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KARIN LUKK

Structural, Functional and Social Aspects of Home-School Cooperation

Abstract



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Institute of Educational Sciences, Tallinn University, Estonia.

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Supervisor: Marika Veisson, Professor, Tallinn University

Opponents: Inge Unt, *prof. emer.*, Tallinn University
Inger Kraav, *PhD*, Tartu University

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KODU JA KOOLI KOOSTÖÖ STRUKTURAALSEST, FUNKTSIONAALSEST NING SOTSIAALSEST ASPEKTIST

Resümee

Tänapäeva ühiskonnas toimunud muutused nõuavad uut lähenemist ka hariduses ja ainult need koolid, kes suudavad edukalt muudatused ellu viia, saavad pakkuda õpilastele haridust, mis tagaks neile edu hilisemas elus. Holistilises ehk terviklikus lähenemises rõhutatakse, et mida laiem on last ümbritsev võrgustik, seda tugevam on selle mõju lapse arengule ja sellest tulenevalt on oluline kaasata lapse arenguprotsessi kõik huvigrupid. Kooli ja kodu koostöö toetab efektiivse õpikeskkonna kujunemist.

Holistiline lähenemine kooliarengus kätkeb endas demokraatia, täpsemalt osalusdemokraatia põhimõtteid. Demokraatia rakendamisel koolis tuleb püüda säilitada tasakaalu indiviidi ja grupi huvide vahel. Osalusdemokraatia kannab endas holistilise lähenemise põhimõtteid, kaasates erinevaid huvigruppe – kooli tasandil: õpilasi, õpetajaid, kooli juhtkonda ja lapsevanemaid.

Lapsevanemate osalust on erinevad uurijad nimetanud üheks olulisemaks komponendiks kooli reformimisel nüüdisaja nõuetele vastavaks ennastjuhtivaks haridusasutuseks. Õpilase tasandil on lapsevanemate osalusel seos õpitulemuste paranemisega, aga eelkõige õpilase käitumuslike väljunditega (Cassel 2003; Cordy, Wilson 2004; Eddy 2004; Fantuzzo 1999; Hill, Craft 2003; McNeal 1999; Peraita, Pastor 2000; Shepard, Carlson 2003). Samas aga ei ole lapsevanemate osalus koolielus ainsaks lapse akadeemilist arengut mõjutavaks faktoriks, pigem on seejuures tegemist sotsiaalse kapitaliga, mis erinevate ressursside koondamise – ehk kooli ja kodu koostöö – abil toetab lapse arengut. Sotsiaalset kapitali on defineeritud kogukonnaliikmete ühise kultuurilise ressursi ja interpersonaalsete seostena (Jack, Jordan 1999). Seepärast võibki lapsevanemate osalust koolielus vaadelda kui sotsiaalse kapitali vormi, mis võimaldab indiviidile juurdepääsu tema akadeemilist edukust mõjutavatele ressurssidele.

Väitekiri koosneb viiest originaalartiklist ja nende artiklite analüütilisest ülevaatest. Teoreetilises osas esitatakse ülevaade holistilisest lähenemisest hariduses, selle demokraatlikust aspektist, kirjeldatakse lapsevanemate osalust koolielus ja analüüsitakse seda sotsiaalse kapitali kontekstis. Lisaks tutvustatakse töös mudeleid demokraatia ja jätkusuutlike muutuste hindamiseks hariduses.

Väitekirja empiiriline osa põhineb uurimisel, mis viidi läbi 65 Eesti koolis aastatel 2004–2007. Tegemist oli laiaulatusliku uurimusega, mis kandis pealkirja “Kool kui arengukeskkond ja õpilase toimetulek” (Tallinna Ülikooli kasvatusteaduste teaduskonna sihtfinantseeritav projekt, grant nr 0132495s03). Uuringusse kuulusid erinevad kooliga seotud huvigrupid: õpilased, nende vanemad, õpetajad ja koolijuhtkonna esindajad. Väitekirjas keskendutakse lastevanemate osale (kokku küsitletud 2048).

Uuringu põhilised tulemused on järgmised: holistiline lähenemine ja sellega seotult demokraatlike põhimõtete rakendamine on Eesti koolis väärtustatud. Esineb aga märgatav lõhe teooria ja praktika vahel: õpetajad ja koolijuhid hindavad ning väärtustavad demokraatlikke põhimõtteid, kuid õpilased ja lapsevanemad ei tunneta nende praktilist rakendust igapäevases koolielus.

Erisugused muutused hariduses on muutnud märgatavalt õpetaja rolli, mis esitab tänapäeva õpetajale varasemast erinevaid väljakutseid. Õpetaja on eelkõige lapsevanema partner ja mitte niivõrd konkreetseid korraldusi edastav ekspert. Lisaks muutunud suhtlemise alusele lapsevanematega lasub õpetajatel surve saavutamaks kõrgemaid õpitulemusi ettenähtud standardite alusel (riigieksamid, tasemetööd) ning samal ajal rõhutatakse iga lapse individuaalse arendamise tähtsust ja eeldatakse õpetajalt loovat lähenemist lapsele ning tema perele sobiva suhtlusevormi ja arengustrateegia valimisel. Efektivsema koostöö saavutamist toetab sobiva koostöövormi raken-

damine. Praegu on koolid kinni traditsioonilistes vormides: lastevanemate koosolekud, avatud uste päevad, kooli hoolekogu töö, millele on lisandunud kohustuslikud uued vormid, nagu arengust vestlused, sisehindamise käigus läbiviidavad tagasiside küsitlused. Oluline aga on luua uus mõtteviis – selle asemel, et olla rangelt seotud konkreetsete vormide ja meetoditega, tuleks leida kodu ja kooli koostöös igale konkreetsele lapsele ja perele sobiv koostöövorm.

Lapsevanemate huvi on koostöö vastu kooliga suur, kuid mitte kõik koolid ei ole valmis kaasama lapsevanemaid olulisemate otsuste tegemisse. Koolidel lasub ülesanne reorganiseerida kooli ja kodu koostööd nii, et see põhineks partnerlussuhtel, mis toetub jagatud eesmärkidele ja väärtustele ning mille korraldus lähtub jätkusuutlikkuse põhimõtetest. Selline koostöö võimaldab luua sotsiaalset kapitali, nii et see toetaks maksimaalselt lapse arengut.

Efektive kooli ja kodu koostöö põhineb headel suhtel (Sutton 2006; Vincent 1996). Head suhted saavad aga alguse usaldusest. Usalduse loomine on keeruline protsess, milles domineerivad kaks peamist aspekti: jagatud väärtused, mis on protsessi südameks, ja suhtlemine, mis on vahendiks sinna jõudmiseks. Väitekirja uurimistulemused näitavadki, et vanemate ja õpetajate väärtused ei ühti, mistõttu on keeruline määratleda ühiseid eesmärke lapse arengus. Vanematele tundub, et õpetajad ei ole piisavalt huvitatud nende lastest ega jälgi süstemaatiliselt nende arengut. Seepärast on usalduse loomiseks oluline alustada suhtlemise tihendamisest, mis viib jagatud väärtuste ja usalduse tekkimiseni.

Väitekirja tulemusi saab kasutada kooli ja kodu koostöö reorganiseerimise alustena, samuti õpetajakoolituse programmide ja ainekavade täiendamisel. Väitekirjas tutvustatud mudelid demokraatia ja muutuste jätkusuutlikkuse hindamiseks hariduses on heaks aluseks edasistele uuringutele.

LIST OF PUBLICATIONS

The present dissertation is based on the following articles which are referred to by roman numbers in the text:

- I. Karin Lukk, Monica Sakk, Marika Veisson 2008. Parents' beliefs about home-school partnership: rethinking the parental involvement paradigm. – J. Mikk, M. Veisson, P. Luik (eds.). *Reforms and Innovations in Estonian Education*. Bundesrepublik Deutschland: Peter Lang Verlag, 43–60.
- II. Karin Lukk, Marika Veisson, Loone Ots 2008. Characteristics of sustainable changes for schools. – *Journal of Teacher Education for Sustainability*, 8 (3), 35–44.
- III. Karin Lukk, Marika Veisson 2007. Building social capital through home-school cooperation. – *Journal of Teacher Education for Sustainability*, 7 (2), 55–66.
- IV. Karin Lukk, Marika Veisson, Viive-Riina Ruus, Ene-Silvia Sarv 2006. Democratic approach to school development: involving all interest groups. – *Journal of Teacher Education and Training*, 6, 88–102.
- V. Karin Lukk 2005. Parental involvement in the framework of holistic education. – *Journal of Teacher Education and Training*, 5, 90–100.

My rate of participation in writing the articles: 100% in the first one, in all the others it is at least 50%.

Other publications on the topic of the dissertation:

- VI. Karin Lukk 2008. Kodu ja kooli partnerlus lapse arengu toetajana. – L. Ots (koost). *Uued ajad – uued lapsed. Teadusartiklite kogumik*. Tallinn: Tallinna Ülikooli kirjastus, 130–156.
- VII. Marika Veisson, Roman Kallas, Tiiu Kuurme, Mare Leino, Karin Lukk, Loone Ots, Viive-Riina Ruus, Ene-Silvia Sarv, A. Veisson 2007. *Eesti kool 21. sajandi algul: kool kui arengukeskkond ja õpilaste toimetulek*. Tallinn: Tallinna Ülikooli kirjastus.
- VIII. Karin Lukk 2007. Kooli ja kodu koostöö. – M. Veisson, V.-R. Ruus (toim). *Eesti kool 21. saj. algul: kool kui arengukeskkond ja õpilaste toimetulek*. Tallinn: Tallinna Ülikooli kirjastus, 223–244.
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- X. Karin Lukk 2006. Lapsevanem kui toimetuleku toetaja. – Kool kui arengukeskkond ja õpilaste toimetulek: konverents 5.–6. okt 2006 Tallinna Ülikooli Tallinna saalis. Tallinn: Tallinna Ülikooli kirjastus, 38.
- XI. Karin Lukk 2006. Kodu ja kooli koostöö lapse toimetuleku toetajana. – *Kool kui arengukeskkond ja õpilaste toimetulek: konverents 5.–6. okt 2006 Tallinna Ülikooli Tallinna saalis*. Tallinn: Tallinna Ülikooli kirjastus, 23
- XII. Viive-Riina Ruus, Marika Veisson, Ene-Silvia Sarv, Loone Ots, Mare Leino, Karin Lukk 2005. Kool kui arengukeskkond ja õpilaste toimetulek. – I. Kraav, U. Kala, T. Pedastsaar (toim). *Haridus muutuste ja traditsioonide keerises*. Tartu: Eesti Akadeemiline Pedagoogika Selts; Johannes Käisi Selts, 109–120.
- XIII. Karin Lukk 2005. Kooli ja kodu koostöö õpilaste toimetuleku toetajana. – I. Kraav, U. Kala, T. Pedastsaar (toim). *Haridus muutuste ja traditsioonide keerises*. Tartu: Eesti Akadeemiline Pedagoogika Selts; Johannes Käisi Selts, 128–138.
- XIV. Karin Lukk 2005. Families as Partners of Schools: The influence of parenting style on the development of child's intellect. – L. Talts, M. Vikat (koost). *Lapse kasvukeskkond Eestis ja Soomes III. Teadusartiklite kogumik*. Tallinn: Tallinna Ülikooli kirjastus, 118–131.
- XV. Karin Lukk 2004. The Basic School Dropout: The Role of Family and Child's Intelligence. – A. Veisson, M. Veisson (eds.). *Sustainable Development. Culture. Education*. Tallinn: Tallinna Pedagoogikaülikooli kirjastus, 172–192.

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INTRODUCTION

Changes in our society today has had its effects on education as well. Different developments and problems have proved the uneffectiveness of traditional models at school. Therefore the schools have to find new ways and approaches including in the field of home-school cooperation which is one of them most important factors in forming an effective learning environment, supporting child's development and his or her coping at school. One of the approaches supporting the development during the time of rapid changes is a holistic approach (Schreiner et al. 2005). In learning process it embraces the perception of relations between different elements, directing the learning process from both behavioural, affective and cognitive aspects (Cheng 1997; Pilli 2005).

The concept of a holistic education has found its place beside other educational philosophies during the last years although the idea itself is not new, Comenius, Pestalozzi, Montessori and Dewey have already stressed the importance of a holistic approach in their works (Schreiner et al. 2005). The elements characteristic to holistic approach could be found in Estonian educational concepts as well, for example a system approach theory by H. Liimets that analyses phenomena holistically embracing their broader background systems. In holistic education the system approach has sometimes been opposed to holism as it is considered to be a mechanical interpretation (Pilli 2005). However the system approach theory in Estonia embraces the principles of critical educational concept and therefore can be considered as a part of a holistic approach which in its essence is the next stage of the critical educational concept.

Structural aspect of holistic approach embraces the involvement of all stakeholders: students, teachers, school administration and parents. The parents have started to value their role in their child's educational development. An increased interest towards better home-school cooperation has been one of the greatest changes during the last decade. It has broadened the discussion on the matter to different levels of educational system. The importance of home-school cooperation has been stressed in the strategy of sustainable development of Estonia "Sustainable Estonia 21" (Säästev... 2005).

The problem of the present dissertation is how home-school cooperation functions and what both school and parents could do to develop the cooperation.

The aim of the dissertation is to provide a survey of home-school cooperation and its different aspects (structural, functional and social) in Estonia and to present the possibilities to develop the cooperation.

The following tasks have been set to achieve the aim of the dissertation:

- 1) To survey home-school cooperation as a part of a holistic educational process;
- 2) To survey home-school cooperation in Estonian schools according to parents' opinion in following aspects:
 - a. Structural: different forms of home-school cooperation
 - b. Functional: the functioning of home-school cooperation, its effectiveness
 - c. Social: home-school cooperation as a social capital

The present dissertation is based on a survey research that involved both students, teachers, parents and school administration. The present dissertation focuses on parents' part. The research is based on quantitative methods, a questionnaire to parents was used in order to analyze parents' beliefs and opinions about different aspects of school-life.

The dissertation consists of five articles and their analytical review that introduces the general theoretical background and the main results and it also involves the discussion based on the

research results presented in the articles. The articles embrace the following aspects of home-school cooperation:

- Article I. The content: the holistic nature of educational process, parent-teacher relationships, parents' opinion about values of school, its environment and teachers' proficiency;
- Article II. The content: the connections between democracy and education, the model for assessing democracy in education, the values of different stakeholders, the factors hindering home-school cooperation;
- Article III. The content: different theories and forms of social capital, their relationships with home-school cooperation, different types of teachers and factors describing schools by the opinion of parents;
- Article IV. The content: the concept of sustainable development, the six-component model for assessing the sustainability of educational changes;
- Article V. The content: the principles of a new home-school cooperation paradigm – partnership paradigm and the research results presented according to them.

1. THEORETICAL OVERVIEW OF DIFFERENT ASPECTS OF HOME-SCHOOL COOPERATION

1.1. Holistic nature of educational process (Article I)

Great changes taken place in the world today have changed the meaning of education and the art of teaching. Rapid changes in technology, economy and political climate have influenced educational aims to become more complicated, the demands on education are higher but at the same time public expectations are somewhat contradictory. Schools have to manage with different roles and functions which in turn presumes a constant development towards self-improvement.

A holistic approach that looks at teaching and learning from an integrated perspective has been proved to be more efficient than any other approaches adopting only one innovation at a time (for example active, collaborative, technology-enhanced or student-centred approaches) as adopting one innovation, without accounting for the forces that work against it, can neutralize or negate desired outcomes (Poindexter 2003). The reason of that trend lies in capture the bigger picture instead of narrow purposes.

The principles of holistic education provide that refreshing shift our educational reform urgently needs. School education has to be a holistic process, in which students both individuals and groups can receive maximum opportunity to learn and develop themselves to be versatile persons. But, unfortunately, the concept of holistic approach and how it can maximize learning opportunities often remains unclear.

A holistic approach or holism means that everything exists in the context of relationships, connections, linkages and different meanings (Miller 2000; Pilli 2005; Schreiner, Banev, Simon 2005). Holistic education views individuals in the context of the whole society (Poindexter 2003). In order to facilitate school education and maximize its effectiveness, all stakeholders or agents should be involved in the educational process: school leaders or administration, teachers, students and parents. Parental involvement has been identified as one of the major forces of new educational strategies by many researchers (Fager, Brewster 1999; Fantuzzo 1999; Hill, Craft 2003; Peraita, Pastor 2000; Tulva, Väljataga 1999).

A holistic way of thinking seeks to encompass and integrate multiple layers of meaning. (Miller 2000). The concept of *layers' system* could be used to understand the holistic nature of education process in school as well (Cheng 1997) and provide a more comprehensive unit for managing school activities in a holistic way.

The school process can be separated into actor layers such as *the administrator* and *teacher layer* and *the student layer* (Cheng 1997). In order to facilitate school education and maximize its effectiveness, parents should be encouraged to involve in this holistic process as well (Vincent 1996). When all these parties are put together the layer system takes the form as shown on Figure 1.

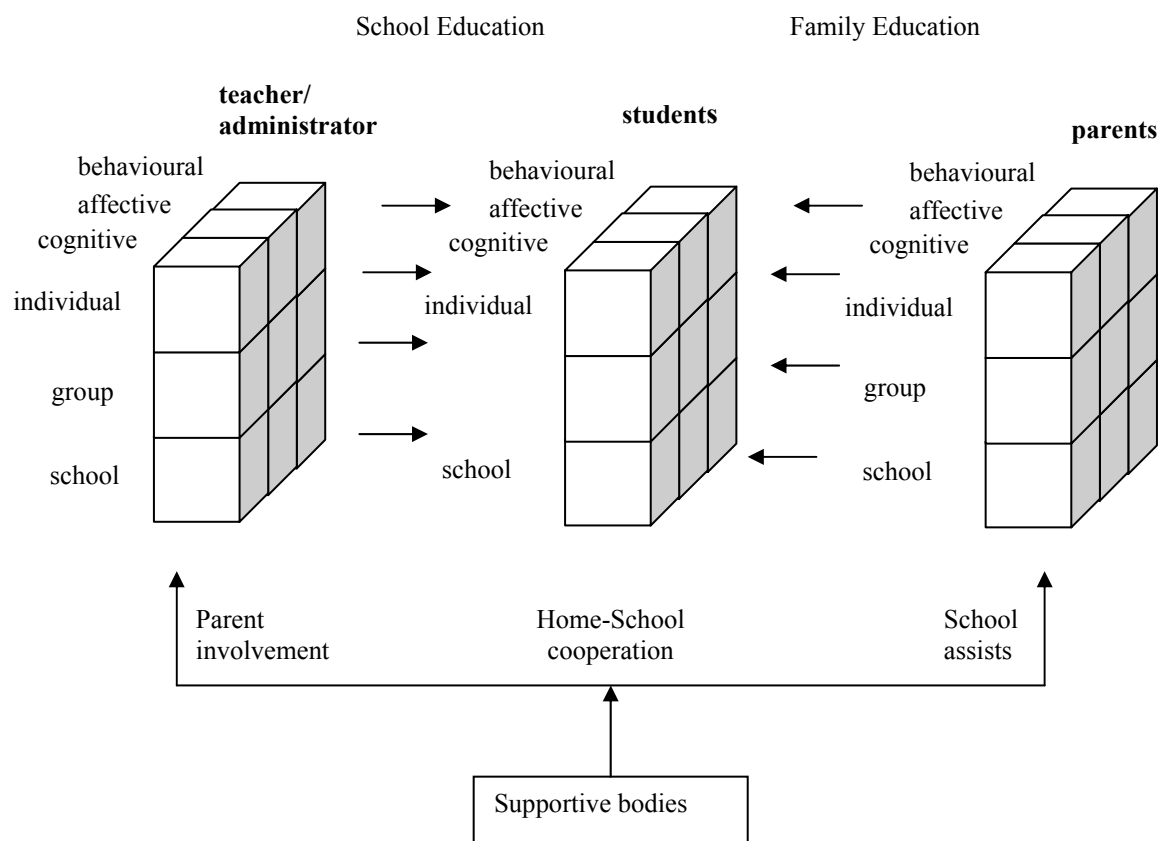


Figure 1. The home-school cooperation – the layers' system (adapted from Cheng 1997)

Thinking in terms of layers (rather than cells) provides a more comprehensive unit to think about the holistic nature of the school process. In order to maximize the effectiveness of teaching process, the teacher layer should influence the student layer as a whole. In other words, teachers at different levels should influence their students through all their behavioural, affective and cognitive performance. And they influence not only individual students but also students in groups and students as a group in a school-level (Cheng 1997) (article I).

1.1.1. Democratic aspect of the holistic approach (Article II)

Democracy is traditionally viewed as a system in which policy is decided by the preference of the majority in a decision-making process (Dahl et al. 2003; Lanning 2008; McCallum 2008). This simple concept has been interpreted and applied in various ways throughout history. Various mechanisms have been developed through which the people control (or are supposed to control) the government. There are several kinds of democracy: direct and indirect democracy (the most well-known kinds are representative and delegative democracy), plus alternative kinds of democracy such as bioregional, anticipatory, grassroots and participatory democracy (Dahl et al. 2003). Participatory democracy involves consensus decision making and offers greater representation. In present times the focus has turned towards wide participation of all interest-groups and stakeholders in negotiation and decision-making. The growing positive attitude towards and use of participatory democracy has been the mainstream trend since the middle of twentieth century (Davis 1999; Leftwich 1996). Participatory democracy can play an important role in learning communities and learning organizations.

As Dewey in 1916 already pointed out democracies depend on education – but only an education that itself incorporates democratic processes can truly serve a democracy (Dewey 1966). The growth of democratization reveals tensions associated with the concept and practice of democracy, particularly as applied to education (Haynes 2000; Schou 2001). On governmental level the democratization of education has been underlined by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) reports on education in different countries (for example – OECD report on Estonia 2001). Here democracy means the wide participation in educational decision-making, including curriculum development, stakeholders and especially – non-governmental organisations (NGOs). The democratization on school-level depends on the democratic processes on state level but in some degree there is also the subject of inter-school culture of participation, empowerment and cooperation (Darling-Hammond et al. 1994; Dewey 1966).

The ultimate aim of school development is to transform the authoritative atmosphere of the school (Pshunder 2005) to a democratic learning and decision-making community (Howard-Hamilton 1995). And the change must come not only from the “outside” – ministry or academic scholars but from school-based educators who live the daily realities of school-life (Darling-Hammond et al. 1994). The values characteristic to democratic approach are: trust, care, moral decisions and actions, respect, involvement and shared responsibility (Landau, Gathercoal 2000; Beane 2002; Power, Power 1992). These values have to be accepted by all stakeholders and at different levels: at ministry, science and school level (Darling-Hammond et al. 1994).

1.2. Parental involvement in school-life (Article I)

Total home-school collaboration should be one of major tendencies in educational reforms (Cassel 2003; Fantuzzo 1999; McNeal 1999). *Parental involvement* in school education has multiple dimensions which often have different impacts on school performance (Eddy 2004; Shepard, Carlson 2003):

- 1) overt parental involvement: which involves visiting meetings and classes and talking to teachers;
- 2) participation in parents organization;
- 3) parent-school cooperation: participation in the daily operations of the school and participation in school decision-making;
- 4) parent-child dimension: conversations about school, education and/or studying etc.

According to the concept of holistic education the broader is the network the child is living in, the stronger is its influence on child’s development. Therefore the cooperation between school and family creates more effective learning environment for a child (Cordy, Wilson 2004; Hill, Craft 2003).

1.2.1. Parental involvement as a social capital (Article III)

Parent *involvement* has been identified as a primary component of school climate, and is also linked with key educational and social-emotional outcomes for students and also their school performance. Many researches have proven its positive impact on child’s academic improvement (Cassel 2003; Cordy, Wilson 2004; Eddy 2004; Fantuzzo 1999; Hill, Craft 2003; McNeal 1999; Peraita, Pastor 2000; Shepard, Carlson 2003). But at the same time it is not simply parental involvement in children’s education that matters for the improved academic achievement, rather it is the production of social capital through specific human interactions in the school. Social capital or social connectedness has been defined as the cultural resources and interpersonal bonds shared by community members (Jack, Jordan 1999). Parental involvement can be conceptualized as a form of social capital that provides individuals with access to resources that improve their academic achievement.

Like other forms of capital, social capital is a resource that students may draw upon when they need to enhance productivity. One of the primary functions of social capital is to enable a student to gain access to human, cultural, and other forms of capital, as well as to institutional resources and support (Coleman 1988).

There has been much discussion of the concept of social capital since it was introduced by Coleman (1994) as an extension of prior research on financial and human capital. Whereas financial capital describes a family's wealth or income, and human capital is measured by parents' education (especially by mothers' education). Coleman defines social capital by referring to its function, viewing social capital as a resource that can be drawn from. Bourdieu (1986) defines social capital as a resource made up of social obligations (or connections), which is convertible, in certain conditions, into economic capital. Later the definition of social capital was refined (Perna, Titus 2005) to include the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that exist in the social networks of individuals.

Coleman (1994) and Bourdieu (1986) offer two somewhat different conceptualizations of social capital. Coleman's approach stresses the role of social capital in communicating the norms, trust, authority, and social controls that an individual must understand and adopt in order to succeed. Coleman's approach is most frequently used in educational research (Perna, Titus 2005) as it is wider (comparing to Bourdieu's) and therefore useful for operationalisation in the frame of an empirical and quantitative study. Coleman identifies the ways in which parental involvement can build social capital, suggesting that social capital is derived from two types of relationships: the relationship between a student and his/her parents; and relationships between a student's parents and other adults, particularly adults who are connected to the school that the student attends (Coleman 1988).

Bourdieu (1986) focuses on the ways in which some individuals are advantaged because of their membership in particular groups. According to him, the amount of social capital to which an individual may gain access through social networks and relationships depends on the size of the networks as well as on the amounts of economic, cultural, and social capital that individuals in the network possess. Bourdieu views social capital as a mechanism that the dominant class uses to maintain its dominant position (Lin 2001). Bourdieu's use of the term is narrower than Coleman's, seeing the effect of social capital at an individual level only and therefore it cannot be viewed as the best approach to describe the home-school relationships supporting child's development.

Drawing on the work of Coleman and Bourdieu, Lin (2001) developed a theory of social capital that focuses on the mechanisms and processes through which an individual obtains the resources that are embedded in social networks. Lin suggests that, whereas closed networks, or strong ties, may effectively preserve resources, weak ties may enable an individual to access resources that are not available via strong ties. In other words, weak ties may serve as a "bridge" to networks that possess information and resources that are different from those that are provided by strong ties or by an individual's family and close friends (Lin 2001). Lin assumes that, although individuals generally establish relationships with individuals who have similar perspectives and socioeconomic backgrounds, some individuals seek relationships with individuals who are of a somewhat "better" social status in order to gain additional resources (Perna, Titus 2005).

1.2.1.1. Forms of social capital (Article III)

Most scholars argue that social capital is not a single entity that families either have or do not have (Woolcock 2001). Rather, it is multidimensional, existing on at least three dimensions. The first dimension is *bonding*, which refers to homogeneous relationships within a close group – for example within the family between parent, children, and kin (Woolcock 2001). Bonding social

capital provides a sense of belonging and is critical to the sense of well-being of the members of families and groups and fulfills immediate need for belonging, love, emotional support and solidarity. Terrion (2006) in her study of the connections forged between members of a temporary group stated that a sense of belonging was central to the development of cohesiveness in the group and that it was created through the group members' communication with each other.

Bridging, the second dimension, refers to connections with diverse social groups: heterogeneous relationships with more distant friends, relations and neighbours. Woolcock (2001) sees bridging as a horizontal metaphor, meaning that connections are made outside of the immediate network but with those who are similar in terms of demographic characteristics, including socio-economic status, beliefs and values, life experience and existing social capital.

Linking social capital, the third dimension, contributes a vertical dimension. It is the addition of linking social capital to bonding and bridging that is vital to the achievement of the positive outcomes associated with social capital (Terrion 2006). Although bonding and bridging connect the parents of different groups with new contacts, linking social capital provides opportunities for families in the form of access to advice, resources and information; it helps to develop linkages with individuals in positions of power.

Looking at those three different approaches to social capital through its three dimensions some links could be drawn out – Coleman's approach seems to deal more with *bonding* dimension as it is based on strong ties, close relationships while Lin assumes both kind of ties, strong and weak, to have their certain roles in building of social capital, which in turn describes the main content of *bridging* dimension. Bourdieu's point of view, dealing with the questions of power and dominancy, is more focused on vertical relationships and therefore discusses the problems of the third dimension – *linking*.

1.3. Principles of home-school cooperation paradigm (Article IV)

Some years ago home-school cooperation was mainly focused on organizational changes or quantitative reforms (increasing parents' participation in daily activities of schools, the number of joint activities, etc). But the new paradigm has shifted the focus to qualitative changes (Carlisle et al. 2005; Driessen, Smit, Slegers 2005; Evertson, Weinstein 2006; Hutchinson 2007; Walker et al. 2005) and the key-word of that paradigm is partnership. Partnership as the desired essence of home-school cooperation is a term that has also been stressed as one of the factors guaranteeing sustainability of Estonian education (Säästev... 2005).

Home-school cooperation is a process that cannot be defined according to certain rules, strategies or methods. Every child is an individual and his or her development has been influenced by the specific network surrounding him or her. Therefore we can only speak about principles that form the basis for an effective home-school partnership.

The principles of new home-school cooperation paradigm are as follows (Suoto-Manning, Swick 2006):

1. *Family and child*: it is important to encourage educators to get to know children and their families in order to identify the child's and family's strengths and integrate these as the focus of involvement with families (Carlisle et al. 2005).
2. *Involving all families in a partnership*: the underlying prerequisite is to create an environment where all families would feel welcome. The relationship between parents and teacher if not directed consciously can become competitive and adversarial rather than collaborative and empathic (Driessen et al. 2005). Teachers have to work hard to find a balance between responding to the needs and capacities of individual students and supporting the development of a classroom community (Walker et al. 2005).

3. *The multiple format of involvement*: there are some traditional forms of home-school cooperation that are characteristic both to the old and the new paradigm: parent meetings and open-door-days (the days when parents can visit classes). The shift towards child-centeredness has brought new approaches to the format of parent-school cooperation and some new parent involvement forms have been added: developmental conversations (to provide the opportunity to follow the child through each developmental phase) are held with children and parents at least once a year (appointed by the law), different out-of-classroom activities held together with parents, participation in parent organizations. It is imperative to forefront the understanding that there is no one model or format of cooperation that works for every family and/or teacher (Driessen et al. 2005; Evertson, Weinstein 2006).
4. *A lifelong learning approach in which the educators/schools learn alongside children and families*: this includes involving parents in the school development process. Currently, more and more parents have started to understand the importance of parental involvement in school, and they have become very active in reforming the school system. The majority of parents would like to participate in discussions about school development (Lukk 2005), but not all schools eagerly accept it. It is the responsibility of schools to educate parents and help them to understand their new roles as partners of schools (Fager, Brewster 1999; Hutchison 2007). The prevalent culture of rights encourages parents to exercise their rights in the field of education as well. How parents do it and the benefit schools can get from it depend greatly on schools.
5. *Trust-building*: true collaboration needs to value each partner and involves an exchange of values among the participants. This element embraces the whole process: it involves different parts of the elements discussed above. The four dimensions of the basic collaborative framework are value definition, value creation, value balance, and value renewal (Carlisle et al. 2005).

Once parents and teachers realize their capabilities and roles, they can work together effectively in helping their children learn. A shift is needed from the paradigm of parents and teachers working separately to parents and teachers working together for the benefit of the child. The relationship between parents and teachers should be one in which both have mutual power and influence regarding the child's education. The existing cultural discontinuity can be addressed by the teacher shifting from – “telling to showing” parents what to do – by explicitly teaching parents to assume new roles (Musti-Rao, Cartledge 2004).

1.4. Sustainability of changes in school (Article IV)

1.4.1. The concept of sustainable development in education

Quality of education in today's world is somewhat superficial. While globally the importance of sustainable education is stressed, locally the main focus is on passing tests, hitting targets and obtaining the knowledge deemed essential in the context of a modern economy. The knowledge is a dominating goal in formal education at present (Quince 2006) although holism stresses the formation of meaning as the most important component of learning (Pilli 2005) and cooperation is seen as a supportive factor in the process. M. Heidmets (2008), the chief editor of “The report of Estonian human development 2007” has also stressed the importance of cooperation alongside of the knowledge. Changes necessary to implement in order to guarantee the sustainability of development require cooperation within a wide network – the sectors of formal, non-formal and informal education working together (Säästev... 2005).

Fundamental concepts which underlie powerful paradigms are usually relatively straightforward and easy to grasp (Shallcross et al. 2006). In the area of social science, ideas which affect millions of people and guide the policies of nations must be accessible to all, not just to an elite (Selby 2006). The growing awareness of challenges to traditional development thinking has led to the increasingly wide acceptance of a new concept that has also become a new paradigm – sustainable development. Development that encourages us to conserve and enhance our resource base, by gradually changing the ways in which we develop and use technologies (McKeown 2002). The challenge of sustainable development is to put this understanding into practice (Steinmann 2003), changing our unsustainable ways into more sustainable ones. Social component has been recognized as the essential part of the new paradigm (Selby 2006).

As sustainable development is the concept that has ethical, moral, and spiritual connotations – it requires attitudinal and behavioural changes. The success of sustainable development will ultimately depend on the decisions individuals and groups make regarding their own behaviour and the bottom-line of these decisions is their value system (ARIC 2000; Mang 2005). But changing someone's value system is a task that is largely based on education (Mandolini 2007).

1.4.2. The characteristics of sustainable changes

The growing awareness of a new paradigm – sustainable development – has brought many changes in every sector of our society. It is understood as a development that encourages us to conserve and enhance our resource base, maintaining a reasonable balance between the desired goals and the available means – this is the way the endurance of the process can be established.

Education for sustainable development (ESD) is the educational manifestation of the concept of sustainable development and it faces a difficult task to put the principles of sustainable development into practice.

Despite the growing body of knowledge about reorienting education, implementing changes and special education practices of ESD, less attention has been paid to studies about the extent to which innovations or changes are sustained over time, what characteristics or factors support their sustainability (Sindelar et al. 2006).

Combining the characteristics of lasting changes in education (Scherer 2006) and the principles of sustainable development (ARIC 2000; McKeown 2002; UNESCO Education sector 2005) a model of six characteristics can be formed for assessing sustainable development and sustainability of these changes in school:

- Depth: the keyword – *values*;
- Endurance: the keyword – *balance*;
- Justice: the keyword – *interdependence*;
- Diversity: the keyword – *equity*;
- Conservation: the keyword – *intergenerational links*;
- Capital: the keyword – *synergy*.

Depth. The depth of teaching-process at school. It involves both the content and the organizational side. To sustain education reforms, we must focus on learning that matters and that results in measurable achievement (Mang 2005). Success in ESD will take much longer and be more costly than single-message public-education campaigns. It is not possible to change something in school using just one course or one student-conference. Education for sustainable development cannot be based exclusively on knowledge. It is the matter of everyday values that run through every program (Mang 2005). To become permanent, changes associated with values to address sustainability must occur throughout the programs, practices, and policies of a school system.

Concerning structuring and placing ESD in the curriculum each country faces a fundamental decision. They must decide on a method of implementation – whether to create another subject, (e.g., Sustainable Development, Environmental Education) or to reorient entire education programs and practices to address sustainable development (McKeown 2002). It is important to distinguish the concept of teaching *about* sustainable development from teaching *for* sustainable development that means changing the goals and methods of education to achieve sustainable development.

Endurance. Balance is one of the keywords of sustainable development. A sustainable development is democratized, decentralized, and pluralistic process where creation of resources has to be balanced with their distribution (Selby 2006). A reasonable balance between the desired goals and the available means and resources must be established to assure the endurance of the process.

The concept of sustainable development involves three aspects: economic, environmental and social. The aim of sustainable development is to balance **economic, environmental, and social** needs (Harris 2000). The goals of these three elements are clearly multidimensional, raising the issue of how to balance objectives and how to judge success or failure. It is instructive to examine the problem from different disciplinary perspectives that draws up the next keyword – participation of all stakeholders in order to balance the different perspectives by exploring their internal logic and understanding them.

Justice. Sustainable development recognizes the interdependence of environmental, social, and economic systems and promotes equality and justice through people empowerment and a sense of global citizenship (Harris 2000). The same keyword can be expanded to a broader meaning. As part of a system, every school must consider its effects on every other school. An ethic of competition does not improve matters for all. Partnership and collective accountability can drive schools to work together.

Schools are interconnected systems. One school's mission may send it to the top of the charts – but end up crippling a neighbour (Hargreaves, Fink 2006). The fates of schools are increasingly intertwined. What leaders do in one school necessarily affects the fortunes of students and teachers in other schools around them. As exemplary or high-profile institutions draw the most outstanding teachers and leaders, they drain them away from the rest. The more school systems run on the market principles of competition and choice, the tighter these interconnections become (Hargreaves, Fink 2006).

Diversity. Recognizing the importance of diversity can help one to focus on humanity's capacity to work together to meet the enormous environmental and social challenges (Hudson 2005). Unity in diversity – the phrase connected with the ideas of equity and social justice. In the context of sustainability, the term 'equity' has to do with fairness – whether all people have similar rights and opportunities.

Social justice is another realm of study that involves values. Social justice that is considered a central part of ESD in most countries includes meeting basic human needs and concern for the rights, dignity, and welfare of all people. It includes respect for the traditions and religions of other societies and cultures, and it fosters empathy for the life conditions of other peoples. Ecological sustainability and resource conservation are considered part of social justice (McKeown 2002).

Conservation. The links between generations are necessary to guarantee the sustainability of changes. These links carry the role of intergenerational mentoring in disseminating messages about sustainable lifestyles (Shallcross et al. 2006). Our actions today are the basis for changes tomorrow. Interdependence that was discussed above as a horizontal characteristic between schools has its vertical dimension as well – it exists across both time as well as space (ARIC

2000). Past, present and future are inextricably connected. We are directly linked back in time by the oldest members of the community and forward nearly a century by those born today. It is important to appreciate that both continuity and change have fundamental influences during the courses of our lives. Understanding the concept of interdependence will assist us in recognizing our responsibilities for the future.

Capital. In the context of sustainability, communities have different types of capital that need to be considered – natural, human, and social capital (Quince 2006). All these types of capital are necessary for communities to function and they need to be managed by a community. A community that is living off the interest of its community capital is living within the carrying capacity (ARIC 2000).

Capital as a characteristic of sustainable development in school involves describing of *synergy* between all stakeholders (Hudson 2005) – the ideas of democracy, participation, involvement, holistic approach; and broadening the meaning it leads to embracing stakeholders both in formal, non-formal, and informal education.

For a community or a nation, implementing ESD is a huge task. Fortunately, formal education does not carry this educational responsibility alone. The non-formal educational sector (e.g., nature centers, nongovernmental organizations) and the informal educational sector (e.g., local television, newspaper, and radio) of the educational community must work cooperatively with the formal educational sector for the education of people. The influence of all sectors that are combined in implementing ESD creates a far larger effect that would be the sum of the influences these sectors could have working separately – a phenomenon of *synergy* occurs (Hudson 2005; Szilagyi, Szesci 2005).

Changing home-school cooperation is a process that needs to be addressed according to the principles of sustainability. Educational changes are not the rapid ones – the conservativeness of education guarantees its stability and all steps taken must be carefully planned in order to achieve the aim of a vital and sustainable system.

2. EMPIRICAL STUDY OF HOME-SCHOOL COOPERATION

2.1. The method

The research the present dissertation is based on was an extensive study funded by Estonian Education and Science Ministry: a state financed project “School as developmental environment and students coping” (reg. no. 0132495s03). The project was carried out by the researches of the department of Educational Sciences at Tallinn University. The underlying question of the research was what schools can do to support students’ coping and prevent their dropping out and other unacceptable behavioural outcomes and to what extent this can be done.

The research was carried out in 2004–2007. It was a survey type research, using a questionnaire as a method. The research involved all stakeholders: students, teachers, school administration (headmaster and headteachers) and parents. The questionnaire to students formed a central part of the research – the students of the 7th, 9th and 11th grades were studied, further their parents, teachers and the administration of the school they were studying at. The questionnaires for different stakeholders were prepared by different researchers individually – the author of the present dissertation was responsible for preparing the questionnaire for parents – followed by an adjusting or harmonizing process by the project team. The questionnaires to all examined parties (school administration, teachers, students and parents) consisted of the same content blocks about the questions studied (opinion about the school as an organization and about teachers; relationships at different levels) as well as specific questions directed solely to a specific stakeholder group.

The present dissertation focuses on the analysis of the data of the questionnaire to parents. The questionnaire consisted of 49 questions that embraced the following content blocks (based on the studies of the following researchers: Cassel 2003; Hill, Craft 2003; McNeal 1999; Peraita, Pastor 2000): 1) parents’ evaluation of school as organisation: trust, home-school relationships, participation in decision-making; 2) the forms of home-school cooperation; 3) difficulties and obstacles in communication with the school; 4) the spirit of the school; 5) school characteristics; 6) evaluation of teachers; 7) relationships (parent-child); 8) safety of the child; 9) family characteristics; 10) personal data.

Different researches of the project have analyzed different content blocks. The present dissertation focuses on the following home-school aspects:

- Structural aspect: questions 7, 8;
- Functional aspect: questions 1–6, 9–12, 14, 16–19, 23;
- Social aspect: questions 1–4, 6, 10–11, 14–16, 18–19, 24, 33, 35–36.

The sample consisted of 65 schools in Estonia (10% of Estonian schools). The respondent schools formed an adequate representation of schools – geographically, by working language (Estonian or Russian), by results of state exams during last 5 years (best and weakest results in their area – county or city). The number of participants: 3838 students, 2048 parents, 624 teachers and 120 representatives of school administration. All members of the research group took part in carrying out the questionnaires. Full anonymity was guaranteed for all participants.

Analyzing the data of the groups studied in the research separate wholes were formed – one-to-one correspondence was not used. Some comparisons are drawn between different groups when interpreting the data (for example in the article II the answers of students, parents, teachers and school administration are compared; in the articles III and IV the answers of parents and children are compared).

In statistical analysis the data was assembled into master variables by factor-analysis (Cronbach's alpha not less than 0,60). Cluster-analysis was used for classification, ANOVA (*one-way*) to find out the differences between groups, f- and t-tests were used for comparing the means and variance. Regression analysis was used to develop the model describing the relations between different variables.

The following programs were used: SPSS for Windows Version 10.0 (the entering forms and analysis) ja Microsoft Excel 2000 (the graphics).

2.1.1. The sample

The sample consisted of 2048 parents, 88 % of respondents were female and 12 % male. The average age was 42 years (min. 19, max. 82 years). The questionnaires were not filled in solely by parents but also grandparents, foster parents and other people who were official custodians of a child.

The level of education brought out two larger groups: secondary-special education (subprofessionals) and respondents having a higher education (graduates): accordingly 33,7% ja 31,3%. The next group was formed by respondents having a secondary education: 17,0%. The other groups were smaller: vocational education, 14,5%; basic education, 3,5%.

2.2. The results of the research by the principles of home-school cooperation

2.2.1. Family and child

It is important to encourage educators to get to know children and their families in order to identify the child's and family's strengths and integrate these as the focus of involvement with families.

The level of care in families (article III) revealed that more than a half (59,9%) of respondents completely agreed with the statement "Our family members care about each other", 33,4% would rather agree with it, 6,7% did not agree (Figure 2).

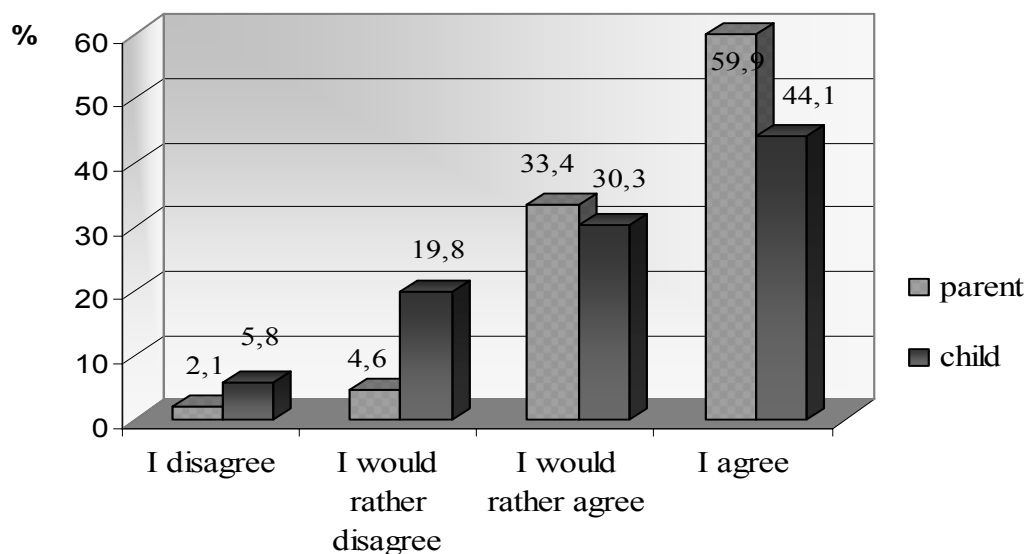


Figure 2. The family members care about each other

Comparing the opinions of parents and children about caring in the family shows a statistically significant difference ($p=0.000$). Children tend to assess the level of caring lower than parents do. More than 20% of children stated that they do not/rather not agree that the members of their family care about each other. One of the reasons may be that the relationships between siblings are often problematic especially at adolescent age. However, it is a quite serious fact if only less than half of the students can express their complete agreement with the statement.

9.5% of the children said that they had experienced violence at home lately and only 5.1% of parents stated that about their child (the significance of the difference was $p=0.008$).

One of the questions studied the different aspects of child's life that parents are concerned about. The results revealed that 18.6% of parents worry about the relationships in their family. Parents from Russian schools and from schools in the capital city showed much higher percentages (36% and 23.5% accordingly) comparing to parents from rural or country regions (13%), which may be due to the more stressful lifestyle. People living in the capital city have to manage in a much busier environment and face more challenges in their daily life. Russian parents tend to feel quite uncertain in our contemporary society about their future and about their children's coping in their future lives. Having that uncertainty in their minds as an underlying factor of distress may also cause tensions in their family life.

The aspects of life parents are concerned about (article V): 18,6% of parents are concerned about the relationships in their families. The parents of Russian schools are more concerned about it and so do the parents from the capital city (36% and 23,5% accordingly), comparing to the parents living in rural areas (13%).

Communication plays a pivotal role in the production of social capital (Terrion 2006). The analysis of the difference between parents' and children's opinions about the school revealed a statistically significant ($p<0.01$) difference in their views on some characteristics (Figure 2). The most remarkable differences were about the clear aims of the school and whether new teaching methods and techniques are used in teaching process or not. Most of the parents (82.6%) support the statement that the school, their child attends, has clear aims and knows how to achieve them. But at the same time only 71.7% of children seem to know that – which shows an information gap on that point. The same trend can be followed in the question about the new teaching methods and techniques as well (67.2% of parents and 42.6% of children). These differences show the lack in educational conversations between parents and children.

2.2.2. Parent-teacher cooperation

The basis for engaging parents is readiness for communication which in turn presupposes sacrificing one's time. Analyzing parents' beliefs about teachers' readiness to devote their time and attention to children revealed that 62% of parents thought teacher generally find the time to communicate with the parent, but only 8% noted that teachers have *enough* time for them, while 38% stated that teachers do not find some time for parents.

The communication between teachers and parents is a key-element of home-school cooperation. Comparing the ranks of the topics teachers discuss with the parents, a difference can be observed (Table 1):

Table 1. The rank of the main topics teachers discuss with parents

Parents' suggestion	Actual situation
1. Child's safety	1. Child's grades
2. Child's development and future	2. Child's behaviour and moral
3. Child's grades	3. Specific misbehaviours and troubles
4. Child's food and health	4. Child's safety
5. Child's behaviour and moral	5. Child's food and health
6. Bullying	6. Child's development and future
7. Friendship (between children)	7. Bullying
8. Specific misbehaviours and troubles	8. Friendship (between children)
9. Means of instruction	9. Out-of-classroom activities
10. Out-of-classroom activities	10. Means of instruction
11. School curriculum	11. School curriculum
12. Changes in school arrangements	12. Changes in school arrangements
13. School renovation	13. School renovation
14. Transport	14. Transport

Parents expect teachers to speak primarily about their child's development, future and safety, but teachers focus on grades and behavioural outcomes. Deeper conversations about school development are not held. Comparing the schools having higher academic results with the ones having lower the statistically significant difference was found: in schools with higher scholastic proficiency the conversations about student's development and his or her future as well as about school curriculum were had more often (article I).

Parents' opinions about teachers were grouped by cluster analysis and four different clusters were formed (article III):

- 1) Student orientated caring teachers (42,6%): teachers who are interested in child's development, they monitor systematically student's improvement; they think that assessing or grading is a tool to support child's learning process and the most important is a positive learning environment at the lesson.
- 2) Positively strict teachers (32,5%): teachers who maintain good discipline by being objective and reasonably demanding; student's opinion is important for them; they think that grades are objective descriptors of child's development.
- 3) Subject orientated teachers (10,5%): teachers who have extensive knowledge in their subject and the most important for them is to prepare their students for their level tests and exams.
- 4) Strict competitors (14,4%): teachers who consider punishment as the main factor influencing child's academic attainment; the base for development lies in competition; it is very hard for them to accept students who are too different from a "normal average".

2.2.3. The forms of home-school cooperation

The present research studied different forms of home-school cooperation: parent-meetings, parent-meetings together with children, developmental conversations, open-door-days, outings, participation in parent-organizations (articles I ja V). All these forms were studied from two points of view: frequency and needfulness.

Most parents support traditional forms of home-school cooperation – parent-meetings with parents and class teacher, 83.8%, and open-door-days (the days when parents can visit classes), 62.2%. Developmental conversation held together with the child (parent-child-teacher) is a new form of parental involvement that was introduced in 2006 as a compulsory part of home-school cooperation. Participation in parent organizations had the lowest score (44.3% of parents assessed it as a necessary form of parent involvement). As this form of involvement is new and not so well-known, parents may not fully understand it and therefore cannot assess its necessity.

Comparing these indicators with the percentages describing the actual situation in schools showed somewhat different results: half of the parents (52.1%) have never participated in parent meetings together with children; 40.8% have never had a developmental conversation; about one third (37.8%) have never visited classes during open-door-days and almost half of parents have never taken part in outings or parent organizations (48.5% and 52.1% accordingly).

2.2.4. Parents' opinion about school and cooperation

One of the main functions of schools is to support the idea of lifelong learning. We studied parents' beliefs about some aspects of school culture describing the values of lifelong learning in the home-school cooperation framework. 60.7% of parents thought that school culture supports the formation of a dignified citizen; 45.6% that the conditions of learning environment meet the needs of a modern society; 52% that school has clear aims and knows the direction of their development. But only 37.2% agreed with the statement that new learning and teaching methods were used in the school. Developing different learning skills is one of the most important parts in successful coping and lifelong learning process, and therefore the readiness to implement new ideas is essential for achieving the aim of lifelong learning. However, according to the results of the research, the idea of lifelong learning has not been fully implemented yet.

Involving all parties or stakeholders at school presupposes the existence of a democratic leadership style. But only 26% of parents think that the school their child attends has a democratic leadership style where everybody has equal rights and possibilities; this leaves three quarters of parents unsatisfied in this respect.

The means of different aspects of home and school cooperation (on the scale 1–6):

- Satisfaction with the relationship: 3,81
- Trust: 4,35
- Satisfaction with the right to participate in decision-making: 3,1
- Satisfaction with the frequency of cooperation: 3,71
- General: 4,15

Generally parents are satisfied with home-school relationships (article II): the mean 3,81 (on the scale 1–6) and they trust teachers: the mean 4,35 (on the scale 1–6). The lowest index had the satisfaction with the right to participate in decision-making: the mean 3,1 (on the scale 1–6) (articles I ja II). At the same time most of the parents expressed that they should have the right to participate in decision-making both at school, local government and republic level (Figure 3).

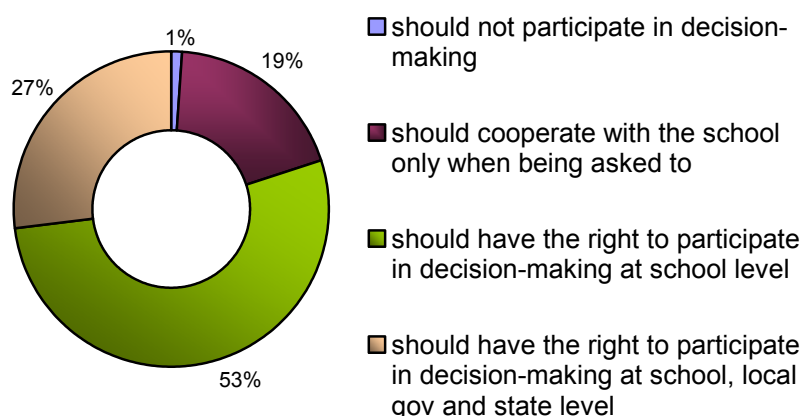


Figure 3. Respondents' opinion about the right to participate in decision-making

The overall evaluation of school was high: 75% of respondents gave the points from 4 to 6; the mean was 4,15.

What are the most important evaluation indices that determine parents' general opinion of the school their child is attending to? As the result of a regression analysis a regression model was formed from the variables that had a statistically significant correlation with parents' general evaluation of school:

$$y = 2,487 + 0,274x_1 + 0,146x_2 - 0,145x_3 + 0,063x_4 - 0,109x_5 + 0,05101x_6$$

or: parents' general evaluation = $2,487 + 0,274 \cdot \text{trust towards teachers} + 0,146 \cdot \text{the evaluation to home-school relations} - 0,145 \cdot \text{child's willingness to go to school} + 0,063 \cdot \text{satisfaction with the frequency of cooperation} - 0,1099 \cdot \text{child's opinion about the boredom of the school} + 0,05101 \cdot \text{parents' opinion about the right to participate in decision-making at schools}$

The regression model shows clearly that parents' opinion about trusting teachers determines their overall opinion of the school.

The underlying prerequisite of the effective functioning of home-school cooperation is the characteristics of the school: specifically, the extent to which the school encourages parental involvement, the volume of resources that may be accessed via social networks at the school, the homogeneity of the social networks at the school and the school climate in general (Perna, Titus 2005).

In the present study parents assessed schools by various variables, which were analyzed by factor analysis. Three factors were extracted (article III):

1. **Respectable/Honourable schools** (descriptive power 34%): schools with a strong belonging and democratic leadership style; the school has well-established aims, strong traditions and a good reputation; at the same time they are opened to new ideas.
2. **Progressive schools** (descriptive power 24%): open-minded and forward-looking, these are the schools that keep up with the demands of the modern society; the leadership style is clear and objective – involving all interest groups.
3. **Impeding schools** (descriptive power 13%): schools that still hold onto old-fashioned ways and habits; implementing new ideas or views is an extremely slow process; students are regarded and treated according to their socio-economic status.

The results reveal that most of the schools have recognized the necessity for change, try to be opened and to involve different interest groups in school development. But all changes take some time until they function without serious problems. So there are still some reasons that hinder effective home-school cooperation. Researches have shown (Lukk et al. 2006) that parents who have been ready to cooperate have lost their willingness because of the negative experience with school. The number of parents who either cannot find time or are not interested is quite large, but it still cannot be an excuse for no home-school cooperation at all. Knowing these facts it is now school's – both administration and teachers – obligation to become an active party of the process organizing the work in a way that would motivate parents to participate.

2.2.5. The hindering factors of home-school cooperation

The reasons that hinder the effective home-school cooperation were grouped by cluster analysis and four different groups of reasons were distinguished (article II):

- 1) **Personal aversion:** this group is formed by the reasons that are connected with parent's direct negative experience in the field of home-school cooperation (17,2% of cases).
- 2) **Problems of everyday life:** this group consists of reasons that are outside of school – problems at work, in family, lack of time and strength (22,2%).
- 3) **Senseless efforts:** some parents have tried to join in the decision making at school but have seen their efforts as senseless; they have experienced the malfunction of the system and even noticed that cooperation with the school may have a bad side-effect on their child (35,2%).

4) Keeping a distance: this group of reasons shows the lack of parent's interest towards the school and child's studies, such kind of parents try to distance themselves from the problems at school (25,2%).

These results show that in parents' opinion the focus of home-school cooperation is more on exclusiveness than inclusiveness. The parents who have been ready to cooperate have lost their willingness because of the negative experience with school. The number of parents who either cannot find time or are not interested is quite large, but it still cannot be an excuse for no home-school cooperation at all. Knowing these facts, it is now school's – both administration's and teachers' – obligation to become an active party of the process organizing the work in a way that would motivate parents to participate.

3. DISCUSSION

3.1. Holistic approach as the principle of educational reforms

Our society today is moving on a new way of life that requires new meaning of education and only the schools that have successfully put necessary changes into practice can provide students with the level of education that would guarantee them success in their later life (McKeown 2002; Selby 2006; United... 1996). The new key-word in educational reforms is a holistic approach that embraces all fields of a system as well as the relations and connections within it. At school level it means involving all stakeholders – students, teachers, parents and school-administration – in a functioning cooperation. According to the concept of holistic education the broader is the network the child is living in, the stronger is its influence on child's development. Therefore cooperation between school and family creates more effective learning environment for a child (article I).

3.2. Implementing the principles of democracy in schools

The process of building a democratic school is a complex one and requires an effort to maintain a delicate balance between the needs of individuals and the interests of the group, trying to reflect the differing perspectives of people from different backgrounds and experiences. The problems in the process of change must not be viewed as inevitable failures but as challenges that can be met and overcome. All the tensions cannot be solved with a certain formula or prescription, but according to the principle of democratic community, the internal problems have to respond in their own way based on individual and collective experiences which would lead to the forming of a democratically educated learner (article II). In the changing world that requires workers with developed problem-solving skills and higher-order thinking processes, and citizens who share democratic values and practice, the move toward democratic practice in schools has to be considered as essential.

Speaking about Estonian educational system and schools it is important to notice that at present there are two contradictory aspects concerning democracy in the system: from one side the decentralization, schools' autonomy, their right for self-government (including school-curriculum development) are declared and introduced by the Ministry of Education; from the other side – the Ministry has created a system of centralized directives, control and standardization mechanisms (including state-tests, state-exams). So the democratization at teacher level has increased in terms of curriculum-creation and decreased in terms of directives about grading, documentations etc. The participation of teachers (and their organizations) in educational decision-making on state level is almost nonexistent.

At school-level in general Estonian schools share democratic values – headmasters and teachers value honesty, tolerance, good relations and they understand the importance of involving all interest groups or parties in vision-building and decision-making process. But students' rank of values is much different – when it comes to school the most important value is of a utilitarian one – academic success, a wish to improve themselves. The parents' opinion is very similar to that of the students – academic achievement is the most important and they have even more radical views giving discipline the second place. This raises the question of a gap between theory and practice, which may also be called a communication gap as teachers have not succeeded to pass their democratic view to the children and their parents. Parents should be guided on their way to close relationships with school. Most parents are ready to cooperate but they need assistance and of course they need to feel accepted and welcomed at school.

Estonian educational system has implemented the idea of internal evaluation process as a basis for development. The internal evaluation of school is the process that has been introduced in most of the countries in Europe – although in some of the countries it is only recommended (not mandatory as it is in Estonia since 2007) – for example in Belgium, Ireland, Austria, Great Britain, and Hungary (Õppeasutuse... 2006). The model used in Estonia is based on European EFQM Excellence Model (Õppeasutuse... 2006) and it embraces the basic ideas of successful educational reforms.

The process of internal evaluation includes the requirement of studying the opinion of all stakeholders that carries the idea of participatory democracy in it. That change which came into force in September 2007 has remarkably increased the partnership with stakeholders in schools. When all stakeholders are working together it definitely helps to balance the objectives and increase understanding which in turn supports the endurance of changes (Szilagyi, Szesci 2005; Smith 2006). To make change last over time requires that reforms not be linked to one person. To assure the continuity, the leadership must be distributed to many (Wagner et al. 2006) – to follow democratic principles.

3.3. Structural and functional aspects of home-school cooperation

Home-school cooperation is one of the fields where modernization needs more attention and guidance. The most difficult part is to implement new ideas in the areas that have strong traditions of known methods yet they are not recognized as effective in today's changed conditions. There used to be an authority, a key-person whose opinion and instructions were followed without significant questions. This key-person was a teacher. Nowadays home-school cooperation focuses on the process – a joint activity that is based on partnership. The aims and final results are achieved through collaborative work, every stakeholder has a say and opportunity to introduce new ideas. There are not any ready-made models – every case is unique as every child is unique.

The parental involvement is rather different in Estonian schools, Although the new internal evaluation system has brought positive changes on that matter (Lukk 2005; Nassar, Rebane 2002). Most of the parents are interested in cooperation with school in order to guarantee their child's development.

We found that the present situation in Estonian schools does not support the improvement of home-school cooperation process. The forms of parental involvement that schools generally practice are not suitable for all parents. Therefore it is extremely important to implement the new way of thinking – rather than being bound to concrete forms of home-school cooperation, teachers should be creative, open to new ideas, and, based on the knowledge obtained from conversations with parents, find the forms of involvement suitable for every family (article V).

The effective home-school cooperation is based on positive relationships, positive opinions of school and teachers and trust that had the highest indices in the research which means that a good foundation has been led. The next step is school's to take – schools have to learn to trust parents and give them opportunity to participate in a decision-making process. But not all schools are ready for that. The factors hindering home-school cooperation revealed that a lot of parents have experienced either senselessness of their efforts or even a hostile reaction on their attempt to express their opinion. But the formation of a person capable to cope in his or her life requires a supportive environment, the adequate information and last but not least shared goals of all stakeholders (article V).

3.4. Social aspect of home-school cooperation

Parental involvement is a part of a complex phenomenon – social capital. Social capital has been defined differently but in general it is a privilege the person gets from the relationships with his or her social networks. Depending on the character, strength and direction three different forms of social capital have been used *bonding*, *bridging*, *linking social capital* (article III).

Child's rearing environment involves different social networks that make up a network system. Adapting social capital theory with the most well-known environmental theory, Bronfenbrenner's (1986) theory, the network surrounding a child becomes a two-level network system: the first level embraces environments and relations between them, the other one embraces the relationships withing the network (Figure 4).

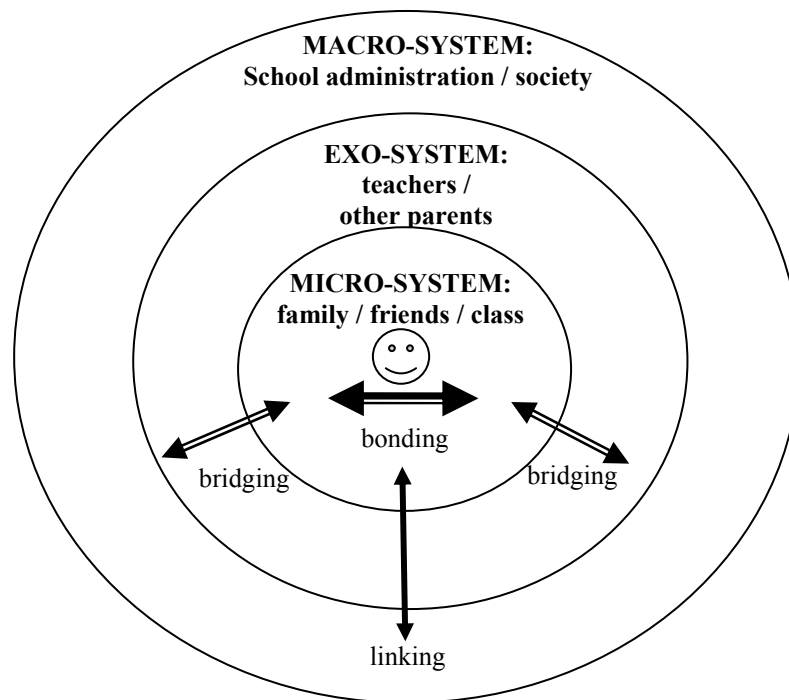


Figure 4. Bronfenbrenner's theory together with the forms of social capital in the framework of home-school cooperation

With the growing diversity in schools, the role of teachers, especially in urban schools, has changed dramatically, becoming decidedly more challenging. Teachers are under constant pressure from the school district to achieve established standards of excellence, making it essential to work collaboratively with parents toward a common goal of children's success in school. Instead of considering parents as a threat or nuisance, teachers have the opportunity to elicit help from parents. Just as more information about the schools allows parents to assist their children better, the more information teachers have about the children's home environment, the better equipped they will be to accommodate the needs of the parents and the children.

Parental involvement is only a factor of the more complex phenomena – social capital. Social capital is a term that has different explanations and exists on at least three dimensions: bonding, bridging and linking.

The relationships within family as the indicators of *bonding*. The most important results were that more attention should be paid on caring between family members and parents should talk to the children about the importance of school and education instead of concentrating only on grades.

Parent-teacher communication and parents' opinion about teachers as aspects of *bridging*. Parents trust school and teachers but they expect them to be more opened; varying the forms of home-school cooperation would provide more opportunities for parents to find the most suitable way of communication for them. A shift is needed from the paradigm of parents and teachers working separately to parents and teachers working together for the benefit of the child. Communication is the heart of the whole exchange process. Help and involvement may occur only when communication is recognized as the generator of fruitful relationships.

school related questions as parts of the *linking* dimension. The results reveal that schools have recognized the necessity for change; they try to be opened and involve different interest groups in school development. A very important aspect of parental involvement is an exchange of expertise and abilities. Schools provide parents with ideas on how to help their children with adequate attitude and interest, and they invite parents to become involved with curriculum matters such as planning, classroom activities, and children's assessment.

The focus of efforts for both parents and teachers needs to be the educational success of the child. The relationship between parents and teachers should be one in which both have mutual power and influence regarding the child's education. It is essential that schools and particularly teachers recognize parents as assets. Only then we can speak about building social capital that enables parents to better support their children.

3.5. The model of sustainable home-school cooperation

The growing awareness of a new paradigm – sustainable development – has brought many changes in every sector of our society. It is understood as a development that encourages us to conserve and enhance our resource base, maintaining a reasonable balance between the desired goals and the available means – this is the way the endurance of the process can be established.

Education for sustainable development is the educational manifestation of the concept of sustainable development and it faces a difficult task to put the principles of sustainable development into practice (article IV).

The concept of education for sustainable development has been broadly accepted by now, but less attention has been paid to the extent to which innovations or changes are sustained over time, what characteristics or factors support their sustainability. A model of six characteristics of sustainable changes in schools is one of the ways to describe sustainable development in schools. These characteristics are: depth, endurance, justice, diversity, conservation and capital.

According to the model the positive changes concerning sustainable development in Estonian schools have been the national curriculum supporting the ideas of education for sustainable development, internal evaluation system as the basis for autonomy and self-management. The areas requiring deeper changes are justice or interdependence (to diminish the role of market principles in schools), diversity – respect for other people and tighter connections between formal and non-formal education as well as between schools and teacher training institutions.

Transforming the concept of sustainable development into reality is not a short-term process – producing greater lasting effects requires long-term strategies that would support changing the values of the whole community. An effective home-school partnership is based on good relationships (Sutton 2006; Vincent 1996). Good relationships are built on trust. Building trust is not a simple process that can be achieved in a short time period. Trust-building is a complex process that embraces two main aspects: shared values that may be seen as a heart of the process and communication as the means to get there. According to the results of the present research, pa-

rents do not share the same values as teachers. They think teachers do not support their child's coping; they believe that teachers do not monitor the child's development systematically, and they are concerned about their child's future. Russian parents tend to be more concerned about their child's future, probably because they are a minority group and the language barrier may become an obstacle in their further studies. Trust cannot be built on that basis.

There is no way to prescribe or standardize a single way of going about building trust, as teachers and families differ. But there is a need for improving communication in order to achieve the desired aim of shared values. By putting together the four value dimensions (value definition, value creation, value balance, and value renewal) (Carlisle et al. 2005), the results of the present research and the main stages of the well-known quality cycle – Deming-circle (Plan-Do-Check-Act) (Greenwood, Gaunt 1995; Johnson 1993), a developmental model of effective home-school cooperation process that would guarantee the quality and sustainability of the relationship could be formed (Figure 5).

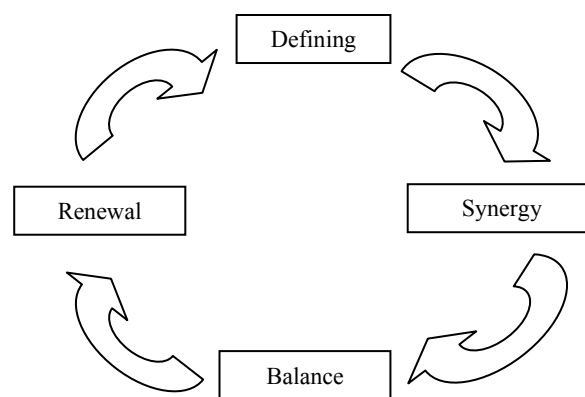


Figure 5. The developmental model of effective home-school cooperation process

The defining stage embraces the process of getting to know the family, finding out the strengths, aims and concerns of the family and child; it also involves introducing the values of school and education and providing parents with the necessary information. It is important to remember at this stage that the basis for good communication lies in respect and appreciation for a multiplicity of perspectives, the readiness for a dialogue and problem solving together – following the principles of a true democratic process. The synergy stage is an active cooperation process where both of the parties join their resources, and, working together, they achieve even greater success than working alone. The stage of balance is the period when the values of both parties – parents and school – are balanced; the differences have been settled; the consensus has been reached, and the steps taken are also assessed at this stage. The renewal stage is the preparation for the next level: choosing new aims, new goals to be achieved in the child's development. This is the cycle of continuous development and improvement.

The challenges of education are ones which neither schools nor families can meet alone; they must support each other. When families and schools cooperate, the children learn more; they enjoy school and the learning process, and they experience a consistent sense of commitment and support from the important adults in their lives (Epstein 1996).

The results of the present dissertation could be used as a basis for reorganizing parental involvement at schools as well as the curriculum of teacher training programmes. The dissertation also present the models for assessing democracy and sustainability of changes in education that could be used in further studies.

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CURRICULUM VITAE

Name: Karin Lukk

Date and place of birth: 04.05.1974, Tartu

Citizenship: Estonian

Education and training

2003– Tallinn University, PhD studies

2001–2003 Tallinn Pedagogical University, MA studies

2000–2001 Tallinn Pedagogical University, BA

1992–1996 Tartu Teacher Training College, diploma in teacher education

2006–2007 The Open University Centre for Continuing Education of Tallinn University, leadership training course “The Head of General Secondary School”

2003–2008 Trans-European Division of SDA, St. Albans, United Kingdom, certificated training course “Certificated Family Life Educator”

Employment

2007– Sisters Group Ltd, lecturer-educator

2006– Tartu Kivilinna Gymnasium, headteacher and developmental manager; English teacher

2005–2006 Tartu Kivilinna Gymnasium, developmental manager and English teacher

1996–2005 Tartu Kivilinna Gymnasium, English teacher

Other organizational and administrative experience

2005– Tallinn University, the member of Curriculum Council of School of Doctoral Studies in the Institute of Educational Sciences

2005–2007 Tallinn University, the member the Council of School of Doctoral Studies in the Institute of Educational Sciences

2005– Baltic and Black Sea Circle Consortium (BBCC) member

1996– National director of the Children and Youth organization Pathfinders

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