Involving Students in School-Home Cooperation

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The paper discusses the importance of involving students in school-home cooperation and its impact on their responsibility, motivation and behaviour. Great emphasis is placed on the active involvement of students, as it contributes to a better understanding of learning objectives, more effective communication between teachers, parents and students, and greater success in achieving educational and behavioural goals. Particular attention is paid to children with special needs, where participation further promotes their independence and enables an inclusive attitude. Based on qualitative research, we conclude that students who participate in three-way conferences are more motivated and better able to monitor their progress. Despite the benefits, there are challenges in implementing such practices, as teachers and parents often doubt students' ability to participate. On this basis, we propose to increase the systematic involvement of students in school-home cooperation and to provide additional education and training for educators and parents to promote students' active participation.

University of Maribor Press

1   Cooperation between school and home

Effective communication between teachers, parents and students is key to creating a positive and productive learning environment and to the holistic integrated development of students. This is also fostered by building collaborative partnerships between teachers, parents and students and encouraging students to actively participate (Derfler et al., 2019; Eggert-Schmid Noerr et al., 2011; Sacher, 2008). Through active participation, students develop life skills, such as self-advocacy or help-seeking (Newman, 2000), responsible decision-making (Sever & Ersoy, 2019) and taking responsibility for achieving goals (Christenson, 2004). This is particularly important when it comes to children with special needs, where the development of these skills is crucial for their holistic integrated development and later empowerment (Licardo & Schmidt, 2014), especially during periods of transition between educational stages (Strnadová et al., 2023).

School and family are areas that contribute significantly to the formation of a child's (student's) personality and performance (Gwiazdowska-Stańczak, 2014). If we want to offer children the best possible development, both areas must be integrated, which requires active and conscious collaboration between teachers and parents (Betz, 2015; LaRocque et al., 2011). Collaboration is even more important when children with special needs are involved (Howland et al., 2006). Cooperation should be based on a partnership relationship that includes: 1. all parties working together toward a common goal; 2. an awareness that all members of the relationship (teachers, parents, and students) are extremely important and valuable; 3. consideration of the perspectives of all parties involved in the collaboration; 4. a focus on the purpose of the collaboration; and 5. trust and a sense of shared responsibility (Coutts et al., 2014). Teacher-parent partnerships are not simply about the flow of information from one system to another, but about active joint action and systematic mutual support (Mundwiler, 2017; Sacher, 2016). In this form of collaboration, the teacher shares power with the parents and sees them as equal and valuable partners in the children's educational process, without forgetting the students, who play an important role in the collaboration (Bryan & Henry, 2012). The need for collaboration between school and home is even greater in the case of children (students) with special needs, which in school can include all those whose development, well-being and learning are at risk if they do not receive specific

intervention (Vršnik Perše, 2005), as partnership is essential for the development of inclusive practices (Adams et al., 2016).

1.1　　The importance of involving students in school-home cooperation

In an educational partnership, there are two ways in which the role of the student can be considered: 1. students are included and seen as equal partners, or 2. their inclusion is not welcomed and they are not involved (Sacher, 2016). In some cases, parents collaborate intensively with the school and their child's teachers, but the students are excluded from this involvement. This creates an obstacle to optimal cooperation between school and home (Sacher, 2014).

Achieving optimal results in collaboration requires planned, continuous and systematic communication between teachers, parents and students, based on the equality of all parties involved (Bezić, 2015). However, when we talk about the equality of all stakeholders, several dilemmas arise. Jensen & Jensen (2011) and Juul & Jensen (2009) state that the relationship between teachers and parents is asymmetrical because it is based firstly on the relationship between the expert (teacher) and the layperson (parent) (see also Mundwiler, 2017; Sacher, 2008) and secondly on the teacher's commitment to the country's public education system, which has recognised and entrusted the teacher with an important role in education (ibid., see also Betz, 2015). We can speak even more clearly of an asymmetry of relational roles when it comes to students. Teachers and parents are adults, but students are children or adolescents, which makes it difficult to speak of an equal relationship between them. Each of them also has a different role and varying expectations. The teachers know the child as a student; the parents know the child in other roles. In the teacher-parent-student relationship, it is the students who still have to learn their responsibilities, which is why we cannot speak of an equal relationship between all parties (Jurič Šenk, 2014). However, while it is important to clearly define the responsibilities and roles of all parties involved, it is also important to clearly address how students' agency can be included in the collaboration (Vedeler, 2023) or in other words, their active engagement.

The school-home partnership can therefore be understood as the active involvement of all parties, i.e., students, parents, and teachers, in a collaborative process (Eggert-Schmid Noerr et al., 2011). It is not enough to involve only parents and teachers

(Robinson & Harris, 2014), as a well-functioning educational partnership requires the cooperation and consent of all, including students (Paseka, 2014, see also Betz, 2019). Students can participate in the partnership between school and home in various ways and to varying degrees, and this involvement enables them to plan and reflect on their own learning and life at school and in the classroom (Liening-Konietzko, 2017). Gesing (2011) points out that we can only speak of participation in the school context if both students and their parents are involved in (all) decisions that affect school life and teaching.

One-on-one meetings between teachers and parents are usually a central part of the collaboration. These meetings also offer the opportunity for involving students (Strle et al., 2017). Involving students in communication or conversations between teachers and parents presents a particular challenge, especially when engaging them to actively participate in the conversation (Beveridge, 2005). Active participation means that students go from being passive recipients of information to active and responsible participants. Optimal student development is only possible when students are actively involved in planning their future goals and evaluating their performance (Hogan, 1975). However, the extent and form of their involvement should be adapted to the student's age or stage of development, abilities and preferences (Beveridge, 2004, 2005; Textor, 2009, see also Fthenakis et al., 2014).

There are several reasons why it is important for students to be actively involved in meetings with their parents and teachers: 1. because they have the right to hear what their parents and teachers say about them; 2. because they have the right to express their opinions and views and thus shape their education and lives; and 3. because this gives them the opportunity to experience all the processes that adults also experience when they are sad or worried (Juul & Jensen, 2009). All of this can be facilitated by meetings with parents and teachers. These represent a new dimension not only in the quality of collaboration between school and home, but also in the quality of educational work as a whole (Westfall-Greiter, 2012). Involving students in setting goals for their own learning and behaviour and in evaluating their own performance guarantees an improvement in the quality of work at any given school (Beutel, 2010).

1.2   Three-way conferences

Three-way conferences are a special type of collaboration in which the students are actively involved in meetings with parents and teachers. These are discussions between the student, the parents and the teacher (or several teachers, if applicable), wherein the students learning and development are discussed. These meetings offer students the opportunity to discuss their progress with teachers and parents and to set further goals together. In doing so, students develop responsibility for their actions and learning, and are often more successful in achieving their goals because they are actively involved in formulating them (Bastian, 2012). Three-way conferences (sometimes they are also referred to as student-led conferences) are well established in many countries, e.g., Austria, Canada, the Czech Republic, Finland, New Zealand, Norway and Sweden. In Slovenia, this type of involvement of students in collaboration with teachers and parents is not mandatory and is not common in school practice (Strle et al., 2017). Students are usually only involved in parent-teacher meetings if there is a specific problem, be it an educational or behavioural problem. However, the purpose of three-way conferences is not to solve problems once they have arisen, but to prevent them, as all students are included, regardless of whether they have experienced problems at school.

There are usually two meetings with parents and students per school year, always involving teachers, parents and the student. The first meeting takes place at the beginning of the school year and the second at the end of the school year. The purpose of the first meeting with parents and students is to establish the students' starting point and to determine the next steps. To this end, the student's achievements and skills to date are reviewed, such as, their independence in work, their understanding and application of knowledge, their performance of tasks, their personal development, and their behaviour. The discussion focuses primarily on the student's areas of strength (rather than weakness) (Derfler et al., 2019; Jäckl & Moser, 2016).

Three-way conferences include the following steps:

1.   A welcoming introduction and an explanation of the plan for the meeting.
2.   A previously prepared presentation by the student in which they present their learning achievements to date.

3. Parents' and teachers' reactions to the student's presentation in the form of a dialogue (e.g., asking questions, listing things that were a surprise, etc.).
4. Parents' views on their child's learning and development.
5. Teachers' presentation of their views on the student's learning and development based on the evidence gathered.
6. Sharing of information among all participants and joint discussion on the next steps in the student' s development.
7. Joint agreement on the next steps and objectives.
8. A summary of the discussion, given verbally by the teacher or, if necessary, in writing and signed by all participants.
9. A conclusion with positive thoughts for the future, including, if necessary, the handing out of an evaluation questionnaire to parents and/or students on the conduct of the meeting (Jäckl & Moser, 2016).
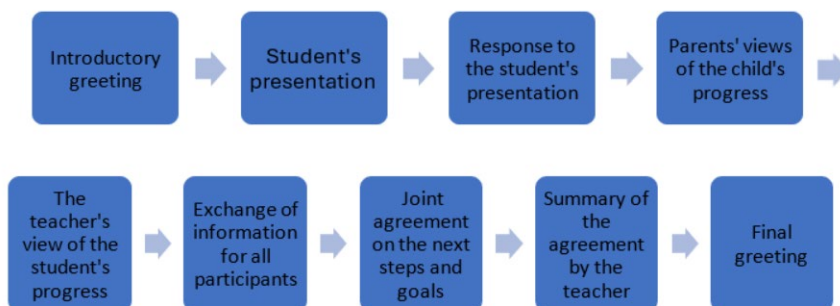

Figure 1: Three-way conferences
(Jäckl and Moser, 2016, p. 11)

Meetings allow teachers to engage in constructive dialogue with students and parents. The focus is not on students' grades, but on empowering students to reflect on their learning and working process. They also provide students with insights into their learning process and help them to identify what it is that helps and hinders them in their learning (Gössinger, 2012).

1.3 Team meetings to prepare and monitor individualised programmes for children with special needs

Another form of discussion that involves the participation of students is the expert group's team meetings, which are designed to discuss individual programmes (IPs) for students with special needs. This format is well established in various countries, e.g., the USA, Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom (known as individual education plan (IEP) team meetings), Finland, Norway and Slovenia, where there is a legal basis for this format. According to Article 36(1) of the Placement Of Children With Special Needs Act (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia, 2011; hereinafter referred to as ZUOPP-1), an educational institution must draw up an individualised programme (hereinafter referred to as IP) for a child with special needs on the basis of the guidance decision. The IP sets out, among other things, the objectives and forms of work in the individual educational areas, strategies for integrating the child with special needs into the group, the necessary adjustments in the assessment and evaluation of knowledge, the achievement of standards and progression, the use of adapted and assistive educational technology, skills for maximising independence in life (adaptive skills), etc. In order to prepare and monitor the implementation of the IP, the school principal appoints an expert group, composed of the professionals who will be involved in the implementation of the IP, in accordance with Article 37(1) of the ZUOPP-1 (ibid.). Article 36(4) of the ZUOPP-1 (ibid.) requires the parents and the student with special needs to be included in the preparation and monitoring of the IP, taking into account the child's maturity and age. It is therefore essential that children (students) are involved in decisions concerning the preparation, implementation and evaluation of the IP, in addition to their parents. Given that decisions are made in team meetings, it is reasonable that students with special needs, if their maturity and age allow, and their parents, are also actively involved in this form of cooperation. Küpper (2000) also takes the view that students should be present at team meetings. This gives them the opportunity to have their voice heard on the topic of their own education, while at the same time learning to make decisions for themselves. Each member of the team contributes to the team's overall success.

Partnership between teachers, parents and students is ideal in the educational process in general, but the need for this partnership is particularly evident when children with special needs are involved (Beveridge, 2004). However, achieving

quality relationships between all partners is often difficult in practice (Gwernan-Jones et al., 2015). In order to cooperate effectively, it is important that parents of children with special needs are involved from the outset, as their presence has an impact on the child's socio-emotional development and on the adaptive skills the child will develop (Fenning et al., 2007). However, it is important to recognise that even if parents of children with special needs are involved from the outset, difficulties in cooperation with the school cannot be ruled out (Grillitsch & Stanzel-Tischler, 2016). These problems may arise from the teacher's lack of information about the individual student with special needs, their lack of knowledge about students with special needs in general, their lack of experience with such students and inadequate communication (Vršnik Perše, 2005), but they may also be caused by inadequate or inappropriate communication with parents (Butler et al., 2019) or by systemic aspects identified by both parents and teachers (Means, 2023).

For the cooperation between the school and the parents of students with special needs to be successful, it is important that all the school's professionals are involved: the class teacher, the other teachers, the headmaster, and the counsellors. The involvement of the latter is important, as their advice helps to achieve the goal of prevention or intervention and planning relevant to the school (Vršnik Perše et al., 2008). However, the students themselves must also be involved in the process (Kern, 2017). No help is good enough if students do not have the opportunity to co-research, co-define and co-determine, which they often do not get in practice, as adults commonly assume that they know everything about them and what is best for them (Čačinovič Vogrinčič, 2008).

Only students who are given the opportunity to participate can feel that they are understood and taken into account (Geppert et al., 2018). Research confirms that learners want to be accepted as equal partners and want their needs and wishes to be considered (Andresen & Wilmes, 2017). All of the above can be facilitated by actively involving students with special needs in team meetings, i.e., in the planning and evaluation of the IP. Actively involving students with special needs in meetings whose topic is IPs is what Čačinovič Vogrinčič (2008) calls exploratory conversation. This should include all those involved in the process of helping a child with special needs, and in particular, such a conversation involves dialogue with the student, which, according to Čačinovič Vogrinčič (2008), is often overlooked. Furthermore, the guidelines for the preparation and monitoring of the IP provided by Košnik et

al. (2023) also assume that parents and students should be actively involved in the preparation and monitoring of the IP, that there should be conditions for their involvement in the planning, implementation and evaluation of the IP, and that students should be involved in all phases of the IP, in accordance with their age, maturity and abilities. For example, they can set their own goals, evaluate their own progress, make suggestions … (ibid.). Uphold et al. (2007) also believe that students with special needs can be involved in all phases of the IP: in the planning phase of the IP, which includes the identification of strengths, needs and goals; in the drafting phase of the IP, in which the learners themselves identify their strengths, needs and goals; in the implementation phase of the meeting or discussion, in which the learners can be involved in various ways depending on their age and developmental level; and in the evaluation phase of the IP (ibid.).

If we want students to develop confidence in their abilities and take responsibility for their own learning and development, the following two conditions must be met: 1. students must have individual goals and individual pathways to reach these goals, and 2. students must have: a. the opportunity to co-determine their goals, b. the opportunity to co-determine the pathways to reach these goals, and c. the opportunity to participate in the evaluation of their own success (Bartnitzky, 2010). The vast majority of school counselors in Slovenia also see the involvement of students in the process of solving learning difficulties as a key factor in helping students effectively and efficiently. School counselors also note that the level of student participation in the problem-solving process has an impact on how successful their problem-solving will be (Kodele, 2017). Similarly, as many studies in the past have found (Arndt, 2006; Agran & Huges, 2008), contemporary research confirms that parents' and students' involvement in team meetings dealing with the construction of an individualized program is still too low (Sandereson & Goldman, 2022), and, above all, their level of active involvement is too low; too often they are simply passive participants (Agran & Huges, 2008; Gosciski et al., 2023). In Slovenia, the majority of teachers involved in a national evaluation study (Košak Babuder et al., 2023) reported that parents are always or often involved in IP planning and IP evaluation, and that they are always or often informed about changes to the IP. The teachers also stated that students are largely informed about changes in IP, while two-fifths of teachers stated that students with special needs are only often involved in IP planning, and a good third stated that students are rarely or never involved in IP planning. In light of the above data, it is interesting to note that about half of the

primary school teachers surveyed (ibid.) believed that IPs in their institution were always the result of cooperation and coordinated agreement among all members of the professional team.

The aim of involving students with special needs in the development and evaluation of an IP is to help them learn how to defend their own decisions and views and to learn to develop goals that pursue their own interests. However, Pounds & Cuevas (2019) note that students with special needs, especially those in the lower grades of primary school, are not yet able to set their own goals. They see the reason for this in the age of the students and, above all, in their lack of familiarity with this way of working. In fact, the students in the study were the first to encounter team meetings in which they could participate in setting their own goals (ibid.). They therefore conclude that the participants (teachers, students and parents) need to be properly trained to engage in these forms of collaboration (Sanderson & Goldman, 2020).

Students' active participation in team meetings depends, among other things, on whether they have sufficient knowledge of IP, whether they have the learning skills related to the preparation of IP, and whether they have developed the collaborative skills needed to engage actively in the cooperation. Active involvement of learners in the preparation and monitoring of the implementation of the IP allows learners to choose and follow objectives and develop skills related to self-determination. It is also a way for students to practise speaking up for themselves. All of these skills are crucial for success in further education and life (McGahee et al., 2001). It is important that learners are involved in the development of the IP and the setting of goals based on their preferences and interests. This is the only way to make them feel involved in the process. They are also more likely to pursue and achieve their goals as a result of their involvement (Arndt et al., 2006). Booth & Ainscow (2002) even state that the whole principle of inclusive education is based on community and collaboration between professionals, parents, and students.

Here, we present the results of two studies. The first one explored, among other things, a class teacher's views on the involvement of students in three-way conferences. In the second, we sought the opinions of various elementary school practitioners (class teachers, additional professional assistance teachers for special needs students, and school counsellors) on the involving students with special needs in team meetings. The purpose of the study was to see how the involvement of

students in school-home cooperation is implemented in practice, as this involvement is one of the fundamental factors in the development of an inclusive school.

2   Methods

The aim of the empirical study was to analyse the data obtained in two separate surveys. We included the results of a survey that determined the extent to which students in a particular elementary school class were actively involved in three-way conferences, as well as the results of a survey that determined the extent to which students with special needs were involved in team meetings for planning and evaluating IP.

2.1   Participants

The first study concentrated on analysing three-way conferences that were carried out in an elementary school class (hereafter referred to as Study 1). We interviewed a class teacher of this class who was part a larger study in the 2020/21 school year. During this study, an experiment of implementing three-way conferences was used to investigate the effects of students' active participation in three-way conferences. This study was carried out on an ad hoc sample of Year 4 students from a selected elementary school, their parents, and the class teacher. The data for the study were obtained through surveys and interviews conducted concurrently with the implementation of the experimental three-way conference model. In this paper, we only highlight the answers given by the class teacher during the individual interview. Since 2020/21 the class teacher has been conducting three-way conferences regularly. Therefore, we repeated the same interview with her again in the 2024/25 school year. The interview questions were designed specifically for the purpose of the study, covering the class teacher's opinion on the meaningfulness and effects of students' active participation in the parent-student interviews.

The second study focuses on the active involvement of students with special needs in the preparation and monitoring of the implementation of IPs (hereafter referred to as Study 2), which most often takes place in team meetings aimed at preparing and monitoring an IP for students with special needs. The survey was carried out in the 2024/25 school year and involved eight female practitioners (class teachers, additional professional assistance teachers for special needs students, and school

counsellors) in elementary schools. All the practitioners were members of expert groups dedicated to the preparation and monitoring of IPs. The practitioners came from six different elementary schools. Individual interviews were carried out with all the practitioners to determine whether students with special needs were actively involved in team meetings and therefore in the preparation, monitoring, and implementation of the IPs. We were interested in whether the student's voice is heard during the preparation and evaluation of their IP. The questions for the interview with the practitioners were specifically designed for the purpose of the study. The interview questions dealt with their experience with team meetings and their opinions on the meaningfulness and effects of actively involving students with special needs in team meetings.

2.2 Data collection procedure

In Study 1, in the 2020/21 school year, we conducted: 1. an individual interview with the class teacher, 2. a student survey, and 3. a parent survey before and after the experiment's implementation (i.e., three-way conferences). Additionally, after the experiment, we conducted a focus group interview with students and individual interviews with parents. For the purpose of this paper, only the answers given by the class teacher in the individual interview after the experiment were used. The three-way conferences were conducted separately for each student. They were carried out twice, 5 months apart. At each meeting, the class teacher, the student, and the student's parents were present. Before the first meetings, the class teacher, parents, and students were given guidelines to help them prepare for the meeting. The guidelines were sent to the parents in printed form by post (note: owing to the COVID-19 pandemic, face-to-face contact between parents and teachers was banned or discouraged for some time). In the 2024/25 school year, we repeated the individual interview with the class teacher.

In Study 2, individual interviews were conducted with practitioners (class teachers, additional professional assistance teachers for special needs students, and school counselors) working at six different elementary schools in the 2024/25 school year. All of them had been working at their elementary schools for several years and had on several occasions been present at team meetings to prepare and monitor the implementation of IPs for students with special needs.

2.3   Data processing

In order to obtain more in-depth information on the active involvement of students in school-home cooperation (in three-way conferences and in team meetings for students with special needs), we analysed the answers given by participants in two different studies in individual interviews after the implementation of the experiment (i.e., after meetings with parents and students) (Study 1) and the team meetings for planning and evaluation of the IPs for students with special needs (Study 2). Furthermore, the findings of the two surveys were compared and related to each other to see how the involvement of students in school-home cooperation is implemented in practice.

3   Results and discussion

At the beginning, we wanted to know how often students attend meetings. To this end, we present the results of the practitioners' responses to the question of who was present at the three-way conferences (Survey 1) and the team meetings (Survey 2).

The class teacher in survey 1 said:

R: *"In all three-way conferences, the student, his parents and I were present."*
After four years of conducting three-way conferences the class teacher added:
R: *"Sometimes, on the first day of school, students ask me when we will have three-way conferences where they can also be present, because they have heard about three-way-conferences from older students."*

The survey 2 practitioners had the following to say:

S1: *"During team meetings, we had the following present: the class teacher, the DSP provider, the parents and, if necessary, the counsellor."*
S2: *"The team meetings were attended by the additional professional assistance teachers for special needs students, the mobile special educator, and the class teacher."*
S3 *"At the team meetings, the additional professional assistance teachers for special needs students, the class teacher, the parents, and often the student are present. Furthermore, if an external professional service is involved in the work with a student with special needs, a representative of that*

service is also present at the team meeting. Whether the student is present at the team meeting depends primarily on his or her age and maturity, which is a matter for the professionals to decide."

This is confirmed by several authors (Beveridge, 2004, 2005; Textor, 2009, see also Fthenakis et al., 2014), who state that the extent to which students are involved and the form of student involvement in teacher-parent cooperation should be adapted to the age or developmental stage of the student, their abilities, and their preferences. We can see from the practitioners' responses that in Study 1, students were present at all three-way conferences alongside the class teacher and parents, which is to be expected, as the experiment in this study was conducted with the aim of introducing three-way conferences. In Study 2, however, parents were mostly present in team meetings alongside at least one practitioner (i.e., additional professional assistance teachers for special needs students, class teacher, school counsellor), while students were often present in team meetings, as reported by only one practitioner – the other practitioners did not report having students present during meetings. This is certainly an interesting finding, given that Article 36(4) of the ZUOPP-1 Act foresees the parents and the child with special needs being involved in the preparation and monitoring of the IP (which most often takes place during team meetings), while taking into account the child's maturity and age. This means that most of the time, according to the practitioners in Study 2, students with special needs are not actively involved in the preparation and monitoring of their IP. It is possible that they are involved in the preparation and follow-up of the IP, but in a different way than actively participating in team meetings.

We were further interested in the reasons why the practitioners thought that students were absent from team meetings (Survey 2). The practitioner from survey 2, who said that students were often present at team meetings, also said the following about the reasons for students being absent from team meetings:

S3: "We have had cases where we have invited a student to a team meeting but the parents did not agree."

However, other practitioners in Survey 2 said the following about the reasons for students being absent from team meetings:

S4: "I hadn't even thought about having a student present at the team meeting. I think it would have a bad effect on their self-esteem."
S2: "We don't invite students to team meetings because they might misunderstand their deficits."

Walker (2002) also notes that some teachers are reluctant to involve students because they feel that they cannot give parents realistic information about the student in the presence of the student. Furthermore, parents and teachers in Minke & Anderson's (2003) study expressed concerns about expressing negative information in front of students. However, they both agree that a student can hear some discouraging information as long as it is presented in an appropriate way and with an emphasis on how they can improve things (ibid.). This is the purpose of three-way conferences, such as those carried out in Study 1, and as they should be carried out in the context of team meetings to prepare and monitor the implementation of IPs for children with special needs. Hannemann (2007) further emphasises that the active involvement of students in school-home cooperation helps the student to develop a positive self-image, to be able to sort out their strengths and weaknesses, and to learn to cope with them. In order to overcome the fear of engaging students in collaboration, it would be beneficial to educate professionals and parents on the importance of engaging students and its positive effects (Munthe & Westergård, 2023).

Furthermore, the following reasons for students being absent from team meetings were also given by the practitioners in Survey 2:

S5: "I don't see the need for a student to be present at the team meeting."
S6: "We don't invite students to team meetings. We only invite them if the parents explicitly want us to. If a student were to attend, it would reflect badly on his self-image."
S7: "I have had parents bring a student to a team meeting, but the special educator decided that the student should not be present at the team meeting and had to wait outside. She felt that only the adults should talk to each other about the IP."

All of the above is inconsistent with the findings of Kodele's (2017) survey, in which the vast majority (91%) of counsellors saw student involvement in the process of solving learning problems as key to helping students effectively and efficiently. The same study (ibid.) finds that the degree of student participation in the process of understanding their learning difficulties has an impact on how successful the

problem-solving process will be. Indeed, it is not enough to involve only parents and teachers to reduce the collaboration gap (Robinson & Harris, 2014), as a well-functioning educational partnership requires the participation and agreement of all, including the students (Paseka, 2014, see also Betz, 2019). It follows that we should systematically encourage school practitioners and parents to implement this kind of collaboration (and by this we also mean team meetings), where students and parents are present.

We also wanted to know whether, in three-way conferences, and in team meetings, students and parents are given the opportunity to be actively involved in the conversation. The class teacher in survey 1 said:

R: *"The talks gave parents the opportunity to get involved in the conversation, to express their views and their wishes. The discussions also gave students the opportunity to participate actively. If they didn't join the conversation themselves, I encouraged and guided them. They were involved in setting goals, which I think motivated them to want to achieve said goals.*

From the class teacher's answer, one can understand that both parents and students had the opportunity to participate actively in the three-way conferences. This, according to the class teacher, contributed to the students' increased motivation to achieve the set goals. Foster-King (2011) also found that discussions with parents and students contribute to students making a greater effort to do well. Furthermore, Pihlgren (2013) points out that the advantage of talking to parents and students is that it gives students the opportunity to set their own goals, which makes them more likely to achieve them.

Of the active involvement of students and parents, Survey 2 practitioners said:

S4: *"Yes, all[1] members of the conversation can join in the conversation. Parents always have the floor first, followed by school staff."*
S1: *"Everyone can give their opinion, but adaptations are mostly decided by the special educators."*
S7: *"Parents can give suggestions and preferences, as they are part of the team."*
S5 *"Parents are usually the ones who are the listeners in team meetings. This is especially evident in the first team meeting. But in the evaluation team meeting, parents also have more to say."*

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[1] By everyone, we mean practitioners and parents, not students, as according to the practitioners in Study 2, students were not present during team meetings except in one case.

The practitioner from Survey 2 who said that students are often present at team meetings maintained that students and parents are actively involved:

S3: "In a team meeting, everyone has the opportunity to have their say. We give everyone a voice. Most often, the class teacher has the floor first, then the rest of the team, and finally we give the floor to the parents. If there is a student present at the team meeting, he/she has the floor more towards the beginning."

Given the responses of the practitioners in Survey 1 and Survey 2, it is clear that when both parents and students are present, both have the opportunity to actively engage in the conversation. However, students were mostly absent from team meetings aimed at preparing and monitoring the implementation of IPs for children with special needs; therefore, they did not have the opportunity to actively participate in the collaboration between teachers and parents. Also, not all practitioners reported parents being actively involved in team meetings to prepare and monitor the implementation of IPs for children with special needs, which is an additional problem in the implementation of the inclusion paradigm in the educational context. According to Wingert (2006), in order to develop a good partnership between school and home, it is important that both students and parents are active interlocutors in the discussions, have the opportunity to express their opinions, ask questions, give feedback on the work done so far, express criticism, and are   involved in the school's activities. These findings therefore also confirm the usefulness of systematically encouraging (future) educational professionals to promote the active involvement of students and parents in school-home cooperation.

We also wanted to know whether the requests and suggestions made by students and parents during the meetings with parents and students (Survey 1) and the requests and suggestions made in the team meetings by parents and students (Survey 2) were taken into account.

The class teacher in Survey 1 said:

R: "Parents and students stated their opinions and gave suggestions during the discussions, all of which were taken into account. Finally, at the end of the discussion, we signed a contract in which we all set objectives together."

Survey 2 practitioners said:

S1: "Parents don't usually have a say in team meetings, but they can certainly make suggestions if they want to. Taking their suggestions into account depends on whether they are feasible or not."

However, Kern (2017) points out that a student's problems can only be solved by working together, not individually. Thus, neither teachers nor parents can solve a child's problems on their own. They must come to an agreement (ibid.).

The practitioners in Survey 2 also said the following about listening to and taking on board parents' suggestions:

S4: "In principle, parents' wishes and suggestions are taken into account. However, this depends on each individual parent. The more reasoned and sensible their suggestions are and the more parents insist on them, the more they are taken into account in the decisions we make. Parents' wishes are taken into account as far as they are realistic. Because their expectations are often too high."
S7: "Parents are actively encouraged to give their suggestions and ideas during the team meeting. The parents' suggestions and ideas are then discussed by the expert team, which decides whether to take them into account. In doing so, we check that they are in line with the law and the student's guidance decision.
S6: "The parents' opinions were taken into account if the expert team considered it to be in the best interests of the child and in accordance with school policy."
S5: "The more educated the parents are, the more they take the initiative and influence decisions, while other parents mostly just listen quietly and go along with what we suggest."

From the responses of the practitioners in Study 2, one can conclude that parents' wishes are taken into account insofar as they are realistic and contribute to the student's development as deemed by the other members of the expert group. For good cooperation between parents and teachers, it is certainly important that the expectations of one and the other are clarified, coordinated and realistic (Ažman et al., 2015; Kalin et al., 2008; Miller, 2011; Olender et al., 2010; Sacher, 2008; Sächsisches Bildungsinstitut, 2011; Wegner, 2016). Similarly, as one practitioner in Study 2 noted, the more educated the parents, the more actively they are involved in the collaboration, as also found in the study by Cugmas et al. (2010) in Slovenia. This study found that highly educated parents are more involved in school than parents who are less educated.

A comparison of the responses of the practitioners in Survey 1 and Survey 2 showed that in Survey 1, both students and parents were given the opportunity to be actively involved in the discussion and to make their wishes and suggestions known, and that their wishes and suggestions were taken into account, as noted in a written agreement that was agreed upon and signed at the first meeting. On the other hand, the responses of the practitioners in Survey 2 show that, in most cases, the absence of the students from the team meetings meant that they did not have the opportunity to make suggestions at all. However, some parents did make suggestions, which were only taken into account if they were in the student's best interest, in line with the law, and realistic. It would make sense to plan to introduce rules for three-way conferences in order to conduct team meetings to prepare and monitor the implementation of IPs for children with special needs.

Since the purpose of school-home cooperation is to make agreements in order to achieve educational goals, we were interested in which agreements are usually made in three-way conferences (Survey 1) and in team meetings (Survey 2), and to what extent these agreements are implemented.

The class teacher in Survey 1 said:

R: "During our talks, we agreed on both curricular and educational issues. In the first three-way conferences, all students set themselves specific goals to achieve by the end of the school year. All but one of the students achieved their targets."

We also wanted to know what the class teacher in Survey 1 attributed as the reasons for achieving the goals. She stated the following:

R: "The reason I see for achieving the objectives is that the students themselves were asked to reflect on their areas of strength and areas where they want to improve. They also had to sign a contract containing the objectives and our agreements. Because they signed a contract, they wanted to fulfil it."

From the class teacher's response, one can see that agreements were reached with parents and students in both curricular and educational areas, and that all but one student achieved the targets set. The class teacher saw the reason for the

achievement of the targets as the signing of a written agreement, which she believed had a motivational effect on the students.

The practitioners in Survey 2 had the following to say about making agreements in team meetings:

S3: "The purpose of the team meeting is to agree on what adaptations and aids the student will receive, how the work will be monitored, how and how often we will contact each other."
S5: "We agree on the organisation of the work itself (additional professional support timetable, practitioners, etc.)."

In terms of reaching agreements, the practitioners in Survey 2 said:

S1: "The implementation of the agreements differs from student to student."
S7: "The agreements we make are strictly enforced, especially when it comes to adjustments, because parents are quick to complain."
S3: "The goals we set are mostly realised by the professionals, but sometimes not by the parents. Occasionally, parents only stick to certain agreements and not to others, or only stick to them for a short time."
S6: "At the organisational level, all the agreements are being implemented. Other agreements are not quite all being realised. On the school side, all the agreements are implemented, but not on the parents' side."

Given the answers of the practitioners in Survey 2, it is clear that team meetings are mainly used to agree on the organisation of the additional professional support itself and on the adaptations and aids that the students receive. The implementation of the agreements varies from student to student, according to the practitioners, and it depends on the students' and parents' commitment. However, the responses of the practitioners also indicate that the agreements mainly relate to the practitioners and parents, but not to the students. In fact, the practitioners stated that the agreements are most often implemented by the school, but not by the parents, and only one practitioner in Survey 2 reported on students participating in creating their agreements.

Given the responses of the practitioners in Survey 1 and Survey 2, one can see that the extent to which learners are involved in setting goals and making agreements contributes to increased realisation of goals and agreements, especially if the agreements are linked to other areas, not only organisational aspects. Other researchers (e.g., Bastian, 2012) have also noted that learning is an active process, and learners need to be actively involved in it if it is to be successful. Pihlgren (2013) also points out that if students are given the opportunity to set their own goals, they are more likely to achieve them. Based on the findings of our study and other research, it would be useful to actively involve students in holistic goal-setting and coming to agreements related to their learning and development, as this increases the likelihood of them realising these goals.

Finally, we were also interested in how practitioners assess students' progress, based on three-way conferences (Survey 1) and team meetings (Survey 2).

After the experiment, the class teacher in Study 1 reported positive changes in several areas for her students.

First, she reported progress in the area of motivation to do school work. She said:

R: "I see a significant increase in motivation to do school work in all students. Only one student showed a minimal   increase in motivation. I think that the main contributors to the increase in motivation were the three-way conferences, because during the discussions, the students set their own goals and defined their own paths to reach them. We have also had several discussions on this topic during class. In addition, parents also reported to me that they talk a lot with their children at home about the contract and the agreements reached during the meetings."

After four years of conducting three-way conferences the class teacher said:

R: "Every year I notice that three-way conferences contribute to students' progress in both behavioural and educational areas. Above all, their motivation to achieve their goals increases."

The class teacher's answers illustrate her belief that the students have made progress in the area of motivation to do school work. She attributed the progress to the discussions she had with parents and students, especially the fact that students were able to set their own goals. She also found that repeated discussions about school

between students and their parents had a motivational effect. This increase in student motivation is consistent with the findings of studies by Derfler et al. (2012), Eder et al. (2015) and Pihlgren (2013). Similarly, Foster-King (2011) reports that one of the benefits of talking to parents and students is improved student achievement and higher student motivation for school work.

Furthermore, in Survey 1, the class teacher reported on the students' behavioural progress:

R: *"Before the experiment, each individual student was seen 3 times a week for behavioural issues, and after the experiment, that reduced to once a week."*

The class teacher's answer shows that she believed the students had also made progress in their behaviour. Based on these responses, we suggest that three-way conferences can contribute to a reduction in the number of behavioural difficulties in students. Other studies also support this. Bilton et al. (2017) found that talking to parents and students leads to parents and teachers joining forces and working together to change the children's inappropriate learning or behavioural habits. Similarly, Kodele (2011) found that students' active participation during parent-teacher meetings had positive effects. The results of the study showed that 82% of the students broke fewer class and school rules.

Furthermore, the class teacher's answers in Survey 1 show that students also made progress in the area of taking responsibility. She said:

R: *"The most positive changes I see in students at the end of the school year* (author's note: after the experiment) *are in their taking responsibility for their own performance and work. I attribute this to the fact that the students set their own goals during the discussions, which made them feel responsible for achieving them. They had a stronger desire to achieve the goal."*

After four years of conducting three-way conferences the class teacher said:

R: *"It happens often that during the school year, students want my feedback on how successful they are in achieving their goals and what they still need to do to achieve the goal. I think that this reflects their feeling of responsibility for their schoolwork."*

According to the class teacher's answers, she believed that the meetings with parents and students caused the students to make progress in taking responsibility for their own success and work, to feel more motivated for school work, and to better their behaviour. This progress can be attributed at least in part to the meetings with parents and students, and in particular to the fact that students were able to set their own goals and pathways to them through active participation in the discussions, which motivated them to achieve these goals.

The Survey 2 practitioners reported the following on the students' progress after the team meetings:

S1: "Overall, I see very little progress from the students. Because students quickly forget their responsibilities."
S2: "The biggest change I see is in the area of students taking responsibility for their own success and work. The changes depend on how much the student understands what he/she has to do."
S5: "The biggest improvement I see is in the area of motivation to work. Often, I can see that students are more motivated at the beginning, but that motivation decreases over time."
S6: "I don't notice any major changes in the students."

The practitioner who said that students were often present at team meetings, said the following about their progress:

S3: "If the student is present at the team meeting, I notice more positive changes than if the student is not present. I see the most changes in the area of taking responsibility for one's own performance and work, and the least progress in the area of motivation to do school work and behaviour."

Given the responses of the practitioners in Survey 2, we found that they reported little progress in the students' motivation for school work and in taking responsibility for their own success and work. Some practitioners reported that they did not observe any progress in their students. However, the practitioner   who said that students often attend team meetings, reported that students make more progress when they attend team meetings than when they do not, especially in terms of taking responsibility for their own success and work, which can be linked to the views of the class teacher in Study 1 who made a similar observation.

Given the responses of the practitioners in Survey 1 and Survey 2, and the findings of other studies   presented here, we conclude that the active participation of students in school-home cooperation can contribute to better ownership of their own performance and work, as well as to greater motivation for school work and fewer behavioural problems.

4   Conclusion

The results of our study show that the integration of three-way conferences (as presented in the theoretical part and as implemented in Survey 1) in school-home cooperation can contribute positively to the active participation of students in school-home cooperation. In fact, the class teacher in Study 1 reported not only that the students were always present at the three-way conferences, but also that both parents and students had the opportunity to participate actively in the discussions. Both parents and students gave suggestions, made requests and shared opinions during the discussion, which were taken into account, as was evident in the written agreement signed at the end of the first meeting. In the written agreement, they jointly set objectives which, according to the class teacher, all but one of the students achieved. Thus, when the model of three-way conferences was implemented, the students showed improvement in their motivation for school work, in taking responsibility for their own performance and work, and in their behaviour. The class teacher attributed this progress to the fact that the students were able to set their own goals during the meetings, i.e., that they had the opportunity to participate actively.

On the other hand, in Survey 2, in most cases except for one, the practitioners reported that various school professionals and parents were present at team meetings for the preparation and follow-up of the IP for children with special needs. Only one practitioner in Survey 2 reported that students were (often) present at team meetings. This suggests that students are mostly absent from IP team meetings and thus do not have the opportunity to participate actively in school-home cooperation. Perhaps the little or no progress reported by the practitioners in this part of the survey could be at least partly attributed to this. The reasons given by the practitioners for the absence of students from team meetings were the age of the students, the fear that the student's attendance would have a negative impact on their self-image, the perception that only adults should discuss IP with each other,

and the fact that they had not thought to have students attend team meetings at all. Furthermore, the responses of the practitioners in Survey 2 also show that, in addition to the students, parents are not often actively involved in team meetings; rather, they are just listeners.

Based on the above, we conclude that the active participation of students in decision-making, and therefore in school-home cooperation, has many positive effects; hence, it would make sense to introduce educational programmes or additional training for all professionals on the involvement of students in decision-making. This could strengthen cooperation between teachers, parents and students, contribute to an inclusive attitude and to resolving the dilemmas that practitioners have regarding active participation of students, and of course, above all, to the students' educational progress.

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