills, of educators play an important role in developing children's creativity, as they influence the relationships at different levels of the system: educator-pupil, educator-pupil's parents (Songailienė&Bražienė, 2011). The ability of educators to communicate constructively with parents determines the results of joint activities, the possibilities for cooperation, allows to solve problems more quickly, and creates a favourable social-psychological climate for pedagogical process.

The importance of creativity is highlighted in the State Progress Strategy *Lithuania's Future Vision "Lithuania 2050"* (2023), which states that every country should strive to develop open, creative, active and responsible people. This vision encourages educators and parents to work together to create an environment where children's creativity is stimulated, where they can work together and learn to act creatively. Only by growing up and living in an environment that nurtures creativity will people be able to create and be part of a smart society. This article strives to show the potential of inclusive partnerships in fostering creativity in pre-school children. **The aim** is to explore the potential

of inclusive partnerships in the development of creativity in pre-school children. **The methods** used for the study were the following: the analysis of the scientific literature, document analysis, written questionnaire, quantitative data analysis and interpretation.

**Methodology**

The authors have chosen a questionnaire method to explore the possibilities of inclusive partnerships in developing creativity in pre-school children. In order to empirically substantiate the relevance of the research problem, not only theoretical approaches have been used, but also a quantitative study has been carried out in order to determine the relevance of the phenomenon under investigation and to assess it, to reveal the opinions of the study participants on the possibilities of inclusive partnership in developing creativity in preschool children. The questionnaire consisted of 13 questions. Due to the large amount of data obtained, only a part of the questionnaire data has been selected for analysis in the paper in order to reveal the opinions of teachers and parents on the importance of inclusive partnership, barriers to cooperation, and the possibilities of inclusive partnership in developing children's creativity. The research has been carried out in the following stages: 1) methodological justification of the research; 2) organisation of the research process, discussion of the research method and procedure, selection of the research base, selection of the contingent of the research subjects - the sample volume, etc.; 3) collection, processing, analysis and interpretation of empirical data; 4) formulation of conclusions based on theoretical approaches and results of the empirical research. The research problem has been addressed by a questionnaire survey carried out between February and May 2023. The respondents were teachers working in pre-school education institutions and studying at Klaipėda University in the Childhood Pedagogy study programme (50 1st-4th year students in total) and parents (50) whose children attend pre-school education institutions of the teachers participating in the study. The questionnaire consisted of four blocks: 1) the importance of cooperation between teachers and parents, its necessity and benefits for inclusive partnership; 2) the obstacles to cooperation between teachers and parents in the development of children's creativity; 3) the possibilities of inclusive partnership that promote more effective development of children's creativity; 4) demographic data.

In order to have a representative sample reflecting the general population, a probability convenience purposive sample has been selected for the study, based on the data from 1-2 lecture sessions of the spring semester of the KU SHMF in 2023, attended by the studying educators. The parent survey was conducted at the same time. The survey gathered 52.4% of educators' and 54.2% of parents' opinions on the problem under investigation. This sample allowed for a fairly representative presentation of the research problem. Statistical analysis of data has been used for statistical processing of the research data by using MS Word and MS Excel software. Statistical method has been applied in the process of data processing in the course of the descriptive analysis.

A summary analysis of the demographic data showed that teachers aged over 50 have participated in the research, representing 50% of all teachers surveyed. 24% of educators are aged 41-50, 16% of surveyed educators are aged 31-40, 10% of surveyed educators are aged 26-30; 50% of surveyededucators have a senior teacher qualification, 28% of surveyed educators have a teacher's qualification, 22% of surveyed educators have the qualification ofa teacher-methodologist. None of the teachers in the survey had the qualification of expert teacher. The majority of respondents have considerable teaching experience and more than 30 years of teaching experience, which represents 30% of all the teachers who participated in the survey. 24% of teachers have between 21 and 30 years of teaching experience and 20% of respondents have between 11 and 20 years of teaching experience. Teachers with 0-5 years of teaching experience account for 16% of respondents, while 10% of respondents have 6-10 years of teaching experience.

The parents' survey sought to find out the gender distribution of the research subjects. The questionnaires for parents were mainly answered by women, which accounted for 93% of the total number of respondents, while 7% of respondents were men. The demographic results of the parent survey show that the majority (46%) of respondents are aged between 31 and 40,36% are aged between 26 and 30,9% of parents are aged between 18 and 25 and the same proportion (9%) are aged between 41 and 50. This distribution of results shows that the age range of parents participating in the study is quite diverse, with a significant number of parents aged between 26 and 40. The vast majority (38%) of parents in the study have a vocational qualification, 32% have a university degree and 23% have a secondary qualification. 7% of parents have an advanced vocational education and training. From the data presented, it can be concluded that 100% of thesurveyedparents have a level of education higher than basic education.

In line with research ethics, the principle of anonymity is guaranteed in order to gain trust of participants in the research and to expect honest and objective answers to research questions.

Respondents are assured that their individual data will not be disclosed and that the results obtained during the study will be used in aggregate. The principle of voluntariness is guaranteed, allowing for voluntary participation in the study, with the right to withdraw or terminate participation at any time. The principle of respect is guaranteed by informing respondents about the purpose of the study, explaining how the study will be conducted, etc. The following principles of the *European Code of Conduct for Research Ethics* (ALLEA, 2019) have been followed at all stages of the study:

reliability; integrity; respect for colleagues, research participants, the public; and responsibility for the quality of the research.

**Research results**

*Analysis of the results of the study on teachers' perceptions of inclusive partnerships for developing creativity in pre-school children*

The survey sought to find out educators' views on the importance, need and benefits of teacher-parent collaboration for inclusive partnerships (see Table 1).

**Table 1.**

*Teachers' views on the importance of, need for and benefits of collaboration in inclusive partnerships*

| Statements | Totally agree | Agree | Neither agree nor disagree | Disagree | Totally disagree |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Parents and teachers are partners in children's education | 72 | 24 | - | 4 | - |
| Teachers take into account parents' views on educational issues | 12 | 76 | - | 12 | - |
| Parents participate in group activities and help their children | 20 | 64 | - | 16 | - |
| Building mutual trust between parents and teachers | 24 | 72 | - | 4 | - |
| Parents are actively involved in improving and modernising the group's creative environment | 24 | 48 | - | 28 | - |
| Children's educational activities are important for the teacher | 20 | 44 | - | 36 | - |
| Parental information is valuable for children's education | 32 | 60 | - | 8 | - |

Teachers' responses in Table 1 about inclusive partnerships and the importance of collaboration between teachers and parents in developing children's creativity, reveal that 76% of teachers say that when teachers take into account parents' views on educational issues, children's creativity is developed better. 72% of respondents strongly agree that children's creativity develops when parents and educators are partners in children's education, and

the same proportion (72%) of respondents agree that children's creativity develops when parents and educators have a trusting partnership. 64% of educators surveyed believe that parents' participation in group activities to support the child also promotes children's creativity.

The researchers wanted to find out which aspects of teacher-parent cooperation are identified by teachers as barriers to children's creativity (see Table 2).

**Table 2**

*Teachers' views on the aspects of cooperation between them and parents that hinder children's creativity*

| Statements | Totally agree | Agree | Neither agree nor disagree | Disagree | Totally disagree |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Lack of parental responsibility for their children's education | 48 | 40 | - | 12 | - |
| Lack of time for cooperation between parents and teachers | 36 | 56 | - | 8 | - |

**Inclusive Partnerships for Developing Creativity**

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| education establishment and teachers | | | | 16 | - |
| Mismatched demands that educators and parents make on each other | 24 | 60 | - | 16 | - |
| Lack of parental involvement in developing a child's creativity | 8 | 36 | - | 48 | 8 |
| Inadequate parental pedagogical culture | 12 | 68 | - | 16 | 4 |
| Insufficient parental involvement | 28 | 64 | - | 8 | - |
| Infrequent and pointless meetings | 12 | 56 | - | 32 | - |

The data presented in Table 2 show that the teachers who participated in the study identify several aspects of parent-teacher cooperation that they consider to be the most important obstacles to the development of children's creativity: 68% of teachers agree and point out that parents' pedagogical culture is not insufficient; 64% believe that parents are not active enough; 60% agree that teachers and parents make incompatible demands on each other. 56% of respondents say that excessive parental and teacher busyness hinders children's creativity, and the same proportion (56%) believe that infrequent and impromptu meetings are also not conducive to the development of children's creativity. Paccaud et al. (2021) consider that the main obstacles to cooperation between educators and parents in educational institutions are related to the increasing complexity of the relationship between the educational institution and the family, which has made it increasingly difficult to reach some parents; changes in parents' expectations of educational institutions; and the increasing demands parents make on teachers, which encourages the teachers to keep childrens' parents at a distance in order to protect their professional autonomy.

During the survey, teachers were asked what they think would lead to a more effective inclusive partnership that would have an impact on children's creativity (see Table 3).

**Table 3**

*Teachers' views on how to promote inclusive partnerships between teachers and parents*

| Statements | Totally agree | Agree | Neither agree nor disagree | Disagree | Totally disagree |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Keeping parents and teachers in constant contact | 60 | 40 | - | - | - |
| Mutual exchange of useful information | 48 | 52 | - | - | - |
| Encouraging parents to express their ideas and thoughts | 40 | 52 | - | 8 | - |
| Parents' interest in their child, their child's progress and their child's achievements in education | 60 | 40 | - | - | - |
| Encouraging parents to take an interest in their children's creative talents | 60 | 28 | - | 12 | - |
| Enhancing parental education | 40 | 48 | - | 12 | - |
| Competence of teachers | 20 | 60 | - | 20 | - |
| The goodwill of parents | 56 | 36 | - | 8 | - |

Table 3 shows that 60% of respondents strongly agree that regular communication between parents and teachers promotes inclusive partnership and cooperation, 60% of respondents believe that parents need to take an interest in their child, his/her progress and achievements in the educational institution, and 60% of respondents also strongly agree that parents need to be encouraged to take an interest in their children's creative talents. Regarding a more effective partnership between teachers and parents that would have an impact on children's creativity, 60% of respondents agree that more competent teachers are needed. 56% of respondents strongly agree with the statement on greater parental

involvement. Suparmi (2014) suggests that teachers and parents could encourage children's creative thinking and behaviour by allowing children to make choices, creating a stimulating environment, allowing more play and fantasy, encouragement, fair criticism, etc.

*Analysis of parents' perceptions of inclusive partnerships for developing creativity in pre-school children*

The study sought to find out whether parents agree that inclusive partnerships and parent-teacher collaboration have an impact on children's creativity (see Table 4).

**Table 4**

*Parents' views on the importance of, need for and benefits of cooperation in inclusive partnerships*

| Statements | Totally agree | Agree | Neither agree nor disagree | Disagree | Totally disagree |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Parents and teachers are partners in children's education | 48 | 52 | - | - | - |
| Teachers take into account parents' views on educational issues | 43 | 40 | - | 17 | - |
| Parents participate in group activities and help their children | 34 | 46 | - | 20 | - |
| Building mutual trust between parents and teachers | 50 | 50 | - | - | - |
| Parents are actively involved in improving and modernising the group's creative environment | 23 | 60 | - | 17 | - |
| Children's educational activities are important for the teacher | 36 | 61 | - | 3 | - |
| Parental information is valuable for children's education | 34 | 61 | - | 5 | - |

Table 4 shows that 61% of respondents agree that parent-teacher cooperation fosters children's creativity when children's educational activities in the group are important and the teacher, rather than the parents, is in charge. 61% agree that children's creativity develops when teachers recognise that parents know their child best and that their information is very valuable. 60% of respondents believe that children's creativity develops when parents are actively involved in improving and modernising the group's creative environment. 52% of participants believe that this happens when

parents and teachers are partners in children's education. It is very important that the development of child's creativity involves all child's environments (kindergarten and home), so that parents can see how much they themselves can give to their children, by suggesting great ideas and by communicating sincerely with the educators (Dodge, Colker, &Heroman, 2007).

The survey sought to find parents' views on aspects of teacher-parent cooperation that hinder children's creativity (see Table 5).

**Table 5**

*Parents' views on the aspects of teacher-parent cooperation that hinder children's creativity*

| Statements | Totally agree | Agree | Neither agree nor disagree | Disagree | Totally disagree |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Lack of parental responsibility for their children's education | 34 | 48 | - | 18 | - |
| Lack of time for cooperation between parents and teachers | 21 | 52 | - | 27 | - |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Poor parental attitudes towards the education establishment and teachers | 34 | 32 | - | 34 | - |
| Mismatched demands that educators and parents make on each other | 23 | 55 | - | 22 | - |
| Lack of parental involvement in developing a child's creativity | 11 | 55 | - | 34 | - |
| Inadequate parental pedagogical culture | 14 | 46 | - | 40 | - |
| Insufficient parental involvement | 34 | 41 | - | 25 | - |
| Infrequent and pointless meetings | 5 | 43 | - | 52 | - |

Table 5 shows that 55% of parents in the study agree that children's creativity is hampered by the unbalanced demands that educators and parents make on each other. 55% of respondents agree that educators do not value parents' help in developing children's creativity. 52% of respondents also agree that one of the barriers to developing children's creativity is excessive busyness of parents and teachers and the lack of time for cooperation. Some parents (48%) admit that the lack of parental responsibility for their children's creativity is also an obstacle to their children's development. Zelvys

(2003) argues that parents are often seen by pre-school institutions as obstacles and material helpers, rarely as partners and consumers, which leads to poor cooperation.

After assessing the importance of inclusive partnerships and identifying the aspects of teacher-parent collaboration that hinder children's creativity, the researchers wanted to find out parents' views on how more effective inclusive partnerships could be used to foster the development of children's creativity (see Table 6).

**Table 6**

*Parents' views on how to promote inclusive partnerships between teachers and parents*

| Statements | Totally agree | Agree | Neither agree nor disagree | Disagree | Totally disagree |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Keeping parents and teachers in constant contact | 48 | 52 | - | - | - |
| Mutual exchange of useful information | 46 | 54 | - | - | - |
| Encouraging parents to express their ideas and thoughts | 27 | 66 | - | 7 | - |
| Parents' interest in their child, their child's progress and their child's achievements in education | 41 | 59 | - | - | - |
| Encouraging parents to take an interest in their children's creative talents | 68 | 32 | - | - | - |
| Enhancing parental education | 34 | 50 | - | 16 | - |
| Competence of teachers | 34 | 36 | - | 30 | - |
| The goodwill of parents | 41 | 55 | - | 4 | - |

Table 6 shows that 68% of respondents strongly agree that children's creativity needs a more effective partnership between teachers and parents, which can be done by encouraging parents to take an interest in their children's creativity, while 66% of parents in the survey say that they need to be encouraged to express their own ideas and thoughts. 59% of respondents identified what they consider to be an important way of improving cooperation between parents and educators, which is for parents to take a greater interest in their child, his/her progress and achievements in the educational institution. 54% of respondents believe that more effective cooperation between parents

and educators would take place if there were a mutual exchange of useful information. 55% of participants believe that more parental goodwill is needed. Parents' answers suggest that parents of pupils understand that not only the teachers but also the parents themselves need to contribute to more effective cooperation. Parents could do this by taking an interest in their child's daily activities in the educational institution, by exchanging information and by communicating and cooperating with teachers. The idea of inclusive partnership poses challenges for the educational establishment and for parents that can only be tackled through joint efforts. It requires continuous and close

cooperation between parents and educators in order to make parents and educators equal partners in the educational process (Lindberg, Swick, 2006).

**Conclusions**

Creating and maintaining an inclusive partnership and an environment that fosters creativity is directly related to the cooperation between the family, the teacher and the whole community in a pre-school institution. Inclusive partnership implies cooperation and shared responsibility to promote children's intellectual, social and emotional well-being, creativity, critical thinking, etc. The empirical research carried out has revealed: 1) the importance of cooperation between educators and parents, as cooperation improves the relationship between parents, children and educators, which allows for the full development of children's personality and creativity, encouraging them to create, explore, discover, and have confidence in themselves; 2) the lack of encouragement by teachers to parents to take an interest in their children's progress and achievements, the low level of parental involvement, and the incompatible demands that teachers and parents make on each other are the aspects that are the most detrimental to the development of children's creativity; 3) the potential for promoting an inclusive partnership between teachers and parents: constant communication between parents and educators, parents' interest in their child's creative abilities, progress and achievements in the educational institution, parents' active and benevolent involvement in the educational process.

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