

*The cooperation of teachers to improve educational processes*

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**Abstract**

The implementation of the educational process in the classroom is both individual and collaborative team approach teachers. One of the requirements and standards faced by the teachers / schools in the Polish educational system is the cooperation of teachers in organizing and implementing educational processes. Cooperation teacher plays an important role in their professional development. The paper describes the models of cooperation of teachers who teach in one class and the organization of cooperation of teachers at the school level. Analyses were performed based on the results of the external evaluation of schools.

Keywords: Teachers cooperation, improve educational process.

## Introduction

Two assumptions were the basis for the study. The first is related to the belief that teaching is a complex process that consists of many elements, not only the syllabus and teaching methods used by teachers of different subjects, but also learning styles among students, their motivation, their assessment, emotions, and the influence of parents and the local community. The second stems from the belief that the educational process in a particular class is not simply the sum of individual effects of individual teachers' work, but also their collective action. The combination of these two assumptions leads to a thesis that planning, organization and implementation of the educational process for a particular class (group of students) requires the commitment and cooperation of all teachers.

The thesis concerning the need for cooperation among teachers at schools is not new; its importance has been repeatedly indicated in many contexts, including: changes in school (Wlazło, 2010), the professional development of teachers, (...), working with students with special educational needs (Schwartz at al., *What are the common...*), co-teaching (Cook and Friend, 2004), as an opportunity to engage numerous teachers in solving complex educational problems (Montiel-Overall, 2005). Research also indicate that there is an actual relationship between the level of cooperation among teachers at school and the educational results achieved by students. In a research conducted by Goddard, Goddard, Tschannen-Moran (2007), the authors show that students achieve better educational results at schools where teachers indicate a higher level of cooperation between them.

For the purposes of this study the definition of a collaboration among teachers was "propose the most effective teaching possible for the greatest number of students" (Pugach and Johnson, 1995). Literature quotes a lot of features that are associated with cooperation, such as: reciprocity, partnership, trust, sharing information, shared vision, dialogue, negotiation, power sharing, joint planning, creativity, team work, and creating new values. They show how one can consider the nature of the collaboration in different ways, and how complex it is.

Models of collaboration among teachers can be found at schools that have also been described in a variety of contexts: cooperation among teachers at school (Ahlgrimm and Huber, 2009), co-teaching (Cook and Friend, 2004), special education teams (Schwartz at al., *What are the common ...*), teachers' collaboration with organizations in the local community (Dorczak, 2012), co-teachers with librarians (Montiel-Overall, 2005). The aim of the study is to describe the types of cooperation among teachers teaching in one class.

## Methodology

The study used data collected during an external evaluation carried out in Poland in May 2013. 33 schools participated (primary, lower secondary and upper secondary), of all sizes, located in both rural communities, rural-urban and urban areas. In total, the study included 846 teachers.

Among the research questions, analyzed were those relating to teachers' collaboration during the design and implementation of educational processes. Quantitative analysis concerned one multiple-choice question addressed in the survey (on-line) to teachers, which was related to their participation in works of teams functioning at school. A statistical analysis of the data collected from the responses to this question used the following variables:

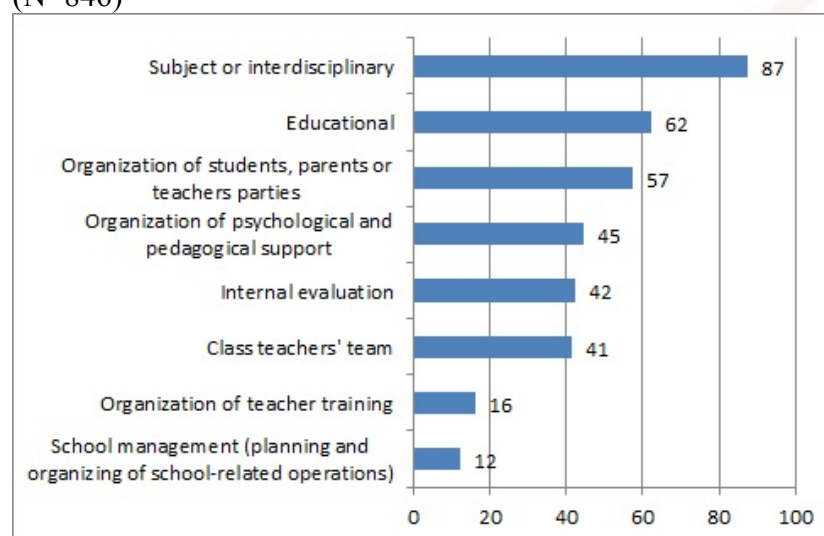
- type of school (elementary, lower secondary, upper secondary),
- type of community (urban, urban-rural, rural),
- school size (small - up to 200 students, average 201-400, large - more than 400 students).

Data were subject to a qualitative analysis, collected in response to questions asked to focus groups formed of teams of teachers who teach in a classroom, concerning planning and modification of educational processes carried out in these specific classes. A content analysis method was used to analyze the collected material (Babbie, 2008), as well as a hermeneutic analysis (Ablewicz, 1994). We analyzed interviews (FGI) conducted in 33 schools, each with one team of teachers, whose purpose was to model the cooperation among teachers in the planning and implementation of the educational process in the classroom. In three interviews it was not possible to separate a cooperation pattern among teachers of one class.

### Survey results

Teachers declare that they work on average in nearly four (3.8) teams functioning at school. The most important thing in the planning of the educational process carried out with the class is the cooperation of all class teachers. Participation in teamwork was declared by 41.49% of the teachers. The second type of teams in which cooperation of one-class teachers is expected is the team dealing with psychological and pedagogical assistance, whose task is to prepare and implement support for students with special educational needs. Participation in the work of this team was declared by 44.56% of teachers. Objectives of the other team types are not directly related to the educational process in a particular class, but they concern more general issues with respect to teaching and educational process, analyzed from the perspective of the whole school. These teachers often (87.47%) indicate the participation in the team of teachers of the related subject/s. Percentage of teachers participating in teamwork is shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Declaration of teachers' participation (%) in the work of teams at school (N=846)



Source: own study based on data from: [http://www.seo2.npseo.pl/seo\\_stats\\_quality](http://www.seo2.npseo.pl/seo_stats_quality)

Differences in the involvement of teachers in teamwork is statistically significantly different, depending on the school size ( $\chi^2(14) = 45.15, p < 0.001$ ). The largest

difference concerns the participation of teachers in teamwork, concerning teaching in one class (in which participation is usually declared by teachers of large schools – 53% and small ones (44%), while teachers of medium size schools declare: 33%). Similarly, a statistically significant difference can be observed in the participation of teachers in teamwork depending on the school type ( $\chi^2(14) = 50.16, p < 0.001$ ). The most important difference for this analysis concerns the participation of subject teachers in the work of these groups, the participation being declared by 94% of secondary schools teachers, 88% in lower secondary schools and 74% in upper secondary. Significant differences are also found in the declarations of participation in teamwork among teachers of one class. This is most frequently declared by primary school teachers 48%, then 42% at lower secondary schools, and 31% in upper secondary.

The difference in the declared participation of teachers in the work of teams functioning at school is not statistically significant, depending on whether the school is located in the countryside or in the city ( $\chi^2(14) = 16.17, p > .05$ ).

Analysis of focus group interviews with teachers of specific classes allowed the isolation of six qualitatively different ways of cooperation among teachers in the preparation and implementation of the educational process in the classroom:

**The subject team** – teachers admit (FGI) that the principal place of educational planning are subject team meetings, during which a group of teachers teaching related subjects has the ability to make joint arrangements:

*Vocational subject team - jointly determine curricula and schedules (content) of subjects.*

*Teachers of biological sciences meet and analyze questions from matriculation tests, create own tests in order to best prepare students for the exam.*

In these teams are created general arrangements concerning teaching of different subjects (curriculum, textbook selection), teaching materials and diagnostic tools are developed, to be used by teachers of specific subjects.

While working in these teams, there is also cooperation between teachers teaching different but related subjects in the same class. Together, they develop cross-curricular correlation, which is the order in which issues are raised within specific subjects, so that they complement each other and are not repeated.

*Teachers of physics, mathematics chemistry work together. Foreign language teachers need to work together. Teachers of Polish and history cooperate with each other. School educationalists collaborate with all teachers in this class.*

A place to discuss problems of education is a team of class educators. It fulfills the role of a specific subject team, whose work involves the development of content covered in homeroom classes:

*There is a team of class educators – to discuss teaching and educational issues, and issues to be raised in homeroom classes.*

**Direct contact between teachers** – the basis of communication between teachers is informal, direct, daily contact between class teachers. Primarily, these discussions provide information about the class (students) and how to solve current problems. Respondents described it as follows:

*... Working with the educators and convey information to him, but also obtain information from him.*

*We also talk about current issues during breaks and after school.*

*Contact between the educator and teachers is daily, we talk everyday, exchange remarks, solve problems on a regular basis.*

Most teachers are in contact with the class educator, with whom they share and from whom they obtain the necessary information. Sometimes, direct contacts are used to determine the issues to be covered in class during lesson on related subjects (cross-curricular correlation).

**The task team** – a role in the planning of educational processes is also played by appointed task teams to prepare educational events (trips, competitions, school events). The work of these teams usually involves 2-3 teachers directly engaged in the event preparation:

*... I cooperate (a math teacher, comment by JK) with the biology and history teacher when trips are organized.*

*Teachers also collaborate in the organization of class and school events and celebrations.*

**Team dealing with psychological and pedagogical assistance** – Teams of teachers dealing with psycho-educational support for pupils with special educational needs are listed in the nine interviews, and are organized in two ways. The first is the participation of all class teachers in the development of educational and therapeutic programs for students who need them, the second is to create a team at the school level, which plans assistance for students requiring it at school. The work of these teams is supported by specialists (psychologists, educators, and other specialists, as necessary).

*As a school team of experts, we created ITEP (Individual Therapeutic and Educational Program), CSIN (Charter of Students' Individual Needs), SAP (Supporting Action Plan) and evaluated the effectiveness of introduced measures, and carry out an ongoing analysis of the assistance used.*

**Teaching Council** – In some cases, the place to talk about the educational process in a classroom is a school board meeting (meeting of all teachers who teach at school):

*... We meet twice a year, at the end of semesters, all of us, and discuss both teaching and educational issues in the class - what are the teaching results. After the first, and the second semester, when all teachers teaching in the class are present.*

*At plenary conferences, the educator talks about the class.*

*We meet and discuss important matters at meetings of the school board.*

Meeting teachers in the school board act as summarizing and reporting classes carrying out educational processes. In most schools, this forum is too numerous to be able to spend enough time to work on specific solutions for specific classes or subjects. For this reason, the work is handed over to school subject teams:

*We work within the school board and smaller subject teams.*

**The team of class teachers** – six interviewed teachers indicated the team of teachers who teach in the class as a platform for planning of educational processes. They have a schedule of meetings and specific goals. During these meetings, progress of students and emerging behavioral problems are discussed.

*Meetings are held in accordance with an established timetable. These issues relate to both academic progress, as well as behavioral problems. The class educator is obliged to represent the team and contact parents (if necessary, additional meetings with parents are arranged).*

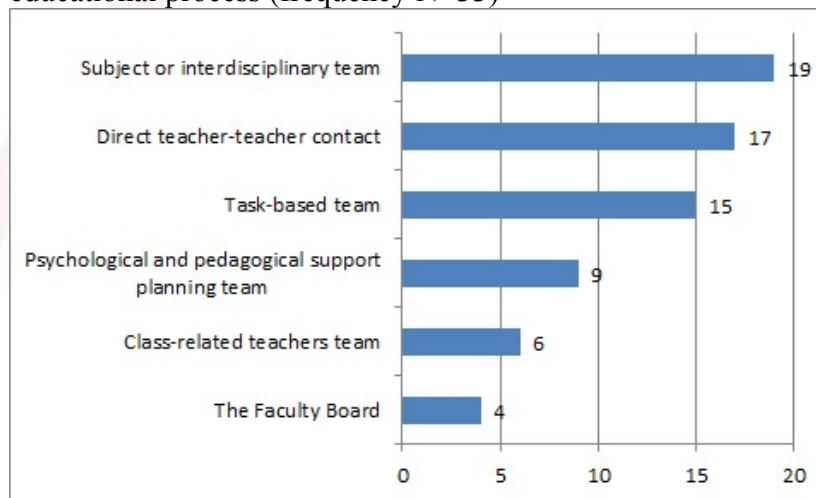
The coordinator of one-class teachers' team is the educator, who is also responsible for organizing and conducting meetings, and represent teachers at the school board forum and in meetings with parents.

It is interesting to observe data acquired from interviews in a quantitative perspective (Figure 2). These results partially overlap with the data from the questionnaires. The

most common form of cooperation between class teachers are subject teams (and cross-curricular teams), in 19 out of 33 interviews. The quantitative analysis also shows the importance of informal communication between teachers in sharing information about the class and the students (mentioned in 17 cases). In 15 interviews, task teams were also indicated as a class teacher collaboration forum.

School board as a forum for cooperation among class teachers has been indicated in four interviews. It should be noted that this form of teamwork among teachers was cited in cases where there were no forms of cooperation best associated with the class level (class teaching team and team in charge of psychological and pedagogical assistance).

Figure 2. Teacher cooperation forms related to planning and implementing of the educational process (frequency N=33)



Source: own study based on data from [http://www.seo2.npseo.pl/seo\\_stats\\_quality](http://www.seo2.npseo.pl/seo_stats_quality)

## Conclusions and discussion

The dominant form of organized cooperation at school is the participation in the work of subject teams. Thanks to them, cooperation is possible among teachers teaching related subjects in one class. Just over 40% of teachers declare participation in works of the team of teachers who teach in one class, but interviews show that in a few cases, team activity is planned and organized (based on the interviews, it can be determined that this is the case at about 20% of schools). Direct informal contacts between teachers in one class can play an important role, but they primarily serve sharing current information.

In a survey conducted just over a decade ago, concerning the teachers' perception of the educational reform in Poland, one of the most commonly expressed objections was the need to create the so-called cross-curricular paths (Tytoń and Wlazło 2002). As it can be seen from the study, these concerns were confirmed. The cooperation of teachers needed for correlation between subject content is not a common phenomenon, which is also confirmed by other studies (Kołodziejczyk, 2013). Tytoń and Wlazło (2002) indicated as a source of concern the need for additional time and effort teachers will have to devote to the organization of teamwork, or at least to co-operation. Results obtained in the present study indicate the possible presence of other factors that act as barriers to cooperation between teachers of one class, that needs to be used in joint planning, organizing and implementing of the educational process.

It seems that teachers perceive run the educational process from the perspective prism of their own subjects, in particular the content taught. Expertise in teaching a particular subject is an obstacle in the cooperation among all teachers teaching in one class. Thus, if there is co-operation between teachers, it is especially related to few (2-3 teachers), who teach related items. The border between the disciplines marks the boundaries of possible co-operation, which is performed in subject teams/cross-curricular teams, or informal cooperation between class teachers (related subjects), coordinating their actions. One of the respondents put it as follows:

*The teachers of vocational subjects are hard to cooperate with, because the subjects are not related to each other. The teachers of vocational subjects need to cooperate closely.*

*(upper secondary school, a teacher of the Polish language).*

This may mean that teachers recognize as the primary (if not sole) component of the educational process the content taught by themselves, ignoring other aspects such as learning styles, motivation, group processes taking place in the classroom, special educational needs, which might be the common denominator for cooperation among class teachers.

One might therefore think that a barrier to cooperation of all class teachers concerning planning, organizing and implementing of the educational process is teachers' mental model, functioning in their minds (educational processes), limiting it to the narrow framework of the subject curriculum.

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