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# **The Involvement Opportunities of Hearing Impaired Children's Parents in Mainstream Education**

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In the international educational practice, as well in Hungary, particular attention tends to be paid to the dominant role of the family increasingly including the parent involvement of children with special educational needs (SEN), which appears differentiated.

The children's education should be based on the cooperation and shared responsibility of the family and the institution. This partnership assumes equality. *Joyce Epstein* (2001) examining the types of school-family-community partnership cooperation developed the forms of parental involvement, potential opportunities and activities that could be applied in practice. The principles and parental involvement forms enshrined by her (parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, collaborating with the community) are often abused in practice.

What kind of programmes and good opportunities are available for the parents and teachers of children with special needs in methodological centres? Referring to TAMOP 2012, which concerned such activities of methodological centres there are good opportunities available for parent involvement, for example Parents school, Family study hall, in Special Schools for deaf and hard of hearing students, where mental health and methodological techniques can be acquired, by which solving everyday problems in a hearing-impaired child's education becomes more efficient and constructive.

The population of deaf and hard-of-hearing children comprises a heterogeneous group. The number of hearing impaired students in mainstream schools indicates an increasing tendency. The needs and demands of the population are characterized by a high degree of heterogeneity. Several Hungarian studies aim to present how partnership works in mainstream schools showing the viewpoints of parents and the changes in the relationship between parents and professionals.

As a specialist working in practice, I believe that re-reading the system of relations in which the parents will be the customers as well as the resource and also as the partner of the service remains much to be done.

## *Introduction*

In today's changing world continuous development can be seen in education. Modern pedagogical paradigms have naturally affected the relationship between families and professionals. The traditional division of roles and responsibilities between the family and the school has become outdated (Takács, Szekeres & Perlusz, 2013). The former hierarchical dependence in this new high-definition connection system is gradually being replaced by efforts to establish a partnership (Prekop, 1997).

This change can be noticed in the special educational needs of hearing impaired children. The "incompetent" parents become "co-therapists", thus helping the work of the experts (Sodogé & Eckert, 2004). This assumes that parents have adequate knowledge and therefore the training of parents is essential.

However, the approach which intends to offer effective training and education for all children is spreading in our country. By inclusion attitudes special teachers' knowledge and competency are growing and becoming differently observed (Takács, Szekeres & Perlusz, 2013), they must meet new challenges (e.g. direct support in mainstream schools, consultation with parents and mainstream educators, special education assistants, team-work). According to the results of a Swedish study, in the case that the primary role of a special education teacher remains teaching, we can talk about exclusive process, whereas if consulting, development work comes to the fore, the process will change into inclusive direction (Takács, Szekeres & Perlusz, 2013).

The analyzing research results of the maintaining contacts features and ways of parents and the institution indicate that parental involvement and the cooperation with the family have a positive impact on the child's development, learning, behaviour and integration into the community (Epstein, 2001; Epstein & Salinas, 2004; Podráczy, 2012).

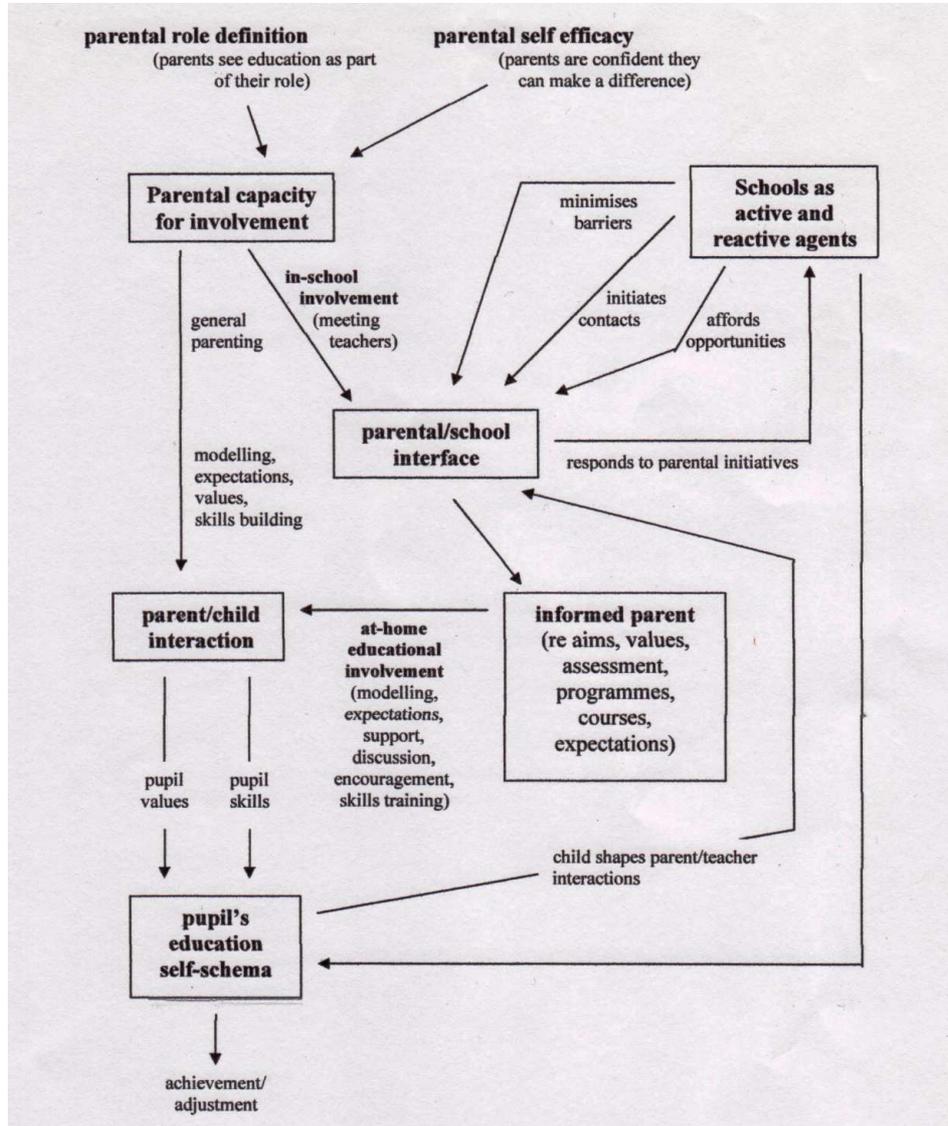
A research summary of TÁMOP project, No.4.1.2./B./KMR-2009-2011., the Teacher Training Network in Central Hungary and its subproject called The Relationship between Family and Institutional Education are the theoretical framework of this study. The research summary contains several national and international writings, good practice, as well as pilot research (Podráczy, 2012).

## *The definition of parental involvement*

Parental involvement is often used in both practical work and education policy, but what does the term mean? – The use of the term of parental involvement is not uniform. Some research means home tasks related to school activities, while in other opinions it is the contacts with teachers or active participation involving all matters of school life (e.g. decision

making, voluntary work) (Podr aczky, 2012). *Desforges and Abouchaar* (2003) illustrate the factors affecting parental involvement and their association in a system model (Figure 1).

Figure 1. The model of effective parental involvement based on Desforges and Abouchaar



(Source: Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003:50).

The degree of parental involvement is determined by several factors, such as the socio-economic status of the family, the relationship of parents with the school and their expectations, the child's age and their special educational needs have significant roles.

*Meilinger* (2011) also highlighted in relation to parenthood and its effective functioning based on interviews made with some parents of integrated students with learning disabilities that parents with SEN children do not often tend to opt for a specific institution following an independent and conscious decision, but according to the proposal and designation of the expert committee. The parental role is influenced by a number of external and internal factors and their complex relations (e.g.

the social situation, the possibility of access to information, the parent's personality and ability to enforce their own interests, their social status and relations) (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003).

Sometimes it could be difficult for hearing impaired children's parents to accept to collaborate with several professionals (audiologist, peripatetical teacher etc.). If the parent is hearing impaired, it's necessary to involve a sign language interpreter during the consultation and rehabilitation lessons.

The role of the therapist in the family's life might become substantial in making decisions, for example, choosing a school, choosing hearing aids. While cooperating, professionals may experience a greater activity on the part of the hearing impaired children's mothers in everyday activities, which may result from the methodology of the auditory-verbal therapy, where parents are involved so that the therapy should become the part of everyday life (routines, interactions at home, reading books, etc.) because the aim is the development of communication, language and auditory skills, however, overprotecting mothers want to hide the difficulties of communication from hearing impairment or avoid them or draw their child's attention. This parental attitude influences the development of the child and their identity.

Cooperation is determined by the difficult financial circumstances of parents. Hearing impaired children's parents cannot often choose the institution for their children, whereas it could be appointed by the committee. They often have to travel great distance for adequate care (from rural, small regions), therefore, it is more difficult to arrange a personal consultation.

According to *Epstein and Salinas* (2004), all parents can be involved in the teaching-learning process, but not to the same extent. Six parental involvements are distinguished that affect children's performance positively (parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, cooperation in the wider community) (Epstein & Salinas, 2004).

The parents' involvement makes inclusive education more effective, and it is also true backwards: if parental rights prevail better in inclusive institutional practice, parents are actively involved in the life of the institution (e.g. programs, work of boards), the performance of the school will change in a positive direction. Although parents get involved in the preparation and evaluation process of the child's individual development plan in the international practice, the national examples show that the principles and parental involvement forms formulated by Epstein are often violated, which is confirmed by the results of research and also my experience as a peripatetical teacher in special education (Takács, Szekeres & Perlusz, 2013; Meilinger, 2011; Lukács & Magyarné, 2016). National research has revealed that consultative parental involvement is the most frequent both in the majority and special institutions, which in many cases operates formally, but the majority of parents are satisfied with this (Takács, Szekeres & Perlusz, 2013; Meilinger, 2011; Lukács & Magyarné, 2016).

## *Training programs for parents*

Promotion of parental involvement can happen in three aspects: strengthen direct relations of the school and parents; by means of parental skills training programs and education programs (Podráczy, 2012).

Parent training programs described in international studies are organized in two main directions. On the one hand, parents are aimed who need to learn basic cultural techniques, so skill-development training is organized for them (e.g. Adult Literacy and Basic Skills Unit (ALBSU), Basic Skills Agency (BSA)) (Podráczy, 2012).

On the other hand, programs are organized which strengthen the parents in their parental roles (e.g. „Care Program” - social responsibility, empathy, relationship skills), school and family cooperation is targeted so that mutual acceptance and respect will be deepened (Podráczy, 2012). Schools find it important that students from different cultures and their families should become better acquainted with each other in open days, thus "Diversity Celebration" programs are organized (Epstein and Salinas, 2004).

Paradigm shift in the field of institutional education only occurred in Hungary after the regime change. On the one hand, trends intensified in which the child is centered in alternative reform education, on the other hand, a process of democratization began, as a result reconsidering the cooperation and relations of the family and the institutions became necessary (Podráczy, 2012).

In line with international trends, good initiatives regarding parents training are available in Hungarian specialized institutions (e.g. Parents school, family study hall, Mentor Program, Parent Helper weekend, hearing impaired children in the family - mental health training for parents, brothers and sisters), which are primarily implemented by tenders. Approach and mental hygiene techniques acquired in the programs by the participating parents will make life management effective and develop problem-solving skills and teaching methodologies will become constructive. Acceptance and cooperation inside the family can be enhanced and family cohesive force can positively change (Mészáros & Müller, 2012).

## *Examination of opportunities for the involvement of hearing impaired children's parents in integrated education*

The number of pupils with SEN in mainstream education has increased gradually (Statistical Information Education Yearbook, see Figure 1. Table) and that increasing tendency can also be observed in hearing-impaired students (Figure 2. Table) (Bodorné & Perlusz, 2012; Csécsiné, Hagymási

& Könyvesi, 2015). Thanks to the early identification of hearing impairment, the modern technical tools and opportunities (e.g. hearing aids, cochlear implant surgery) as well as the effectiveness of family-centered early intervention programs and therapeutic methods (natural auditory-verbal therapy is applied which is based on children's natural speech development), the majority of hearing impaired children attend integrated education.

Table 1. SEN students in integrated education (Information Statistical Yearbook of Education, 2013/2014)

Institutions types	2000/2001 year The number of SEN pupils in integrated education	2001/2002 year The number of SEN pupils in integrated education	2013/2014 year The number of SEN pupils in integrated education
kindergarten	2490	2888	5722
elementary school	6722	8263	34599
vocational school	-	619	6963
grammar school	-	100	2075
secondary school	-	389	4337

Table 2. Evolution of deaf and hard of hearing students in 2015

Type	Integrated education	Integrated education – rate raised	Special education	Total
Hard of Hearing	1166	78,62	317	1483
Deaf	81	24,25	253	334

The forms of communication between parents and professionals in recent decades have changed a great deal (Böhler-Kreitlow, 2005). Initially, hierarchical development sessions took place without the involvement of parents, especially focusing on "the deficiencies and arrears of children" (a child-centric model). Later professionals gradually realized that the therapy could be made more effective and efficient by the activation and involvement of parents. The parent of the child gets involved in the development in the co-therapist model. Developing sessions get integrated into everyday life and parents will become a "co-therapists" while losing their autonomy and parental competence. However, this cooperation model is not perfect, because roles will get

confused and competencies will become blurred. The 'reality of development' of the therapist and the 'reality of life' of parents are not the same. An open, honest and clear communication between the parties is necessary for real cooperation and the creation of partnership in addition to the maintenance of competencies in equal proportions. Therefore, professionals working in the field of hearing impaired pedagogy seek to apply the co-operative model today. This means that guidance is provided by the therapist's expertise, independent decision-making is supported and the fact is accepted that the parent knows their child the best and they help to develop a balanced parent-child relationship (Böhler-Kreitlow, 2005).

### *How does partnership work in mainstream schools? – Pilot studies in Hungary*

The research aimed to answer the following questions. How does the development of parent-professional relationship influence the children's community integration and performance success in the integrated education and teaching of hearing impaired children? In what form and level is parental involvement of hearing impaired children achieved in practice?

The parents (N = 56), teachers (N = 70) and peripatetical teachers (N = 9) of hearing impaired pupils in mainstream education were involved in a three-county-wide "pilot" research (Lukács & Magyarné, 2016; Magyarné, 2016) in Hungary. According to the results of the questionnaire-based data collection indicate that mainly the good quality of educational institutions and the proximity of the institution dominate the choice of institutional aspects of parents.

Parents tend to contact teachers typically in the traditional way participating parents' meetings. The vast majority of parents find the personal consultation with the teacher important, which is available in office hours or on a mobile phone.

More than half of parents do not participate in the meetings organized for parents, but significant part of the parents goes to the joint educational programs organized with the children.

Nearly half of the parents keep daily, personal contact with the teachers of their children. The parents of kindergarten and elementary school-aged children belong to this group.

Parents carry out several types of work for the sake of a closer relationship with the institution (physical work such as painting, cleaning; participation in the work of parents' committee). However, a small proportion of parents in the study cannot participate in these activities.

A third of respondents would require participating more actively in preschool or school life of their children, but the vast majority of parents are satisfied with the opportunities and forms of involvement, which are provided by the institution (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Would you like to participate more actively in the life of the nursery school/school?

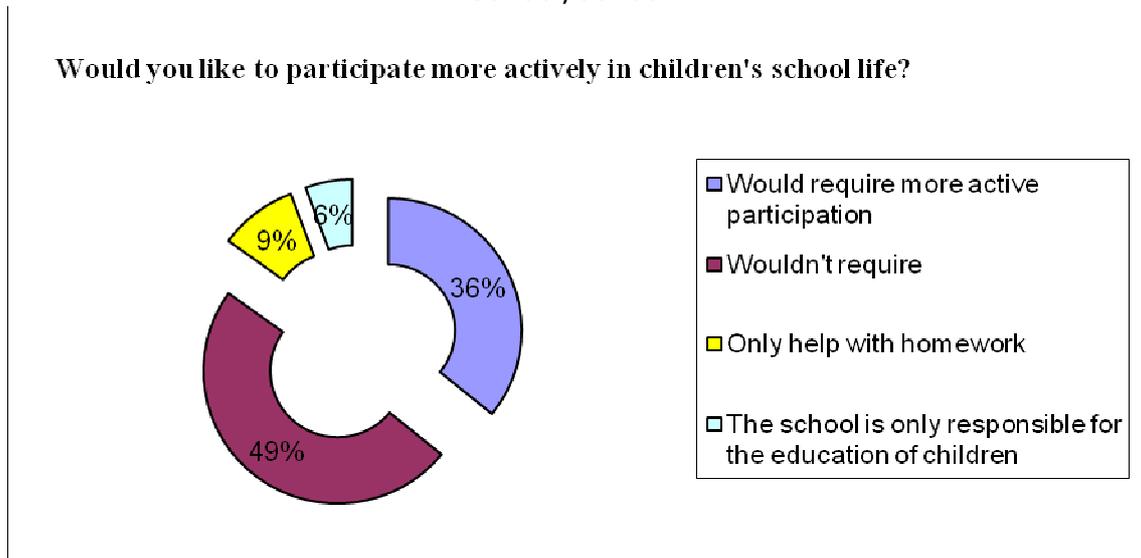
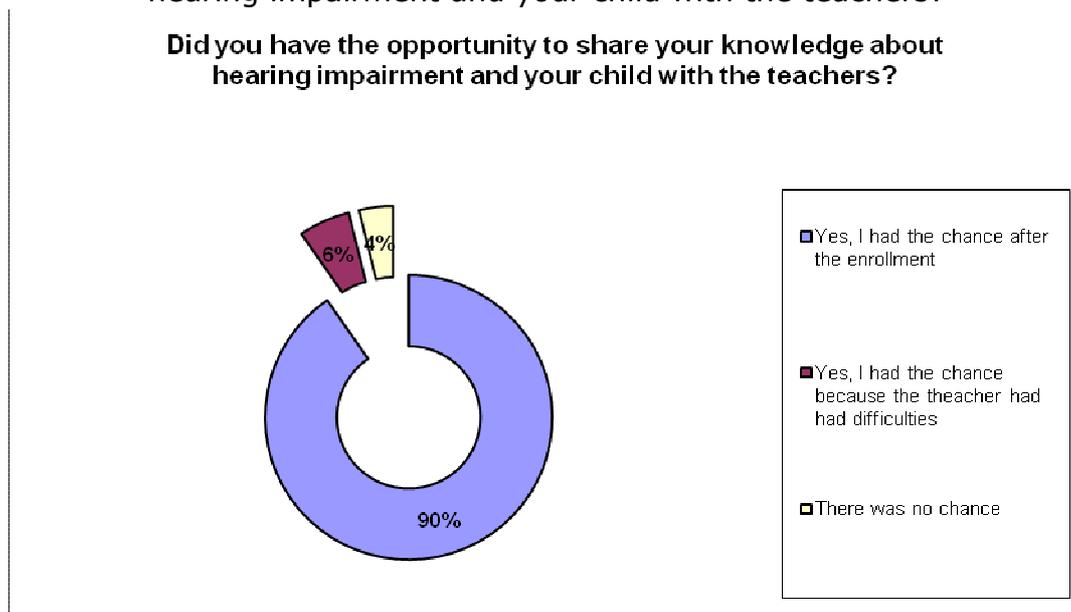


Figure 4. Have you had the opportunity for sharing your knowledge about hearing impairment and your child with the teachers?

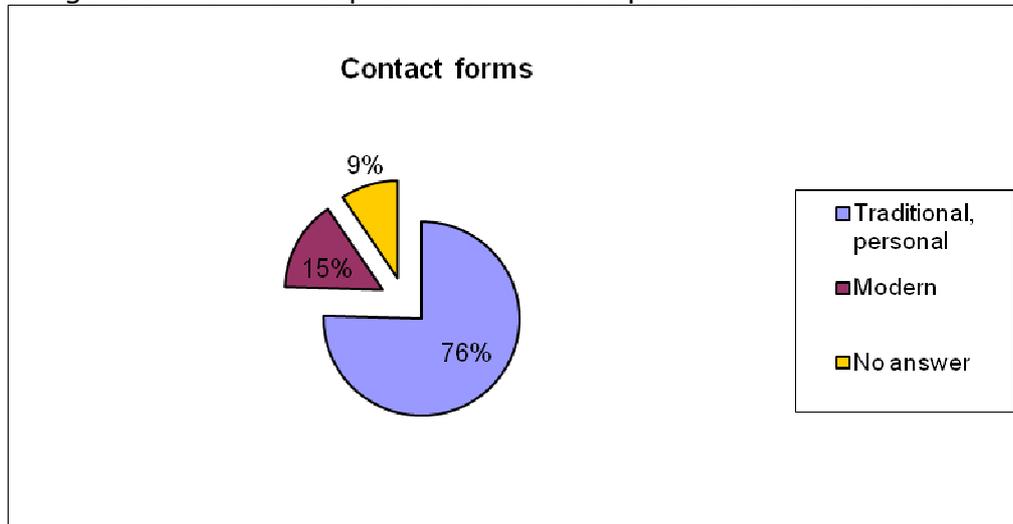


Almost every parent has had that opportunity for sharing their knowledge about their children with hearing impairment (Figure 4). The vast majority of parents said that they had been involved in the planning and evaluation of activities related to the development of their children. However, effective dialogues or partnerships were implemented in only about half of the cases.

The majority of teachers keep contact with the parents of hearing impaired children in traditional and formal ways (parents' meetings, office hours). However, the contact forms vary depending on the child's age.

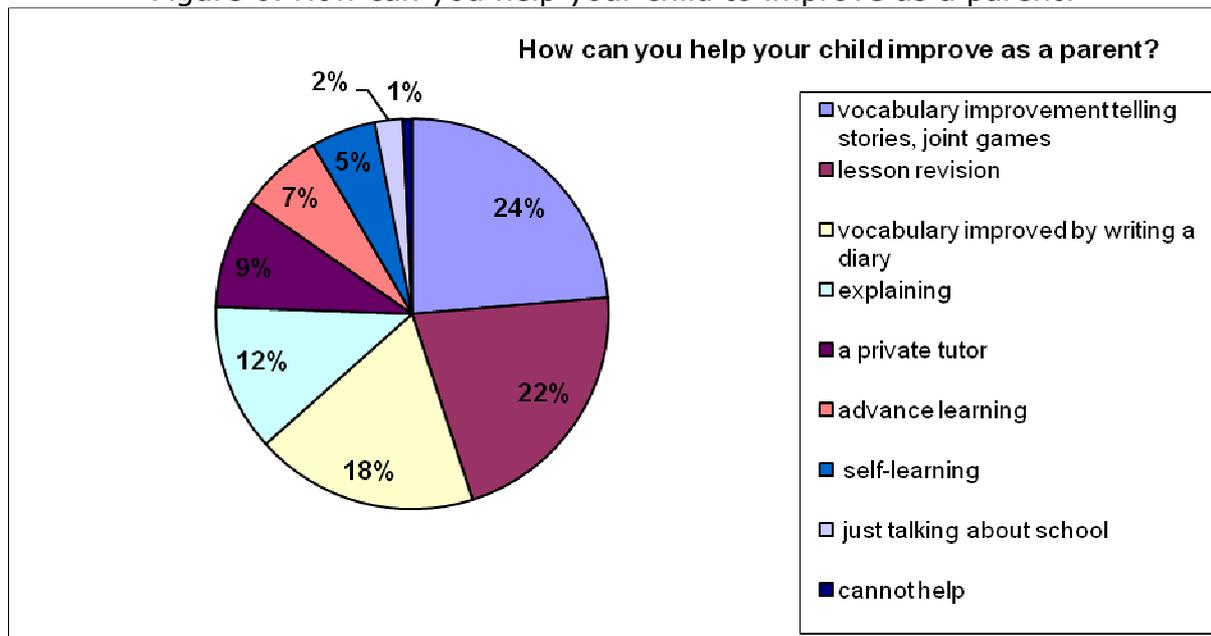
Typically, the parents of preschool children take part in programs organized by the institution in a higher proportion, and direct, daily consultation is more frequent. While the parents of grammar school and high school students prefer modern forms of contact (e.g. e-register, e-mails), as they do not require regular personal consultations. The contact ways are shown in the following figure. (Figure 5)

Figure 5. How to keep contact with the parents of SEN children?



Parents can help with studying (Figure 6) using a variety of ways depending on the age by adjusted methods. "Vocabulary improvement by telling stories and joint games" as well as "vocabulary improvement by writing a diary" are used for children in kindergarten and elementary school children while a private tutor is employed by parents to support children in their school career after starting the upper school. The use of homework revisioning and explanation appears in almost every family regardless of the age of the children. In this connection, it can be said that hearing impaired children and teens cope with integrated education and learning, which is proved by their "good" or "very good" school results.

Figure 6. How can you help your child to improve as a parent?



The integrated education is a multifactor training process, which can only be successful if the participants - families, regular teachers, special education/peripatetical teachers - comprise a team and work together in partnership. Therefore, the roles and responsibilities of regular teachers and special teachers (hearing impaired pedagogy of temporary special education teacher) are significant in the degree and quality of parental involvement.

The needs of hearing impaired children and young people are different and diverse. It is determined whether there are other disabilities associated with hearing impairment, or even hearing or hearing-impaired parents. There is little Hungarian research where the opinions of hearing impaired parents in addition to hearing parents are asked. Research by Nagyné the expectations of hearing (N = 10) and hearing-impaired parents (N = 10) about the education are compared (Nagyné, 2016).

The results of the research show that the expectations of hearing and hearing-impaired parents are different in some aspects. They judged their relationship with the school or the need for extra, tutorial lessons differently. While hearing parents mentioned the lack of foreign language education, partnerships, consultations, the hearing impaired parents said that the sign language training would be needed.

Their opinions are different about the further education of their children. While hearing parents want their hearing impaired children to achieve as high educational level as they can (intermediate and advanced), hearing impaired parents mainly prefer specialized secondary education. This is explained by the fact that according to national research data, hearing impaired adults achieve lower educational attainment than the hearing population (KSH, 2011).

Both parent groups agreed that they had made the right choice when selecting their children's institutions. The hearing impaired parents

primarily relied on the decision of the expert committee. The choice of hearing families was influenced by institutional proximity as well as friends' recommendation. Almost all of them are satisfied with the work of teachers (paying attention in classroom, differentiation).

## *Conclusion*

The results of the surveys showed that positive changes had been observed in the contact ways between parents and professionals, parental involvement and efforts to create a partnership. How has effective cooperation with parents changed in practice in integrated institutions teaching hearing impaired children?

The research described in the studies was conducted on small samples. As specific geographic regions were focused on, the results cannot be generalized conclusions. Despite all these facts, parental involvement forms described in national and international specialized literature, the involvement levels defined by Epstein as well as the impact of modern pedagogical paradigms appeared in the institutions involved in the study (for example, the parents of hearing impaired children support them by various learning ways, such as vocabulary improvement by telling stories, explanations and learning together).

Further research is required to explore what the involvement of parents in school activities and greater involvement is inhibited by and how they could be more motivated. There is another interesting question whether the hearing-impaired children's parents are really satisfied with their children's therapy or not. The most of the consultation was probably realized in a formal way and the parents did not have a choice to try to work together with other professionals. Further research, the use of different methods such as focus group interviews are needed.

In the future, a representative research investigating parental involvement would be necessary in large samples, in which I consider the greater involvement of fathers and hearing impaired parents important.

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