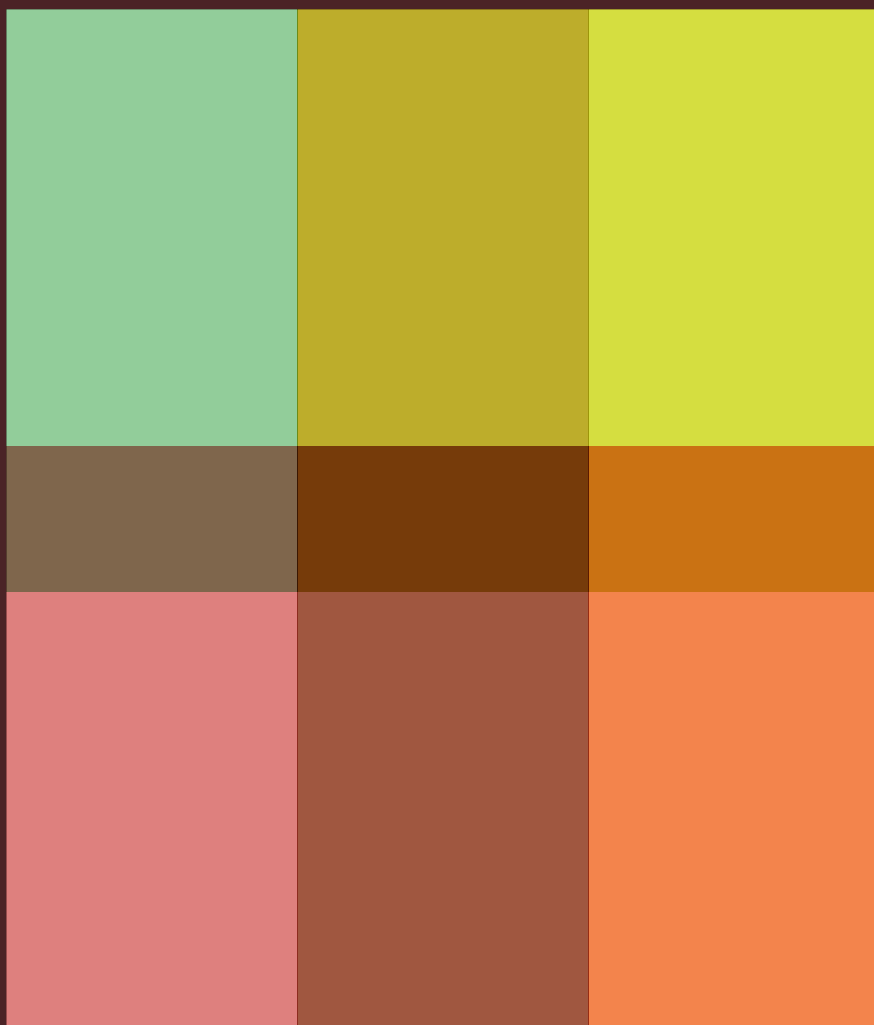


C ■ E ■ P ■ S *Journal*

Center for Educational Policy Studies Journal
Revija Centra za študij edukacijskih strategij

Vol.2 | N°1 | Year 2012



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Revija Centra za študij edukacijskih strategij

Center for Educational Policy Studies Journal

ISSN 2232-2647 (online edition)

ISSN 1855-9719 (printed edition)

Publication frequency: 4 issues per year**Subject:** Teacher Education, Educational Science**Publisher:** Faculty of Education,

University of Ljubljana, Slovenia

Managing editors: Mira Metljak and RominaPlešec Gasparič / **Cover and layout design:** RomanRažman / **Typeset:** Igor Cerar / **Print:** Littera Picta

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C ■ E ■ P ■ S *Journal*

Center for Educational Policy Studies Journal

Revija Centra za študij edukacijskih strategij

The CEPS Journal is an open-access, peer-reviewed journal devoted to publishing research papers in different fields of education, including scientific.

Aims & Scope

The CEPS Journal is an international peer-reviewed journal with an international board. It publishes original empirical and theoretical studies from a wide variety of academic disciplines related to the field of Teacher Education and Educational Sciences; in particular, it will support comparative studies in the field. Regional context is stressed but the journal remains open to researchers and contributors across all European countries and worldwide. There are four issues per year, two in English and two in Slovenian (with English abstracts). Issues are focused on specific areas but there is also space for non-focused articles and book reviews.

About the Publisher

The University of Ljubljana is one of the largest universities in the region (see www.uni-lj.si) and its Faculty of Education (see www.pef.uni-lj.si), established in 1947, has the leading role in teacher education and education sciences in Slovenia. It is well positioned in regional and European cooperation programmes in teaching and research. A publishing unit oversees the dissemination of research results and informs the interested public about new trends in the broad area of teacher education and education sciences; to date, numerous monographs and publications have been published, not just in Slovenian but also in English.

In 2001, the Centre for Educational Policy Studies (CEPS; see <http://ceps.pef.uni-lj.si>) was established within the Faculty of Education to build upon experience acquired in the broad reform of the national educational system during the period of social

transition in the 1990s, to upgrade expertise and to strengthen international cooperation. CEPS has established a number of fruitful contacts, both in the region – particularly with similar institutions in the countries of the Western Balkans – and with interested partners in EU member states and worldwide.

Revija Centra za študij edukacijskih strategij je mednarodno recenzirana revija, z mednarodnim uredniškim odborom in s prostim dostopom. Namenjena je objavljanju člankov s področja izobraževanja učiteljev in edukacijskih ved.

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Revija je namenjena obravnavanju naslednjih področij: poučevanje, učenje, vzgoja in izobraževanje, socialna pedagogika, specialna in rehabilitacijska pedagogika, predšolska pedagogika, edukacijske politike, supervizija, poučevanje slovenskega jezika in književnosti, poučevanje matematike, računalništva, naravoslovja in tehnike, poučevanje družboslovja in humanistike, poučevanje na področju umetnosti, visokošolsko izobraževanje in izobraževanje odraslih. Poseben poudarek bo namenjen izobraževanju učiteljev in spodbujanju njihovega profesionalnega razvoja.

V reviji so objavljeni znanstveni prispevki, in sicer teoretični prispevki in prispevki, v katerih so predstavljeni rezultati kvantitativnih in kvalitativnih empiričnih raziskav. Še posebej poudarjen je pomen komparativnih raziskav.

Revija izide štirikrat letno. Dve številki sta v angleškem jeziku, dve v slovenskem. Prispevki v slovenskem jeziku imajo angleški povzetek. Številke so tematsko opredeljene, v njih pa je prostor tudi za netematske prispevke in predstavitev ter recenzije novih publikacij.

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Editorial

The thematic focus of the present edition of the CEPS Journal is the cooperation of school with parents. This is an area that is extremely important from the perspective of ensuring the overall development of pupils, providing optimal conditions for development and learning, encouraging learning and for the achievement of other educational goals. Various empirical studies confirm that it is important to attract parents to cooperation with school and teachers, in order to comprehensively encourage the child's development (Burden, 1995; Gonzalez-DeHass, Willems, & Doan Holbein, 2005; Henderson & Berla, 1994; Hornby 2000; Jordan, Orozco, & Averett, 2001; Pomerantz, Moorman, & Litwack, 2007; Soo-Yin, 2003). Researchers have confirmed that the overall involvement of parents represents a positive contribution to learning and the learning achievements of pupils (Henderson & Berla, 1994; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997 in Gonzalez-DeHass et al., 2005). These studies prove there is a close relationship between the involvement of parents and the learning achievement of pupils, their wellbeing, their attendance at school, their views, their homework assignments, their school marks and their educational aspirations.

Parents are, therefore, important subjects, who with their participation contribute to the formation of the school sphere, while with their support of the pupil at home they can enable optimal conditions for his or her development. It is therefore important that each school encourages and enables a partnership with parents that increases their inclusion and participation in encouraging the social, emotional, moral and intellectual development of the child (Children's Defence Found, 2000, p. 64 in Soo-Yin, 2003). The school, parents and the community should be aware of their interconnection and together form a vision and understand the role of individual factors in relation to the role of other factors. Such cooperation is necessary in order to ensure the support and help that can enable each child to achieve appropriate school success and personal development. However, it is important to remember that dialogue between the parties concerned does not always mean just seeking consensus, but must also allow for confrontation and diverse viewpoints and perspectives.

The importance of cooperation between school and parents is also confirmed by research into school culture. Bryk and Schneider (2002 in Stansberry Beard, Hoy, & Woolfolk Hoy, 2010) explain that there are at least four social conditions in schools that directly promote student learning: a) teachers with a "can do" attitude, b) school outreach to parents, c) a professional community emphasising collaborative work practices with a commitment to improve, and d) high expectations. In his synthesis of over 800 meta-analyses related to

achievement across all home variables, Hattie (2009) determines that parental aspirations and expectations with regard to children's educational achievement have the strongest relationship with achievement, while communication (interest in homework and school work, assistance with homework, discussing school progress) has a moderate effect, and parental home supervision (e.g., home rules for watching television, home surroundings conducive to doing school work) has the weakest relationship.

Cooperation between teachers and parents, between school and home, is multifaceted, and different authors use different terminology in this regard. Rather than talking about corporation, some prefer to speak of the inclusion of parents in schoolwork, which can be a synonym for cooperation, the participation of parents, parental power and the partnership between school, the family and the community (Epstein, 1996 in Soo-Yin, 2003; Wolfendale, 1989 in Soo-Yin, 2003). Epstein (1996 in Soo-Yin, 2003) expanded the conception from "the inclusion of parents" to "a partnership between school, the family and the community" in order to particularly emphasise the fact that the child learns and develops within all three contexts: the school, the family, and the broader community. We must take all three contexts into account in an integrated way, because that is how they are reflected within the education and learning of the individual child.

The inclusion of parents can have various forms and levels, both inside and outside school. It embraces all of the activities that are provided and encouraged by school and that support parents in working towards improving the child's learning and development. Thus, on the realisation of the importance of cooperation between teachers and parents, questions repeatedly arise about the ways and forms of cooperation that most appropriately respond to the needs and challenges of the present times with which parents and their families, but also school and teachers, are faced. What is the level of quality of this cooperation, and to what extent does it really meet the goals and expectations that we have in relation to it? How can we cooperate with parents who perhaps do not want this cooperation or are overburdened with their everyday obligations? How can we include parents with all of their diverse personality characteristics, experience and positions in society? And the fundamental question, from which all of the responses to the other questions are derived: what is the essential purpose and goal of cooperation between teachers and parents, between school and home, and what do we expect from this cooperation? It is important to be aware that we must always have the pupil and his or her optimal development in mind.

In spite of the fact that many teachers and schools have accepted the concept of the inclusion of parents and are aware of its influence on the child,

many have not yet conveyed their knowledge and beliefs to planning, their plans to practice, and their practice to results (Eccles & Harold, 1993; Epstein, 1986; Gestwicki, 1996; Simon, Salinas Epstein, & Sanders, 1998 all in Soo-Yin, 2003). Many studies confirm that parents are interested in cooperation on all levels, from participation in specific events to making decisions on the level of the school. However, many parents still do not know how to enter into cooperation or do not feel sufficiently competent to do so. Most frequently it is a case of a lack of knowledge about inclusion rather than a low level of interest. It is particularly in relation to this question that the needs of the diverse parents whose children are included in the individual school must not be overlooked: differences in the socioeconomic status of families, the education of parents, the native language, belonging to various ethnic groups, the level of inclusion within multicultural society, familiarity with the language environment in which their children's schooling takes place, etc. Particularly in the case of so-called vulnerable groups of parents (families), it is necessary to enable participation and to establish conditions that, to the greatest possible extent, facilitate communication and mutual cooperation between teachers and parents. Research shows that in spite of a declared desire for dialogue with parents, certain teachers do not encourage such dialogue, nor do they actually want it, particularly with parents whom they perceive as part of the problem rather than part of the solution. This does not refer only to parents from minority ethnic groups, nor does it concern only those with a lower socioeconomic status, but also includes parents with a higher socioeconomic status (Peček, Čuk & Lesar, 2008). It is thus necessary to take into account the fact that the material and cultural conditions of families, as well as their feelings towards schooling, differ according to social class. Therefore, as Carvalho (2001) emphasises, the concept of cooperation between school and parents often appears to be a projection of the model of the upper-middle class rather than an open invitation for diverse families to recreate schooling. Family-school relations are relations of power, but most families are powerless.

Carvalho also highlights the other side of the relationship between parents and school, a side that is particularly salient in contemporary times, with the orientation of school towards ever increased productivity and its quantification; namely, the pressure for more family educational accountability, the expectation that parents not only support their children's work in school and for school, but also help them in learning and in completing homework. Of course, we cannot understand these kinds of expectations purely as the transferral of the teacher's responsibility for instruction to parents, but rather as the pressure of the ever increasing expectations of society with regard to the goals of school.

Teachers often feel that the school curriculum is so broad that it is not possible for pupils to achieve academically unless they work hard at home (Peček & Lesar, 2006). In this regard, children from vulnerable groups, whose parents find it a great deal more difficult to help them, are again exposed. Thus school only increases the differences derived from socioeconomic and cultural factors.

In the field of parent-teacher partnership, we would like to stress the importance of an awareness that “an essential starting point of any culture of good cooperation is allowing each other freedom and autonomy, awareness of interdependence and common goals. These are the very foundations on which it is possible to build the culture of partnership in cooperation between teachers and parents” (Šteh & Kalin, 2011, p. 99).

The diversity of views and responses to questions regarding the cooperation of teachers and parents is revealed by the contributions in the present thematic edition. The participating authors come from very different social environments, each emphasising particular questions related to the central theme: from the Republic of South Africa to Scotland, Norway, Italy and Slovenia.

The contribution by Paola Dusi entitled *The Family-School Relationships in Europe: A Research Review* brings an overview of research in the area of the relationship between school and parents. As the author emphasises, this research points in the same direction: good collaboration between family and school means that students can be provided with a better education and gives them better possibilities for learning. However, in her view, research shows that the home-school relationship is an unresolved issue, the reason for this being the complex nature of the educational role. As the author determines, the success of cooperation between school and parents is not dependent only on the specific, personal relationship between the teacher and parents, but rather is a result of simultaneous influences of factors on various levels: macro (cultural poly-centrism, the multiethnic make-up of society, neoliberal ideology and the decrease in welfare state policies), intermediary (differences in two institutions: family and school) and micro (interpersonal level). In her opinion, the school-parent relationship in Europe is marked by scarce parental participation (which is not only the result of a lack of interest, a lack of motivation on the part of parents to cooperate with school, but frequently also a lack of motivation on the part of teachers), a lack of adequate forms of home-school communication, and the need to invest in parent and teacher training. The author ends the article on an optimistic note, emphasising that despite the difficulty of the family-school relationship it is possible to improve it, and concludes with certain suggestions as to how to do this.

The articles in the continuation also take as their point of departure the supposition that a good relationship between the teacher and parents

contributes to better learning results, school attendance, self-esteem, social behaviour and school climate, as well as a higher level of responsibility on the part of the pupils for fulfilling their school obligations. In addition, from the perspective of research undertaken in specific school environments, the articles raise the question as to what, in fact, a good relationship between teachers and parents is, and how this relationship can be formed. As the authors emphasise, the process of teacher education has an important role to play.

Thus, for instance, the contribution by Franc Cankar, Tomi Deutsch and Sonja Sentočnik entitled *Approaches to Building Teacher-Parent Cooperation* emphasises that in Slovenia we do not have sufficient empirical evidence to make claims about the problems related to family-school cooperation. One of the key questions refers to the quality of the partnership between these two institutions. In their opinion, the quality of family-school cooperation is determined by the presence of mutual agreement and the extent to which cooperation is harmonised. Therefore, they are interested in areas of cooperation in which parent and teacher expectations are the same and where they differ. The results of their research show that teachers are a rather homogenous group in their claim that their cooperation with parents is as it should be; on the other hand, parents' views are much more dispersed and critical in their perception of the actual situation. Teachers and parents have similar expectations, but they differ in their perceptions of the actual situation. Findings suggest that parents' rating of the importance of parent involvement in school work is influenced by their gender and education, as well as by the frequency of their attendance at formal school events. Mothers with higher education take more interest in how their children spend their time in school, through actively seeking cooperation with school, asking questions and giving suggestions. An analysis of cooperation with parents over a period of one year in the programme 'Reading and Conversation' show that parents especially value trust, honesty, spontaneity and mutual understanding in cooperation with teachers.

The aim of the paper by Sathiapama Michael, Charl C. Wolhuter and Noleen van Wyk entitled *The Management of Parental Involvement in Multicultural Schools in South Africa: A Case Study* was to investigate the management of parent involvement in three multicultural schools in the Umlazi District in Durban. The qualitative research was undertaken within diverse school communities, as schools in South Africa have recently been desegregated. This gives the article additional relevance, as it also touches upon questions of teachers' encounters with social, cultural and linguistic diversity, which is pertinent in many countries that have become more heterogeneous as a result of various social, economic and political developments. The research in the aforementioned

schools reveals a low level of meaningful contact between school and parents. Apathy exists on the side of parents, low expectations on the side of principals and teachers, and an organisational structure facilitating parent-school interaction is lacking. The research also highlights certain restricted opportunities for interaction between parents and schools; namely, a lack of time and the language barrier. Furthermore, schools tend to direct their efforts towards fixing parents rather than altering school structures and practices. The authors conclude their article with a recommendation as to how to increase cultural sensitivity both amongst teachers and amongst school managers, thus improving the management of parent involvement in multicultural schools.

The contribution by Gillian Inglis is entitled *Reconstructing Parents' Meetings in Primary Schools: The Teacher as Expert, the Parent as Advocate and the Pupil as Self-Advocate*. The article uses an approach informed by grounded theory to explore the experiences and satisfaction of parents, teachers and pupils around biannual meetings to discuss pupils' progress in three primary schools in the central area of Scotland. In the theoretical section, based primarily on Hornby, the author emphasises various models of teachers working with parents, models that are also evident in her empirical analysis of cooperation between teachers and parents. As she determines, a model of the teacher as the expert and information-giver persists. In this model, passive roles might be expected for the parent. Nonetheless, in an era of the consumerist paradigm, this is changing. As her research confirms, the rise of the consumer model of education has charged parents with an advocacy role and increased professional accountability. The author is not only interested in cooperation between parents and teachers, which is a frequent theme of various analyses that treat the relationship between school and the family, but with the role of pupils, with regard to which she raises the question, increasingly relevant in contemporary times, as to whether and how pupils should also participate in meetings between teachers and parents.

Last but not least in the Focus part, the article by Martha Lea entitled *Cooperation Between Migrant Parents and Teachers in School: A Resource?* deals with the question of cooperation with parents from the perspective of the inclusion of children of migrants in the school system. As the author emphasises, even in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child it is determined that in education the children of immigrants must have equal opportunities. The question is, however, how the school system should be organised and what kind of cooperation between parents and teachers leads to the realisation of the goal of equal opportunities. In the article, the author asks why schools should cooperate with migrant parents; what are the possibilities and challenges in official

Norwegian policy and what are teachers' experiences? She determines that education policy in Norway is inclusive, as is illustrated by the fact that students get language support to a certain degree both in their mother tongue and in Norwegian when needed, that the policy stimulates cooperation between parents and teachers, and that some support is also given to translation. Nonetheless, a whole range of problems are evident on the level of the realisation of cooperation between teachers and parents, which, in the opinion of the author, demonstrates that it is necessary to work through a process of learning how to cooperate and give adequate support. The Norwegian policy shows a will to encourage cooperation, but the implementation of the policy can still be improved. According to the author, cooperation requires clear school policy and the means to implement it, as well as a high level of teacher competence.

In the Varia part the contribution by Ingo Eilks, Torsten Witteck and Verena Pietzner entitled *The Role and Potential Dangers of Visualisation When Learning About Sub-Microscopic Explanations in Chemistry Education* reflects upon the central role that visualisations play when learning about the model-based, sub-microscopic level. It also reflects on the dangers inherent in employing insufficiently examined, poorly thought-out, or even misleading visualisations. This is outlined using different examples taken from both textbooks for lower secondary chemistry education and from the Internet. Implications for structuring and using sub-micro visualisations in chemistry education are also given.

This thematic edition of the journal is rounded out with 'The Third Section', which contains a review of a book that also deals with the theme of cooperation between school and parents, a monograph edited by Sandra L. Christenson and Amy L. Reschly entitled *Handbook of School-Family Partnerships* (2010, New York: Routledge, Taylor and Francis. ISBN 10: 0-415-96376/ISBN 13: 978-0-415-96376-3). The editors emphasise that the monograph is a comprehensive review of what is known about the effects of school-family partnerships on student and school achievement.

JANA KALIN AND MOJCA PEČEK ČUK

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The Family-School Relationships in Europe: A Research Review

PAOLA DUSI¹

≈ The literature on research carried out in the field and parents' and teachers' declarations all point in the same direction: good collaboration between home and school is useful to the child-student for his education and learning. Despite this, parent-teacher relationships in Europe (and elsewhere), from Spain to Sweden, from Ireland to Greece, and from Italy to the Czech Republic, represent an unresolved issue. This is a complex relationship that calls into play various social spheres: macro (social), intermediary (institutional) and micro (relational); in fact, there are as many diverse realities as there are schools. In Europe, the relationship between individual behaviours (parents vs. teachers), social orientations (neoliberalism) and institutional frameworks (school markets) appears significant: scarce parental participation, lack of adequate forms of home-school communications, and the need to make investments in parent and teacher training. Nevertheless, family and school are called on to create a dialogue in order to contribute to the processes of training new generations. They both need each other in order to carry out that task in the best way. This paper presents and discusses the results of a theoretical analysis conducted on the basis of the international literature concerning research on the school-family relationship, with particular attention on the situation of different European countries, and concludes with suggestions for some practical improvements.

Keywords: Benefits and difficulties, European perspective, Individual behaviour, Institutional frameworks, School-family relationship, Social orientations

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Odnos med družino in šolo v Evropi – pregled raziskav

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∞ Literatura, povezana z raziskavami na področju sodelovanja med domom in šolo, ter izjave staršev in učiteljev kažejo, da je tovrstno sodelovanje koristno za učenčevo vzgojo in izobraževanje. Kljub temu v Evropi (in drugod) – od Španije do Švedske, od Irske do Grčije in od Italije do Češke – ostaja vprašanje odnosa med starši in učitelji nerešeno. Gre za kompleksen odnos, ki vključuje različne socialne sfere: makro (družbeno), srednjo (institucionalno) in mikro (odnosno). Pravzaprav gre za toliko različnih stvarnosti, kolikor je šol samih. V Evropi se kot pomemben kaže odnos med vedenji posameznih akterjev (starši : učitelji), socialno usmerjenostjo (neoliberalizem) in institucionalnimi okviri (izobraževalni trg); participacija staršev je skromna, komunikacija med šolo in domom nezadostna, potrebno je vlaganje v usposabljanje staršev in učiteljev. Kljub temu sta družina in šola poklicani k vzpostavljanju dialoga, da bi prispevali k procesu usposabljanja novih generacij. Druga drugo potrebujeta za čim boljše uresničevanje njunih nalog. Prispevek predstavlja izsledke teoretične analize, izvedene na osnovi mednarodne literature s področja odnosov med družino in šolo, s posebnim poudarkom na prikazu stanja različnih evropskih držav in v sklepu poda predloge za izboljšave v praksi.

Ključne besede: odnos med šolo in družino, vedenje staršev in učiteljev, institucionalni okviri, socialna usmerjenost, koristi in težave, evropska perspektiva

Introduction

Research carried out in the field, and the extant literature almost all point in the same direction (Swap, 1993). A good relationship between family and school means that the student can be provided with a better training programme, i.e. one which helps the student experience the encounter of these two worlds in a calm way. Both teachers' professionalism and the parents' knowledge of their child can pave the way to an efficacious educational partnership.

It is to be emphasized, however, that the related literature often conveys a 'romantic' vision of the family-school relationship, highlighting only the positive effects that parent-teacher collaboration can create while overlooking the inevitable differences that this brings out, such as the fatigue and patience required by teachers, as well as ignoring the risks and excesses (in terms of interference and/or being overwhelmed) that collaboration can also cause (Casanova, 1996). Parents and teachers often live in a state of a 'desire for peace and quiet' that, in practice, can transform into a pact of non-interference. Educational limits of respective competences are not a *fait accompli*, since the marginal areas of these spaces in which parents and teachers carry out their responsibilities and functions have an irregular, uncertain form and are intertwined with wider-reaching social-cultural dynamics. Family-school relationships are not exempt from the dynamics of power that are part and parcel of human relationships (Foucault, 1998). Respect, recognition and trust encounter contempt, repudiation and lack of trust (Honneth, 1992) to create essentially subtle conflicts of power (social and personal), even when teachers and parents meet (Henry, 1996). There are a myriad of factors at play. Nonetheless it is the teachers' task, given that they are professionals, to identify suitable strategies to handle the inevitable contrasts that collaborative relationships and rapports create. Promoting dialogue with parents does not mean merely looking for consensus; it means allowing for confrontation, reflecting on various points of view and creating a dialogue with perspectives that are often in contrast.

However, both teachers and parents, when asked, state they believe that mutual collaboration is useful to both education and learning.

This paper takes as a starting point the hypothesis that the school-family relationship is intrinsically difficult due to the complex nature of the educational role, whatever the socio-cultural and normative framework is. As a consequence, the main objective of this study is to provide a wider vision of the family-school relationship by taking into account the European perspective and to find out whether there are recurring elements that characterize the essence of this kind of relationship. The paper collects together and present transversal

aspects found in the literature, which form the structure of the family-school relationship in the different countries with regards to parental participation, teachers' attitudes and the benefits that a good family-school relationship brings with it on various levels. One of the findings from this analysis is the correlation that exists between individual behaviour (parents), institutions (schools) and a neoliberal and market orientation (nations and continent) that characterize the family-school relationship at the European level. An analysis of the literature has led to the possibility of making some suggestions to improve the family-school relationship, an objective that is shared by policies of various national contexts. Criteria used for selection of the literature were: papers focusing on the school-family relationship (primary school) in European countries, the significance of the contribution, and the date of publication.

The Home-School Relationship and Parental Characteristics

Many studies have highlighted the fact that parents want to be more involved in the educational processes of their children and receive more information and help from schools in order to be able to be involved (Baker & Stevenson, 1986; Bastiani, 1993; Comer, 1988; Dauber & Epstein, 1989; González-Falcón & Romero-Muñoz, 2011; Migeot-Alvarado, 2002). However, there are others who believe that their duty to school is to pay the taxes that permit public services, including schools, to function properly; others think that participating in school life is not one of these duties; while yet others are so overwhelmed by their own jobs, families and economic considerations that they are unable to take part in any type of social activity.

Why, in fact, are parents not very involved in their children's schooling? For an infinite number of reasons, every one of which brings a piece of reality with it, in its complexity: from time to energy, from economic resources to a lack of familiarity with the school system, from the knowledge of curriculum to trust in the true ability to be of help to one's child; from convictions regarding what parenting means and to the functions related to the changing ages of the child and personal experience of a parent's own schooling and with teachers.

Parental characteristics that influence the school-home relationships in a relevant way can be summarized as follows (adapted from Eccles & Harold, 1996):

1. Parents' social and psychological resources (personal health, available coping strategies, social networks);
2. Personal sense of efficacy (trust in one's own ability to help children

- carry out assigned tasks; a conviction of being able to continue helping one's children in various subjects during secondary school);
3. Perception of one's own child (trust in the child's cognitive and learning abilities; educational and job hopes, and expectations for one's child; real opportunities for one's child in the present and future);
 4. Parent's personal construction of the parental role; convictions regarding parental role in children's education and results obtained at school (What is the parent's role? How does this role change during a child's growth? Attribution or not of importance in participating in management of school, benefits that good school performance creates);
 5. Cultural, ethnic and religious identity of parents (perception of one's own culture, religion and socialization processes; existing relationships between cultural convictions, parental role and school results; cultural and social recognition received in the school context; school perceived as a reality in which models and values are provided that contrast with those of the family or a context in which one is helped in the task of cultural and religious transmission);
 6. Parental socialization practices (carrying out of their educational role in order to promote their children's autonomy and independence; presence or absence of sharing and reworking through children's experiences);
 7. History of relationship with school and education of children (their prior experience in school and relationships with teachers; introduction to the school system as a parent and continuation of this relationship during the course of their children's scholastic career).

Studies carried out in different European (and non-European) countries all identify a various array of competing factors that determine parents' positions concerning school. These positions, however, together with the way in which teachers act on the relationship with families, have a determining role.

Teachers' Visions of the Family-School Relationship

According to a great deal of research, the way in which a relationship between a student's family and an educational institution takes shape, depends mostly on how the institution and its professionals carry out their roles. The family-school relationship is influenced by the practices adopted by teachers, by the structure of the educational institution, and the way in which a family is considered by the school; it also depends on teachers and their interest level and desire to involve parents, and on their knowledge of concrete methods

aimed at increasing processes of parental collaboration.

The passivity of parents observed in various European countries seems to be fuelled by the formal and institutional nature of the school, by its bureaucracy and the attitudes of many teachers who do not always encourage the presence of parents. At the international level, a widespread state of paradoxical behaviour at school has also been seen between teachers towards parents who are the end receivers of these contradictory messages. The latter are told: 'You are absent parents, therefore inadequate', but at the same time, the parents are also asked 'not to be overly present' (Auduc, 2007; Gayet, 1999; González-Falcón & Romero-Muñoz, 2011). Teachers, as a matter of fact, do not seem to encourage the involvement of parents at school and in the classroom, especially when they are dealing with low-income families and/or members of a minority, who are perceived as being part of the problem rather than a resource (Mac Ruairc, 2011; Palaolou, Evangelou, & Tspakidou, 2011). In certain cases, the school fosters a sense of impotence in the family and a sense of distance that parents associate with frustration and a sense of being judged (Perregaux et al., 2011).

Even though teachers usually emphasize the positive aspects that a good family-school relationship provides (Andonov, 2007; Humbeeck et al., 2006; Pati, 2001), they seem to seek out collaboration from parents only in times of difficulty over disciplinary matters or learning issues (Papazoglou, 1984), the causes of which are often attributed to the family. If middle-class parents are able to make use of a common culture, networks of friends and the type of knowledge that allows them to understand the school system and its language, migrant families and those of a lower socio-economic status have very little information at their disposal regarding the organization of the school, disciplinary practices and so on. Teachers and school personnel tend to take this information for granted, which only aids in strengthening inequalities of already existing knowledge (Lareau, 1987; Useem, 1991, 1992). According to the theory of 'cultural capital', of 'educational reproduction' (Bourdieu, 1996; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1976) and the sociolinguistic theory of 'elaborated and restricted linguistic codes' (Bernstein, 1975), schools significantly influence students' careers through the use of specific authoritarian patterns types of curricula and authoritarian models that favour social dominant groups.

Schools do not seem to be so efficacious in sharing information with students and parents, especially in high schools; this is not only caused by disorganization, nor by the perception of one's tasks, nor by communication flows that are taken for granted or as shared regarding a framework of knowledge and information, but also by the fact that keeping knowledge to oneself is also a type of power. Directors and teachers can take advantage of the lack of knowledge that

parents and students have with regards to the school system (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). Without appropriate knowledge, parents and students can only make small requests, and they are not capable of understanding existing difficulties (Dornbusch & Glasgow, 1996). However, teachers increasingly feel that they are being watched, and looked at with disapproval and/or criticized by parents.

The relationship with parents is certainly not an easy one. Dealing with families means encountering different types of axiologies, convictions about what educating means, which tasks lie with the school and which with the family, representations of educational functions linked to roles of parents and teachers, all of which bring with them different interpretations of the family-school relationship, as well as of its meaning and the methods to be used. Teachers' most frequent objections concerning active involvement of parents – which can mean their presence in the classroom (Gestwicki, 2007) – can be classified as follows (points a, b and c are from Tizard, Mortimore, & Burchell, 1981; the last by author):

- a) Organizational. Difficulty of carrying out all tasks involved, especially of a bureaucratic nature, which are part of the job and require a lot of time. Sharing of one's own educational activity with parents, the exchange of information, preparation of shared activities, all require a large investment both in terms of energy and time;
- b) Professional. Teachers' competences and efficacy of their actions can be weakened by the presence of unprepared parents, by their chatter and unfair requests, and by their lack of respect for teachers' professionalism;
- c) Educational. Teachers' educational activity can be effective even when family collaboration does not exist; the inadequacy of families is one of the main difficulties that teachers' have to deal with in their actions; the task assigned to schools is very precise: teaching;
- d) Personal. A feeling of personal and professional inadequacy; difficulty in relationships with adults (not feeling prepared for dealings implicit in a collaborative relationship; fear of having of not being up to dealing with tensions and conflicts).

The idea of parental involvement triggers teachers' fears of losing their professional autonomy, their educational-didactic management and authority. INTO (Irish National Teachers Organisation) describes it as such:

[F]ears remain that increasing parental involvement in schools, particularly to the point of partnership and the involvement of parents in the classroom, constitute a threat to professional status and even professional competence. It is argued that professionals and non-professionals

cannot be partners except in a very loose sense. Partnership has not been proclaimed with the medical professional with whom parents share the health care of children or with the legal profession when cases of law and justice arise. [...] It must also be noted that there are attitudinal and professional difficulties among teachers, many of whom feel threatened by what is seen as parental encroachment in a professional domain (INTO, 1997, pp. 21–26).

Teachers' actions can be seen as two opposing orientations: democratization and corporativism. In trying to obtain financing and in seeing projects approved, teachers rely on parents and participatory members and/or school management, while paradoxically and simultaneously, in order to strengthen one's own position within these participatory organisms and of the school, professional jargon is used, thereby distancing parents (Fernández-Enguita, 1993).

Reasons to Foster Collaboration between Home and School

The idea that parents are not very interested or poorly motivated in working on a relationship with teachers seems to be on the rise. Also gaining ground is the increasingly popular conviction, which has to be confronted, even with lower class and/or less cultured families, is the lack (whether perceived and/or real) of an adequate educational ability, the scarce knowledge of the school system, different concepts of parents' educational role and, above all, of school practices and teachers' actions that do not really encourage the presence of families at school (Deslandes, 2009; González-Falcón & Romero-Muñoz, 2010; INTO, 1997; Pati, 2008). These are aspects that have been already noted for some time, even in other contexts:

Status variables are not the most important measures for understanding parent involvement. At all grade levels, the evidence suggests that school policies and teacher practices and family practices are more important than race, parent education, family size, marital status, and even grade level in determining whether parents continue to be part of their children's education (Epstein, 1990, p. 109).

Family-school relationships express a complex reality that cannot be reduced simplistically: in each school, there are as many different situations as there are families (and teachers) involved. In each case, when parents and teachers choose to collaborate, things improve for all parties (above all for

students). The sharing of pedagogical responsibility allows parents and teachers to create energies, identify strategies, and to be a coherent educational model for future generations. Schools need the active participation of parents just as families need the collaboration and support of schools. Teachers and parents know this and when asked, they clearly admit it (Dusi, 2010a, 2011).

Parental support can help reach superior standards in students' educational careers. Awareness of this, however, can only be a starting point for planning and developing a family-school relationship on a regular basis that works in respect of mutual competences and respective territories.

The systemic vision of human relationships and social realities (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) highlights the fact that apart from fostering psycho-social development of children and positively influencing their school performance, there are various benefits that a good family-school relationship brings with it on many levels (Haynes & Ben-Avie, 1996; Haynes, Gebreyesus, & Comer, 1993):

- a) Teachers. Giving attention to parents requires great energy and involvement, but in doing so teachers acquire important information concerning their students. Knowledge of the socio-cultural context in which they carry out their jobs increases. Deeper understanding of the students' reality lets the teacher intervene more efficaciously both in the climate of the classroom and teaching strategies, so as to improve the teacher's self-efficacy.
- b) Parents. Dialogue and dealing with other adults concerning educational dynamics and the growth of children leads to access of new information, to the discovery of other perspectives of interpretation regarding a type of behaviour, a situation or an educational problem. By fostering reflection, this dialogue is a privileged way of keeping up one's own self-training. Teachers must become an educational point of reference for adults and schools a place of hope for the present and future of parents' children.
- c) School. For the institution to deal with parents who are present, involved and committed means having access to resources and energy to invest in improving structures, activities and initiatives, the very processes of teaching. Earning trust and the participation of families requires imagination, commitment, creativity and investment in planning and communications activities, which require training of personnel and institutional change.
- d) Community. When the two main educational institutions of family and school collaborate, school becomes a centre of training and social

promotion, a place in which knowledge is spread and social capital is created. The task of the school is not that of taking on the educational functions of families for itself, nor is it only meant to ask parents the function of checking up on the carrying out of homework. Instead, its duty is to encourage parents to expand their sphere of interest, knowledge and activities so as to be able to carry out its educational function and to become a place that promotes social change. From this perspective, the school is called on to become more flexible, to be culturally sensitive and reactive, and to form a bond with families and the territory (*cf.* Dewey, 2004).

Caring for students who fill the classroom day after day means gaining knowledge and understanding of their world. The family is their inner territory, their roots, their gaze upon the world and themselves:

Our students (...) never come to school alone. An 'onion' (of layers) comes into the classroom: various layers of knots in their stomachs, fears, worries ... look at them, here they come, the body in development and the family in the knapsack. The lesson can begin only after they have unloaded this weight down and left behind the outside world (Pennac, 2008, p. 55).

If students only need to unload their weight and leave the outside world behind in order to be calm and concentrate on learning tasks, on relationships, mutual expectations and roles that the school reserves for each one of them, then teachers need to understand each student's family, so as to be able to make suitable changes to their own teaching actions until they become efficacious. Meeting parents in order to come to know and recognize them is a decisive part of the professionalism involved in teaching, given the enormous influence parents have over children:

The fundamental equation of teaching – our equivalent to $E=mc^2$ – the rule which is never wrong is that knowing parents will help understand children (Perboni, 2009, p. 171).

Through sharing, the practice of teaching becomes more efficacious, even if that requires making a great effort. The reasons for collaboration between home and school are based on the benefit for students and the community; they are rooted in the need/possibility to do better, because each new student entrusted to the care of family and school can self-develop and fuel the desire to 'discover the secrets of the world', as in the words of Octavian (10

years old). Home and school are the space in which the personality of every new student takes form. The gaze of adults, especially parents, teaches children to look at themselves and to see in a certain way, to recognize their uniqueness, to believe in the possibility of their own development, to find their own place in the world, to gain recognition from others, as Andrea, an 11-year-old student, writes. After having worked on Leopardi's poem 'The Lonely Sparrow', the teacher invited students to reflect on their own lives, starting with the prompt: 'Sometimes even I feel sad and misunderstood.' Andrea's reflection took school into consideration, including his scholastic performance and the expectations that parents and teachers have for him. Through his story, the child highlights the influence of school on family relationships, on the parent-child relationship, on the perception that children have of themselves, on their sense of well-being within family and school systems and on the possibility of improving things if he commits himself and the energy required by every change.

Luckily it has never gotten so bad that I feel I am suffocating but, especially in this period, my teachers, my parents, my grandparents all think that I am a child who does not exploit my potential. They are always telling me that I have to put my all into everything I do. The problem is that I am aware of this. For example, Marco is able to give his all and for this reason he is the brightest in the class. And the thing that really bugs me is that I could also be the brightest in the class, and therefore I should do it!

Moreover, my parents make me feel sadder when they compare me to my brother because he does better than me in school. In these moments when I suffer, I feel alone, excluded, cast out like the ugly duckling among many beautiful ducks. But maybe it isn't the others who don't understand me, I don't understand myself. Luckily, sometimes, I can change things and I am proud of myself; with a little luck and being only 11 years old, with time I will be able to change! (From the workbook of this primary student, date of composition at school: 22 April 2010. Both the children's quotations – Octavian's and Andrea's – are from research conducted with some teachers in a primary school. The topic of this research is the family seen through children's eyes).

Family and School: A Multi-level and Complex Relationship

There are many factors, variables and contexts that compete in the definition of the family-school relationship. Reflecting on the coming together of parents and teachers means facing a complex and articulated reality that combines three different social levels: macro, intermediary and micro, each of which can influence the others (Dusi, 2010c).

Macro Level. The dynamics of a supranational character intertwine as per the means and ends of parent-teacher interaction. In the family/school relationship dynamics permeating all of society have a role. Demographic, socio-economic and cultural changes of the modern world have their influence on the family-school relationship. There are many dynamics at work in our current times. The most important ones specifically are those related to:

- *Cultural poly-centrism.* Schools do not have a monopoly on access to knowledge, nor does it represent the prerogative of the élite, not only in the sense of social class, but also of merit and ability. Moreover, the role of school has been decreased by changes in the job market: a diploma or a degree no longer ensures socio-economic progress (Auduc, 2007; Dusi, 2002).
- *The multi-ethnic composition of society.* Demographic and cultural changes that have taken place in the various European states have also involved school systems. The cultural-linguistic difference today is a basic structural part of school systems, even in those states that underwent outgoing migration flows in the past (Southern Europe). The role of schools and its professionals has transformed to become more complex and difficult (Andonov, 2007; Dusi, 2010b; Talib, 2006).
- *The establishment of neoliberal ideology and the decrease in welfare state policies.* Individualistic-consumerist orientations identify one of the fundamental criteria in evaluating efficacy of public services through client satisfaction. In the past, education was seen as a collective right. Democratic institutions were expected to guarantee access to schools to everyone. With the introduction of neoliberalism, educational processes have also been reinterpreted through ideas related to market ideologies. Parents are not seen as citizens with a right and duty to educate their children, but rather as clients with the right to choose the school where to enrol their child (Osborn et al., 2003; Ravn, 2005).

In other words, parents as clients and consumers are encouraged to choose among the many offers in the educational market. The idea of

community in school and in class is fading away. Global competing economies and a dominant market orientation are championing the model of people as consumers of education rather than the producers of education through public policy. [...] these days individual schools are asked by the government to set up their specific profiles. [...]. The setting up of an image or profile for each school is a question of marketing each school's individual identity and reputation in order to attract clients. [...] Schools are being conceived of as 'society's offer' to the parents (Kryger & Ravn, 2009, pp. 14–15).

Individualism, consumerist attitudes and the decrease in participation that are widespread in Western society have also made their presence felt within school systems, where parents are always less present in terms of cooperation but increasingly active in terms of being aggressive and making demands on teachers. This is why it is necessary to invest in the training of teachers and parents.

Intermediary Level. The two institutions involved are different: family is not school and vice versa.

Even though educational issues and practices appear tangled, it is important to keep clear that families and schools are distinct institutions, situated in different spaces and times of everyday life, comprising particular (physical and social) arrangements, responding to different social and individual needs, and carrying exclusive functions (de Carvalho, 2001, pp. 40–41).

Functions, perspectives, timing of interventions and competences are different. Moreover, on the institutional level, the forms the two institutions may take are different due to normative frameworks and the levels of schools, and how these are structured and interconnected, and due to the model of socially recognized families and to those – which by nature – are present in the territory. In the relationship between the two institutions, the family acts personally for the most part, while schools have an institutional plan. For this reason, since family-school relationships are ones of power, most families are powerless when dealing with schools. Due to this type of asymmetry, it is the school that must promote collaboration with the family.

Even though they have different roles, tasks and perspectives, the institutions of school and family are called on to create a dialogue in order to contribute to the processes of training new generations. They both need each other in order to carry out their task in the best way (Dusi, 2010a).

Micro Level. The interpersonal level: the parent-teacher relationship. In contemporary society, parents and teachers are called on to take care of education of new generations. This task is to be shared, even if the timing, places and types are different. This is why the family-school relationship is complex: the institutions, powers and perspectives that come together are dual in nature. However, the educational goals of both halves are the same: to offer the best to children, to accompany them in their growth ensuring that they become strong and capable of moving around in the world safely, but each one of these goals take on different meanings that translate into educational processes, strategies and methods that are more or less different between parents and teachers. The difference in perspectives and methods to be used in carrying out educational functions is constituted by the parent-teacher relationship, which is often informed by conflicts of power and values (Henry, 1996).

Research conducted in selected European countries shows that teachers hold a similar opinion of parents (Smit & Driessen, 2009). Researchers have found that there are certain recurring attitudes among parents as soon as they begin to deal with schools.

Milada Rabusicova (2009) addressed the issues of parents' roles with respect to school with a combination of methods, which led to the drawing up of a questionnaire that was distributed among schools and parental representatives.

Data analysis showed which roles are most often ascribed to parents: the customer; the partner; the source-of-problem; the citizenship role. The customer-parent role accounted for by 82% of answers while the citizenship role was the least represented (18%). The most significant data, as Rabusicova points out, is the fact that there is no difference between how parents were perceived by school representatives and by parents themselves. In fact, the two different models are not mutually exclusive: every parent adopts behaviours that recall other models.

Many teachers and headmasters will assert with absolute confidence that parents are partners to them on one occasion and that they are customers on another, without being able to differentiate between these dimensions of parents roles. [...]. School documents sometimes treat parents 'preventively' as a potential source of problems, sometimes as customers entitled to a free choice of a school – a choice, however, that is hard to exercise – at other times as citizens with a right to comment on the operation of public institutions and to associate in organizations supporting school (Rabusicova, 2009, p. 25).

The relationship between individual behaviours and social orientations appears significant. The presence at a supranational level (macro) of the

neoliberal and market orientation is found in parents (micro) who act like clients (82% of answers) in their relationship with an institution which – in accordance with scholastic policies adopted by governments – has appropriated some of the rules of the market and its language (intermediary).

Some Suggestions to Improve the School-Family Relationship

Schools and their professionals are called upon to deal and dialogue with a myriad of family and personal visions; it is the parents who have the right/duty to accompany children in their processes of growth and learning. Despite the difficulty of the phenomenon in question, it is possible to improve the family-school relationship if:

- taking care of students is the focus of one's actions (Dusi, 2010a);
- teachers have the will to act as a partner to parents and parents to increase their participation;
- teachers give proof of their involvement in the relationship with parents and show their desire to invest in processes of collaboration;
- teachers show openness and are attentive of a relationship with some parents – often from another culture – that is lacking or different in the awareness that what is missing may not be due to a lack of interest, but to a different conceptual framework of expectations and norms in the family-school relationship (Huss-Keeler, 1997);
- teachers are prepared to continue collaboration with parents actively, to ask their opinions and points of views (through interviews, consultations, questionnaires) (Smit & Driessen, 2009);
- there is a solid relationship of collaboration among teachers. The practice of sharing ideas, opinions and situations with colleagues regarding students and families allows for a conceptualization of relationships, to give the correct meaning to words used and to adopt more suitable strategies for each family. Teachers become an element of strength, of professional growth and support, all of which are elements that influence communication flows with parents and collaborative relationships with families positively (Dusi, 2010a);
- the implicit culture of the school is made explicit: teachers must ensure that migrant parents (and others) understand the function of school and what the school's expectations of them are (Bernhard & Freire, 1999);
- tools are created to welcome families, both at the institutional level (normative, protocols, documentation, spaces, etc.), and at the interpersonal

level between teachers and parents (flexibility in timing of parent-teacher interviews and meetings – *cf.* Lopez et al., 2001; communication styles, motivating collaboration, recognition of parents' roles etc.). A welcoming atmosphere is a crucial moment in the family-school relationship (especially for migrant families, *cf.* Perregaux, 2008);

- investments are made in participatory communication processes with families: from parent-teacher interviews (*cf.* from the joint action model (Ravn, 2011) to the homework diary and school reports; Lahaye, Pourtois, & Desmet, 2009);
- institutions promote the educational competences and resources of parents.

These proposals call on the responsible politicians for economic funding of the school system, from its organization to methods of teaching training. This latter is a fundamental dimension for the evolution of the family-school relationship based on collaboration, with effects for each person involved and the entire community. The role of teachers in the family-school relationship – by nature – is central, because parents play a crucial role in the education of their children. This does not mean having to ask whether one has to foster family relationships, but to ask what forms these relationships should have, which model to foster as a teacher and as an institution located in a territorial context.

The way schools care about children is reflected in the way schools care about the children's families. If educators view children simply as students, they are likely to see the family as separate from the school. That is, the family is expected to do its job and leave the education of children to the schools. If educators view students as children, they are likely to see both the family and the community as partners with the school in children's education and development (Epstein, 2009, p. 9).

Discussion and Conclusions

The analysis of the literature carried out in the present study makes reference to a limited amount of research, as it is also based on the work of other researchers. This is an exploratory reflection that requires further in-depth study in the field. Moreover, this study identifies selected baselines that inform the family-school relationship, beyond those of each particular nation, by highlighting influences of certain socio-economic and cultural orientations of complex societies (neoliberalism, migration, etc.) and, as such, it goes toward

confirming the hypothesis that, in our times, the coming together of the two main educational institutions and their agents is a complex situation by its very nature, which goes beyond the social-cultural and legislative differences of where this encounter takes place.

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Approaches to Building Teacher-Parent Cooperation

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∞ The purpose of this study was to explore the areas of cooperation in which parent and teacher expectations were the same and where they differed. Data were obtained from a sample of 55 randomly selected primary schools. We analyzed school-to home communications, parental influence on school decisions, and parent involvement in different school activities. At the same time, we also explored building cooperation among the teachers, students, and their parents, within the framework of the program 'Reading and Conversation'. The findings indicated that the third- and ninth- grade lead teachers were mostly in agreement about the importance of parent involvement and as such represented a fairly homogenous group. The third-grade lead teachers were more open about actual involvement of parents in instruction than their ninth-grade colleagues, who were more cautious and restrained. In contrast to the lead teachers who represented a relatively narrow professional group, parents' views were much more diverse. Parental education was the best predictor of their readiness to become involved in the life and work of their children's school. Whether the area in which the families lived was urban or suburban did not make any difference. The evaluation of the one-year 'Reading and Conversation' programme revealed increases in parents' motivation to collaborate with the school as a consequence of the program's approach to work, as well as improvement in mutual relationships and dialogue.

Keywords: Parents, Primary school, School-to-home communications, Teachers

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Pristopi k oblikovanju sodelovanja med učitelji in starši

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~ Namen študije je bil raziskati področja sodelovanja, na katerih se pričakovanja učiteljev in staršev ujemajo in razlikujejo. Podatki so bili pridobljeni na vzorcu 55 naključno izbranih osnovnih šol. Analizirali smo področja komunikacije med šolo in domom, vpliv staršev na odločitve šole in vključevanje staršev v različne šolske dejavnosti. Hkrati smo proučili tudi oblikovanje sodelovanja med učitelji, učenci in njihovimi starši v okviru programa »Branje in pogovor« (»Reading and Conversation«). Ugotovitve kažejo, da se učitelji tretjega in devetega razreda večinoma strinjajo glede pomembnosti vključevanja staršev in tako predstavljajo precej homogeno skupino. Učitelji tretjega razreda so bili bolj odprti glede dejanskega vključevanja staršev v pouk kot njihovi kolegi v devetem razredu, ki so glede tega previdnejši in bolj zaprti. V nasprotju z učitelji, ki predstavljajo precej ozko skupino strokovnjakov, se mnenja staršev veliko bolj razlikujejo med seboj. Glede na izobrazbo staršev se je dalo najbolj napovedati njihovo pripravljenost za vključevanje v delo in življenje šole, ki jo obiskujejo njihovi otroci. Razlike med mestnim in primestnim okoljem niso bile zaznane. Evalvacija enoletnega programa »Branje in pogovor« je pokazala dvig motivacije staršev za sodelovanje s šolo zaradi programskega pristopa k delu. Ugotovljen je bil tudi napredek v medsebojnih odnosih in dialogu.

Ključne besede: učitelji, starši, komunikacija med šolo in domom, osnovna šola

Introduction

The development of society in the recent decades has been fraught with rapid social, economic, and political change, which has created feelings of uncertainty in people's lives. People were not so exposed to such change in the past; they were able to adapt to the social circumstances that guided their lives without much risk. Today things have changed, and people have to take greater responsibility for their own lives. The same applies to the family and school. A child's experience of schooling often depends on the connections between his family and social environment, and on welfare in case of families at risk.

Numerous factors influence the development and quality of the relationship between family and school. The nature of cooperation depends on the local tradition and culture as well as socio-economic status of school district. In addition, what kind of school the child attends, his teachers' professional knowledge, school leadership, parent education and their aspirations and ambitions are all important. The quality of cooperation can differ from school to school. Research has shown that the inclusion of family contributes to better educational outcomes, improves attendance and increases students' responsibility for fulfilling school obligations (Catsambis & Beveridge, 2001; Simon, 2004). Catsambis and Beveridge (2001) confirmed that lower socio-economic status contributed to lower educational outcomes; however, the influence of socio-economic status was neutralised in high school with the inclusion of parents. If the communication between teachers and families is regular and transparent, students' attendance improves and chronic absence decreases over the years (Epstein et al., 2004; Sheldon & Epstein, 2002). A study of the influence of teaching strategies on student achievement produced similar findings. If teachers designed homework in such a way that they encouraged interactions of students with their parents, the number of students who had better results at mathematics increased. Systematic inclusion of families and local communities into the activities that were focused on student behaviour improved discipline (Sheldon & Epstein, 2002). Epstein (2001) suggests three key aspects of relationships between family and school. These are separated, shared and sequential responsibilities of schools and families. The first perspective assumes that the school and family fulfil their goals separate from each other. In contrast to this perspective is shared responsibility, which emphasises complementarity, cooperation, and communication between the institutions, asserting that the school and family share their responsibility for their children's socialisation, and education. Teachers and parents believe that they are more effective if they pursue those goals together. The third perspective emphasises the sequential responsibility of institutions, and exposes the importance of

early stages of childhood development for his later success in school. The author of this paper (Epstein, 2001, p. 28) developed a model of overlapping spheres of influence of family and school on students' learning and development, and on family and school effectiveness.

Although some authors consider school, family, and community partnerships an illusion (Jowett et al., 1991), family and community involvement in education has become essential for successful living together. This issue is related to the nature of successful communities and the nature of human achievement in general. 'Nobody educates others, and we do not educate ourselves. We educate each other in a community, in the living environment of this world' (Hopkins, 2007, p. 13). This is exactly what the school-family relationship is about. The English sociologist Furedi (2008) shares this opinion. He sees the school as a city in which people meet and communicate, and in which change can happen. It goes without saying that the ideas related to the question of culture have to be implemented in the spirit of respect for plurality. Consequently, schools and teachers need to pay more attention to the development of a culture of living together.

In Slovenia, we have evaluated and changed certain elements of education system in the previous decade; however, we do not have sufficient empirical evidence to make claims about the problems related to family and school cooperation. One of the key questions refers to the quality of partnership between these two institutions. If we want to determine the level of quality of school and family partnership, we need to define the criteria for quality appraisal by taking into account a sensitive combination of different factors. Total quality consists of objective and subjective qualities (Snoj & Mumel, 2001, p. 123). The former is based on certain standards, and the latter depends on the consumer's subjective perception of the quality of service. Because the quality of cooperation is always a subjectively expressed individual perception, determining the level of quality is extremely difficult and demanding. The quality of school and family cooperation is not simply reflected in objective reality but is also an expression of feelings. The feelings of teachers and parents reflect the emotional relationship between them and their construction of reality. The quality of their cooperation is therefore determined by the presence of mutual agreement and how much it is harmonised. The school's planning of guidelines for family and school cooperation is usually based on the assumption of a shared value system. However, if common values are not 'internalised', which means that parents and teachers do not consider them as part of their value system, the foundation for initial harmony is missing (compare Bučar, 2003). Without common agreement, it is virtually impossible to direct a system. The system lacking initial common agreement is always in crisis; it lacks the agreement about a desirable state that would make cooperation meaningful.

Purpose and Goals of the Study

The purpose of our study was to explore the approaches to establishing cooperation between lead teachers and parents of third and ninth grade primary students, and the quality of that cooperation. The study also sought to find differences and similarities in parent and teacher expectations within different areas of their cooperation. At the same time, we tried to determine if the teachers', parents' and students' collaboration in the 'Reading and Conversation' programme contributed to their better relationships and partnership. We set the following goals:

- To estimate the degree to which the expected cooperation and actual cooperation were in agreement between groups of parents and teachers of the third- and ninth-grade primary students;
- To enquire into the interconnectedness of latent dimensions of parents' cooperation with the school, such as their sex, education, participation in formal school events, and location of their home.
- To determine if the programme 'Reading and Conversation' improved the cooperation between school and family.

Methods

Data were obtained from a sample of 55 randomly selected primary schools in the 2006/2007 academic year, specifically from their 141 third- and ninth-grade lead teachers (78 third- grade lead teachers, and 63 ninth-grade lead teachers), and 810 randomly selected parents of the students from the selected schools (399 parents of the third-grade students and 411 parents of the ninth-grade students) who were included in the survey.

The survey was conducted in such a way that we visited each school in the sample, and distributed the questionnaires for the lead teachers and for the parents, together with instructions and a list of selected students to the third- and ninth-grade lead teachers from the sample. The lead teachers distributed the questionnaires for the parents to the students who then took them home to their parents. The lead teachers filled in the questionnaires during our visit and returned them personally to the visitors. For the lead teachers who were absent or for those that taught in dislocated units, as well as for the parents of the students of those teachers, a self-addressed stamped envelope was mailed to them together with the questionnaire.

A total of 368 questionnaires were returned from the parents of the 3rd and 9th grades (170 from the parents of the 3rd graders, and 198 from the parents of the 9th graders), and 134 questionnaires were returned from the lead teachers

(75 from the 3rd grade lead teachers, and 59 from the 9th grade lead teachers). The survey return rate was thus 45.5% from parents, and 95.0% from lead teachers.

Two separate questionnaires were used for the collection of survey data, one for the parents and one for the lead teachers. The questionnaires were designed so that the statements in basic sets were the same for parents and lead teachers. When designing the questionnaires, we partly used the existant instruments of different authors (Crozier, 2000; Kolar, 2005; Medveš et al., 2001; Sheldon & Epstein, 2002). The questionnaires included all the key areas of our research: school-to-home communications (using eight indicators and measuring how well the parents' were informed about the school and its operationⁱ), influence (using eleven indicators and measuring parent and teacher influence on schoolⁱⁱ), and involvement (defined with six indicators and measuring parent and teacher involvement in the learning processⁱⁱⁱ). In addition, we also conducted a focus interview with eight 9th grade teachers, included in the survey. We asked them to describe the constraints to their collaboration with parents.

Initially, basic descriptive statistics were calculated for all the variables used in the study using the standard procedures. Next, we compared the answers of both groups of teachers and both groups of parents, as well as those of parents and teachers. Chi-square and t-tests were used for determining the statistical significance of the differences. The effects of independent variables were ascertained by means of regression analysis. For basic sets of variables, the data structure was checked by means of the principal component method and factor analysis (maximum likelihood estimation and principal axis factoring). Teachers' statements from the interview that best define the research problem are included in the results.

For each area, we measured how important that area was for the interviewees (Importance) and what the actual situation in that particular area was (Actual). Because we measured 'the importance' of individual areas and 'the actual situation' for each area in different ways, we transformed the collected data to the same interval (from zero to one) in order to achieve a higher degree of comparability; in the case of 'importance', we transformed average values, which were calculated based on a five-level scale, from the interval one to five to the interval zero to one. In this way, we achieved comparability of the importance of the area with the average value of the actual situation for the area, which was originally calculated on the interval from zero to one due to input data (average value of activity performance for the area).

The programme 'Reading and Conversation', in which 11 fifth grade students, their parents, and their lead teacher participated, lasted for a year (Kolar & Kušar, 2009). Partner meetings occurred once a month. The meetings were

focused on reading books and discussing their content around the following topics: celebrations, diversity, tolerance, intergeneration contacts, and life messages. The students, parents, their lead teacher and the librarian selected the books and prepared the programme (action plan), which also included the motivational strategies for collaboration of all participants in the project. The programme evaluation was based on the methodology of action research and qualitative analysis.

Results

Agreement between Groups of Parents and Lead Teachers

Parents and lead teachers of third- and ninth-grade primary students agreed that cooperation was beneficial for their children/students. They both considered that it was important for the students to gain good education in school. Parents did not perceive cooperation with school as a burden. They both agreed that school-to-home communications were the key to good cooperation (Table 1). Table 1 contains average values, calculated based on the transformed (standardised) scales. In the case of importance, value 0 is not important, and value 1 is very important. In the case of actual condition, value 0 means not true at all, and value 1 means absolutely true.

Table 1: Comparison of Expected Importance and Actual Situation (parents, lead teachers)

Population	Importance			Actual		
	School-home communications	Influence	Involvement	School-home communications	Influence	Involvement
Parents (3 rd grade)	0.858	0.636	0.507	0.693	0.393	0.405
Lead teachers (3 rd grade)	0.873	0.626	0.652	0.920	0.584	0.772
Parents (9 th grade)	0.827	0.653	0.489	0.687	0.340	0.337
Lead teachers (9 th grade)	0.870	0.658	0.596	0.923	0.646	0.661
Differences between Parents and Lead teachers in 3 rd grade; t (sig.)	-1.029 (0.305)	0.476 (0.634)	-5.910 (0.000)	-8.432 (0.000)	-5.377 (0.000)	-9.683 (0.000)
Differences between Parents and Lead teachers in 9 th grade; t (sig.)	-2.321 (0.021)	-0.254 (0.800)	-4.105 (0.000)	-8.793 (0.000)	-10.010 (0.000)	-8.221 (0.000)

Individual indicators used to measure this area showed that parents and third-grade lead teachers rated especially highly the importance of mutual communication and conversation about their children's progress in school, their reaching or not reaching the expected outcomes, and problems they may have in school. Parents differed in their claims about the information they received regarding the areas in which their children were either meeting or exceeding the expectations. The parents of third-grade students differed from the parents of ninth-grade students in their views of the importance of receiving information about their rights, and about changes in school work planned by school. The parents of younger children provided more positive rates in all their responses.

Both groups of parents and lead teachers agreed that school-to-home communications were appropriate. Greater discrepancies occurred in their responses with regard to the form of communication, such as the school's web page, brochures, e-mail, and lead teacher's home visit. There were also discrepancies between the third- and ninth-grade parents and lead teachers in their actual perceptions of school-to-home communication (Table 1). The discrepancies are statistically significant in most of individual indicators used for measuring the actual degree of communication. The third-grade teachers were much more optimistic about the provision of information to parents regarding the areas in which their children were either meeting or exceeding the expectations. The same applied to the school rules and regulations that the parents needed to be acquainted with. There was a great discrepancy between both groups in actual provision of information to the parents about the possibilities of exercising their own and their children's rights. The third-grade parents were much more critical in comparison to the third-grade lead teachers: 36% of the parents claimed that they never received any information on the subject. The third-grade parents expressed similar criticism with regard to the planned changes of school work and their involvement in school activities. Statistically significant discrepancies occurred in how the ninth-grade lead teachers and parents perceived the actual communication in almost all the indicators. The parents were again much more critical than the lead teachers. The majority of the parents claimed that the lead teachers did not provide them with key information about their children's success in school.

A relatively high level of agreement occurred with regard to the importance that the third- and ninth-grade parents and lead teachers assigned to parental influence on school work (Table 1). Although both groups were fairly in agreement about parental influence on school work, the actual situation was quite different. The lead teachers maintained that parents actually influenced the work of school; 95% of the third-grade lead teachers, and 94% of the

ninth-grade lead teachers agreed that they always consulted parents about the decisions that influenced student success in school.

The only statistically significant difference occurred in the statement about the school's consideration of parents' opinion about the broadening of the programmes; the third-grade lead teachers rated it much lower. Although the third-grade lead teachers maintained that parents could always express their opinion, the majority of parents did not agree with them. The statements about parent influence on the rules of student conduct in school and classroom also revealed an interesting situation. More than 45% of the lead teachers in our study claimed that parents could not exert any influence; 60% of the parents of both grades agreed with that claim, and 23% said that they did not know. The parents were therefore not only critical, but also not informed. The ninth-grade lead teachers and parents also significantly differed in their opinion in most of the indicators that define the possibility of their influence on school work. The opinions of both groups were rather polarised, with the parents being much more critical. Greater discrepancy occurred in the statement that the school asks parents for their opinion with regard to the activities for which they have to contribute financially; 62% of the parents stated that they could not influence the selection of additional and above-standard school services, and 59% of the parents stated that they had no influence on defining the rules of student conduct. It is interesting that 36% of the lead teachers agreed with them.

Parents and teachers of the third- and ninth-grade students considered parent involvement in school work important, and they both verbally supported it: 76% of the third-grade lead teachers emphasised that parents could observe instruction, and only 50% of the ninth-grade lead teachers expressed the same opinion. Both groups agreed that parental involvement in various school activities was important. They also considered that it was important that the school invited parents to various formal or informal meetings.

In spite of the general support to parent involvement in various school activities, 80% of the parents of the third graders in our study had never visited classrooms to observe their children at work, and the situation was similar with the ninth-grade parents. There were significant differences between the two groups of parents in their involvement in their children's extracurricular activities, with the parents of younger students being more involved. The actual situation regarding parent involvement shows that more than 50% of parents from both groups cannot observe or assist teachers in the classroom, and more than 30% of parents from both groups do not know if they are allowed to be involved. The statement that parents can be involved in various school activities is barely statistically significant. The percentage is higher for the third-grade

parents, but almost 50% of the ninth-grade parents stated that they did not have that opportunity. Nevertheless, the parents were invited to attend formal and informal meetings organised by the school. The data about parents' willingness to be involved in and contribute to the school work is interesting. Especially the ninth-grade parents rated moderately high their readiness to participate in the school councils. Both groups of parents expressed their readiness to be involved in school projects.

Teachers' statements from the interviews complement the empirical data, and provide additional information on the reasons why teachers formally support parent cooperation but are against it in reality:

- Cooperation with parents is important but the question is what kind of cooperation. It bothers me that some parents don't seem to be interested in their children's success in school. Sometimes their lack of criticism with regard to their children's achievement is problematic. Their expectations are often unrealistic.
- I like to collaborate with my students' parents. I think it's good that we talk and they tell me what their child is like at home and outside school. But I don't appreciate their interference with my work in the classroom. I'm frustrated when they let me know that they know as much about teaching as I do.
- That's what I think about collaboration with parents. They have enough opportunity for expressing their opinion at parent teacher meetings and at parent council meetings. But as far as their children's learning outcomes are concerned, they should do their work at home, and I'll do mine at school.

The above teachers' statements indicate that establishing partnership with parents is not without problems, the main being their perception of the cooperation with parents as that between professionals and laymen.

The Influence of Independent Circumstances on Assigning the Importance to School-to-Home Cooperation

Common variables determining the quality of school-to-home cooperation, especially in primary school, are the sex of the parent, parental education, the frequency of parents' attendance of formal school events, and the location of their home. Each of these variables undoubtedly contributes to the quality of parental cooperation with lead teachers and with schools. Taking into account the structure of the approaches to parent cooperation with school, and the quality of that cooperation that we had determined, we used regression analysis to

investigate the effect of parents' sex, education, attendance of formal school events, and the location of their home, on their expectations for their cooperation with school; therefore, the effect of these variables on the importance of school-to-home communication, parental influence on school work, and the inclusion of parents in school activities.

The results show a connection between the approaches to parent and school cooperation in some of the independent variables (Table 2). In the table, standardised coefficients of the estimated regression model (Beta) are presented, and the statistical significance of the effect (sig.).

Table 2: The Influence of Sex, Education, and Location - Regression Analysis (parents)

Independent Variables	Dependent Variables		
	School-home communications (sig.)	Influence (sig.)	Involvement (sig.)
Sex	0.077 (0.153)	0.048 (0.398)	0.128 (0.018)
Education	0.016 (0.767)	0.160 (0.005)	0.149 (0.006)
Parent Attendance	0.129 (0.017)	0.054 (0.338)	0.143 (0.008)
Location	0.066 (0.224)	0.041 (0.471)	-0.062 (0.251)

In the area of school-to-home communications, the regression model fits the data well, although only 2% of the variability of dependent variable can be explained. Only parents' attendance of formal school events has a statistically significant effect on the importance of school-to-home communication, meaning that the parents who more often attend formal school events (Beta = 0.129) rate the importance of home-to-school communications higher.

The regression model also fits the data well in the area of influence, but (similarly to school-to-home communications) only 2.4% of the variability of dependent variable can be explained. In the case of influence, only parental education has a statistically significant influence on the importance of parent influence on school work, meaning that parents with higher education (Beta = 0.160) attribute more importance to parental influence on school work.

In the area of parental involvement in school work, 5% of the variability of the dependent variable can be explained using the regression model. All dependent variables have a statistically significant influence on the importance of parent involvement except for 'location'. Parent involvement in school work is rated higher by mothers (Beta = 0.128), parents with higher education (Beta = 0.149), and parents who more frequently attend formal school events (Beta = 0.143).

Evaluation Results of the Programme 'Reading and Conversation'

The data gathered from parents prior to the start of the 'Reading and Conversation' programme indicated that they mainly had positive experience with the family-school cooperation. Their answers indicating their positive experience can be summarised into the following categories: communication (relationships), advice, teacher activity, successful organisation, innovation, collaboration with school counsellor. The common categories of negative answers were: local community, grading, school leadership, relationships. Their most negative experience is connected with the school's collaboration with the local community, and a lukewarm attitude toward parent initiative on the part of the school administration.

The data gathered during the program were defined after coding as: relaxed atmosphere, teacher presence, opportunities for expressing different opinion, suitable content, getting to know each other, randomly selected groups, inclusion of all participants in the activities, collaboration, and surprise. The parents and students used the following expressions when talking about how they felt: nice, O.K., good, fun, tense, relaxed, excellent, super, nothing bothered us. 'Everything was O.K.' was a frequent note. Parental collaboration, their inclusion and attitude changed during the meetings, which can be inferred from authentic transcripts.

The findings indicate that the parents' attitude toward children and teachers changed. While at the beginning of the project, 45% of parents described negative experience in their cooperation with school; at the end of the project no one described any negative experience. The analysis showed a positive change in parent opinion in all areas. Here are some of their statements:

- I enjoyed the cooperation.
- I acquired a lot of new knowledge.
- I spent more time with my child.
- My cooperation benefits my child.
- I came to realise new things about my child.
- It's important for me to know that my child works with me in the same group.
- The meetings encouraged conversations with my child about other topic as well.
- My child tells me more about what happens in school now.

The parents therefore realised that they enjoyed their cooperation with school, that it helped them acquire new knowledge, and that they could get to know their children better. The majority of parents maintained that their

cooperation in the program encouraged them to spend more time with their children, to get to know them better and talk with them more often.

Discussion

Why do teachers and parents represent two different worlds? How can differences in their views on the process of cooperation be explained? Why do they both agree that cooperation is important, but in practice their views differ? There are a number of reasons for this, with wider social reasons and arguments being the most decisive. As a professional group, teachers perform their work routinely within a defined framework, and cooperation with parents is part of their work. They are a rather homogenous group in their claim that their cooperation with parents is as it should be. They have high opinion about themselves and their work. As a relatively well-educated and professionally homogenous group, teachers have not been exposed to numerous risks as other professional groups have. For example, the risk that they may lose their job is lower, and it is harder to measure the effectiveness of their work. Consequently, they have not developed an awareness of the public character of their work that also includes their cooperation with parents. That is why they view this cooperation predominantly as an obligation that has to be performed, rather than as a partnership that needs to be developed for the sake of better quality of education that they provide for their students.

In contrast to teachers' views, which are rather homogeneous, parents' views are much more diverse. Parents are from different social groups, have different experience and expectations, and the success of their children in school varies. This is especially true of ninth-grade parents because ninth-grade-students' grades in certain subjects strongly determine the possibility of their enrolment in a secondary school of their choice, thus affecting their acquisition of good education and determining their future career path. Because they consider cooperation with school important, they have high expectations and are highly critical of school-to-home communications. Parental involvement in education is also starting to gain importance in Slovenia, (compare Renner, 2000, p. 109). In our survey, we included a parent who was more involved in their child's school work, and we found that mothers especially played a key role in providing support to their children (83% of surveyed parents were mothers). They were also the ones who expressed the need for better cooperation with their children's school.

Our findings suggest that parents' interest in their child's school success and development is the basis for their cooperation with school. Other authors have come to similar conclusions (Jowett et al., 1991; Resman, 1992). Because

ninth-grade parents are especially interested in their children's school work, they are more critical of school-to-home communications, stating that schools do not inform parents well enough. The schools in our study used parent meetings (to provide information about the whole grade development to a group of parents) as the most typical form of school-to-home communication, followed by parent-teacher conferences (to provide information about an individual student to the parent). Other countries, e.g. Denmark, France, Germany, and Spain, show their preference for the same forms of communication (OECD, 1997). Parents obviously value individual and less-formal conversations with their child's lead teacher. Although parent-teacher conferences are a formal meeting, they offer an opportunity for informal parent conversation with their child's lead teacher about everything related to their child's school life (compare Marinšek, 2003; Resman, 1992; Wolfendale, 1989). Other forms of communication used in schools are various written instructions, e-mail notes, and phone calls. Although teachers and parents support teacher home visits as a rule, neither are really enthusiastic about them, with the parents and teachers of younger children being a bit more open to this form of school-to-home communication. The situation is similar in other countries (compare Kelley-Laine, 1998).

Frequent communication between lead teachers and parents is the key to the development of a trusting and responsible relationship between them. Sending messages and memos to parents from school is not enough. A teacher's visit at home is an opportunity for the development of a closer relationship, and for discussing children's progress at school in a more relaxed and informal way. However, teachers seem to have difficulties going beyond the traditional school framework, and parents still have negative feelings from the times of their own schooling, which is why they both feel reluctant about teachers' visits at home. Although teachers do occasionally visit a family, there is still much unused potential here. Lead teachers' visits at home, as a more frequent form of communication, could contribute to the development of honest communication between teachers and parents about their children and their school work.

The situation is similar with regard to parent involvement at the school. Parents' presence in the classroom is in itself somewhat controversial. There are arguments in favour of their presence, and there are others that are against it. Parents' presence in the classroom can take many forms. They can, for example, make a presentation to the class and thus make the instruction more interesting, they can assist an overworked teacher or recognise opportunities or embarrassing situations in the classroom. Their presence is also an opportunity for them to familiarise themselves with teachers' approaches to instruction, and to monitor their child's development (Resman, 1994; Vincent, 1996). Teachers, however, often perceive the presence of their students' parents as an additional pressure,

increased responsibility, and more time for planning their instruction. They often doubt that parents have good intentions when they decide to be present during the instruction, and have general doubts about the presence of non-professionals in their classroom (Atkin et al., 1998; Mayall, 1990; Resman, 1994). Teachers maintain that teaching is an autonomous profession, and the majority of them are not enthusiastic about having parents in the classroom. They remain doubtful in spite of research findings that have confirmed the beneficial effects of parents' assistance to teachers in the classroom on both, teachers and students, which is especially true for younger students (OECD, 1997).

This problem should not be underestimated. New social conditions require the development of social skills that enable rapid adaptability to change, and consequently require from schools and teachers to go beyond their traditional framework and open up to the community so as to establish productive collaboration with its environment. It would therefore be advisable for schools and teachers to increase parent involvement and occasionally welcome parents' assistance in the classroom, because parents could add new and interesting perspectives to the topics covered in instruction. Many parents would probably be more than willing to work with teachers to improve instruction and connect it with real life, and would thus contribute to the development of a better classroom climate. However, this form of parent involvement does not seem to be taking hold in schools. It seems as if teachers consciously safeguard their position and hold parents at a safe distance from school by not including them in a 'critical' education group (compare Cankar & Kolar, 2006; Vidmar, 2001; Vincent, 1996).

From the reasons stated above, teachers generally avoid inviting parents into the classroom. They do allow them to participate in less important activities, though, such as different administrative technical chores, and adult supervision in field trips (Mayall, 1990). Other researchers provide similar findings. Heywood-Everett (1999), for example, has found that teachers invite parents to be involved as partners in the activities that have no influence on school's effectiveness or its educational process. Although parents are invited to express their opinion about school work, they do not have any real influence on the development of school programs and policies. The situation is similar in the area of parent involvement in school governing bodies. Although the ninth-grade parents in particular rated their readiness to participate in school councils moderately high, those that become involved usually remain silent at the meetings because of their fear that they lack professional knowledge for valuable contribution (Cullingford, 1985; Deem et al., 1995). In addition, members of the school council often perceive themselves as an integral part of the decision-making body, rather than as the representatives of certain interest groups. This is especially true of the

parents (Deem et al., 1995). The school council is often involved in promoting general school interests defined by the principal (Radnor & Ball, 1996). A closer look at how parent and school councils are formed reveals that those parents that support the school and teachers are often identified as the potential school council members, and are then persuaded to accept their membership (Deem et al., 1995). We can probably conclude that the same is true for Slovenia. It is certainly true that our school councils rarely discuss topics related to the process of learning and teaching.

Over the years, teachers' cooperation with parents has increased, and parents have been regularly taking part in formal meetings organised by schools. Schools actively support and announce the importance of parent involvement and participation. However, it seems that teachers are not overly enthusiastic about putting their claims into practice. They perceive parents' involvement as an attempt to establish cooperation between professionals and non-professionals (Resman, 1992; Vincent, 1996). While they formally support parents' involvement, they also provide a number of arguments for keeping parents in a subordinate position.

It is not surprising that parents with higher education are more aware of the importance of good education for their children, and that they consequently consider parent influence on school work and life important. They indicate this view by being more interested in how their children spend their time in school, by actively seeking cooperation with school, asking questions and giving suggestions. We can safely assume that the parents, usually mothers, who are most frequently in touch with school, have better communication skills. Our finding that mothers are more involved in their children's education has been confirmed by other researchers (e.g., Cankar & Kolar, 2006; Kolar, 2005; McNamara et al., 2000). This phenomenon has not received enough attention.

Whether parents live in suburban or urban environment does not bear any significance. This is not surprising, although it is important to take the establishment of cultural and evaluative relativism characteristic of our times into account when analysing social phenomena, and home location is no exception. Some authors (compare Gordon, 1985) do not consider individual social economic status when analysing the communication between teachers and parents, but rather include the quality of relationships stating that it does not depend on where people come from. Parents consider their involvement and participation in their children's school activities important, regardless of the environment in which they live. They all rate the importance of their children's education highly.

The analysis of the data gathered at the end of one-year cooperation with parents in the programme 'Reading and Conversation' shows that parent

participation has a positive effect on their cooperation with school. Every participant evaluated their experience in the programme in a positive way. They especially valued trust, honesty, spontaneity and mutual understanding. It is important to note that the approach that was used in the programme, enabled parents to spend more time with their child in a group with other parents and children, and helped them develop new insights, as well as improve communication with their children at home.

Conclusion

The purpose of our study was to explore the approaches to establishing cooperation between lead teachers and parents of third- and ninth-grade primary school students, and the quality of that cooperation. The study also sought to find differences and similarities in parent and teacher expectations within different areas of their cooperation. The study focused on school-to-home communications, parent influence on school decisions, and parent involvement in different school activities.

Our findings indicate that the third- and ninth-grade teachers in our study represent a fairly homogenous group, and that their statements about the importance of the cooperation between school and home are mostly in agreement. The third-grade lead teachers are more open about actual involvement of parents in instruction than their ninth-grade colleagues who are more cautious and restrained. Both groups expressed similar opinion about the importance of parent cooperation in various school activities. The outcomes were similar for lead teachers and parents of both groups. They showed a high degree of agreement in their support to cooperation between teachers and parents. However, parents were a much more critical group in their perception of actual situation than lead teachers.

In contrast to the lead teachers, who represented a fairly narrow professional group, parents' views were much more dispersed. The lead teachers in our study felt uneasy in their communication with parents. Prominent reasons for that were parents' questions about their children's grades on one hand, and teachers' helplessness related to the limitation of the institutional framework of the school system on the other.

Parental education was the best predictor of their readiness to get involved in the life and work of their children's school. This was especially the case with mothers who took part in formal school conferences more often than fathers. Whether the area in which the families lived was urban or suburban made no difference. All the parents in our study rated the importance of their

children's education highly.

We conclude that the parents and teachers in our study are in agreement about the importance of cooperation between family and school. Both groups have similar expectations. Although the lead teachers consider school-to-home communication and parent involvement more important than the parents, there is not much discrepancy in their claims. However, the parents and teachers differ in their perceptions of the actual situation. The teachers' views of their cooperation with parents are much more optimistic than the parents'. This is true for teachers and parents in general, and for the groups of the third- and ninth-grade teachers and parents.

When analysing the influence of parents' sex, education, attendance of formal school events, and the location of their home, we concluded that these variables did not have the same effect on how parents perceived their cooperation with school. Only parents' attendance of formal school events had a statistically significant effect on how the parents rated the importance of school-to-home communication, and only parental education had a statistically significant effect on how much importance they attributed to parent influence on school work. The parents' rating of the importance of parent involvement in school work was under the influence of their sex, education, and the frequency of their attendance of formal school events. Whether parents lived in suburban or urban environment did not bear any significance.

The findings related to the one-year programme 'Reading and Conversation', which was intended for the development of partnership between school and parents, confirmed that it was a useful way for motivating parents to cooperate with school, strengthening relationships among all three parties, and developing a high level of dialogue.

Notes

- i The indicators used for parents/lead teachers: The lead teacher informs me about the areas in which my child is above average./As a lead teacher, I inform the parents about the areas in which their child is above average; The lead teacher informs me about the areas in which my child is below average./As a lead teacher, I inform the parents about the areas in which their child is below average; The lead teacher informs me about the problems my child experiences in school./As a lead teacher, I inform the parents about the problems their child experiences in school; The school informs me about the rules and regulations I have to be familiar with as a parent./The school informs parents about the rules and regulations they have to be familiar with; The school informs me about the ways in which I can enforce my own and my child's rights./The school informs the parents about the ways in which they can enforce their own and their child's rights;

The school informs me about the programme of additional and above standard activities./The school informs the parents about the programme of additional and above standard activities; The school informs me about any planned changes in future operation./The school informs parents about any planned changes in future operation; The school informs me about how I can participate in their activities./The school informs parents about how they can participate in their activities.

- ii The indicators used for parents/lead teachers: The lead teacher includes me in the decisions that can affect my child's success./As a lead teacher, I include parents in the decisions that can affect their child's success; The school takes my suggestions into consideration in designing their extended programme (extra-curricular activities, camps, ...)/We take into consideration parent suggestions in designing our extended programmes (extra-curricular activities, camps, ...); The school seeks my advice when planning the activities that require my financial contribution./ The school seeks parent advice when planning the activities that require their financial contribution; The school asks for my written permission for the activities that require my financial contribution./The school asks for parent written permission for the activities that require their financial contribution; My suggestions and opinion are taken into consideration by a suitable school body./Parent suggestions and opinion are taken into consideration by a suitable school body; I can influence the selection of additional and above standard school activities./Parents can influence the selection of additional and above standard school activities; I can always express my opinion to the school./Parents can always express their opinion to the school; I can influence rules about behaviour in school./Parents can influence rules about behaviour in school; I can influence rules about behaviour in the classroom./Parents can influence rules about behaviour in the classroom; I can influence the selection of textbooks and other didactic material in individual subjects./ Parents can influence the selection of textbooks and other didactic material in individual subjects; I can participate in the decisions that affect my child (selection of extra curricular activities, child participation in school events, ...)/Parents can participate in the decisions that affect their child (selection of extra curricular activities, child participation in school events, ...).
- iii The indicators used for parents/lead teachers: I can be present at instruction. /Parents can be present at instruction; I can participate in instruction. /Parents can participate in instruction; I can be present at various school activities (extra curricular activities, camps, field trips, ...). /Parents can participate at various school activities (extra-curricular activities, camps, field trips, ...). I can participate in various school activities (extra-curricular activities, camps, field trips, ...). /Parents can participate in various school activities (extra-curricular activities, camps, field trips, ...). I get invitations to formal meetings in school./ Parents get invitations to formal meetings in school; I get invitations to informal meetings in school./ Parents get invitations to informal meetings in school.

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The Management of Parental Involvement in Multicultural Schools in South Africa: A Case Study

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∞ The aim of this study was to investigate the management of parental involvement in three multicultural schools in the Umlazi District in Durban, South Africa. A literature survey resulting in a theoretical framework on parental involvement in schools, multicultural schools, and the managing of parental involvement in schools has been done. The contextual background of schools in contemporary South Africa is depicted. A qualitative research design has been used. Focus group discussions have been conducted, with a total of thirty-three principals, teachers and parents. It has found that there is a low level of meaningful contact between school and parents. Apathy exists on the side of parents, low expectations on the side of principals and teachers, and an organisational structure facilitating parent-school interaction is lacking. In managing parental involvement in multicultural schools, school managers display a lack of intercultural sensitivity.

Keywords: Multicultural schools, Parent involvement, Qualitative research, School Management, South African case study

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Menedžment vključevanja staršev v multikulturne šole v Južnoafriški republiki: študija primera

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~ Namen študije je raziskati menedžment vključevanja staršev v tri multikulturne šole v okrožju Umlazi v mestu Durban v Južnoafriški republiki. Na osnovi pregleda literature so bila oblikovana teoretična izhodišča glede vključevanja staršev v šole, multikulturnih šol in menedžmenta vključevanja staršev v šole. Predstavljeno je kontekstualno ozadje šol v sodobni Južnoafriški republiki. Uporabljen je bil kvalitativni raziskovalni pristop. Izvedena je bila diskusija v fokusnih skupinah s skupno triintriidesetimi ravnatelji, učitelji in starši. Ugotovljena je bila nizka raven pomembnih stikov med šolo in starši. Na strani staršev gre za apatijo, na strani ravnateljev in učiteljev pa za nizka pričakovanja, manjka tudi organizacijska struktura, ki bi olajšala interakcijo med starši in šolo. Pri organiziranju vključevanja staršev v multikulturnih šolah vodstva šol kažejo na pomanjkanje medkulturne senzitivnosti.

Ključne besede: vključevanje staršev, šolski menedžment, multikulturne šole, kvalitativna raziskava, Južnoafriška republika – študija primera

Introduction

The benefits of parent-teacher co-operation are strongly supported by research, which has now taken place over a number of decades (cf. Henderson & Mapp 2002). As a result of this research, it is widely accepted that good family-school partnerships lead to improved academic student achievement, self-esteem, school attendance and social behaviour, a reduction in school drop-out rates, more positive parent-child communication; and improved school programmes and school climate (Banks & Banks, 1997, p. 409; Chavkin, 1993, p. 276; Epstein, 1995a, p. 701; Hester, 1989, p. 23; Jones & Blendinger, 1994, p. 80; Lemmer, 2000, p. 61; Squelch & Lemmer, 1994, p. 13; Van Wyk & Lemmer, 2009, pp. 16–17). Furthermore, research shows that these benefits occur irrespective of the socio-economic class to which the family belongs (cf. Haberman 1992). Likewise, teachers who frequently involve families in their children's education rate single and married parents, and more and less educated parents, as equally helpful with their children at home when shown how to be so (Epstein & Sanders 2000, p. 289). Considering these benefits, family-school relationships assume special significance in a country such as South Africa, where (as is commonly the case in developing countries) large parts of the school system are dysfunctional (cf. Wolhuter, 2007, 2011). The aim of this article is to investigate the management of parental involvement in schools in one district in South Africa. Another dimension that has been added is that this has been done within diverse school communities as schools in South Africa have recently been desegregated: a radical reversal of the historical pattern of racially segregated schooling. The new socio-cultural dynamics and context, and the increasing importance of education in multicultural societies worldwide, give this study increased relevance.

This article commences with a literature survey and theoretical framework on multicultural education, parental involvement in schools, and the management of parental involvement in schools. The contextual background of schools in contemporary South Africa is then depicted. That is followed by an explanation of the research methodology and a presentation and discussion of the findings.

Literature survey

Parental involvement in education

The unique circumstances of each school determine how parental involvement should be planned at that school (Botha, 2000, p. 14). Ravn (2003,

p. 9) agrees, adding that cultural contexts of countries impact the interplay between parents and schools. This means that, in general, there is no 'one perfect' parental involvement program. In spite of this, Lemmer (2007, p. 278) stated that effective partnership models demonstrate certain common themes:

- Effective partnership models are school based and school driven;
- They conceptualise the family and community very broadly and flexibly;
- Effective partnership models allow for a continuum of involvement: from complex school-based activities (such as assisting in the classroom) to simpler home-based activities (such as monitoring children's homework activities or simply covering books available at the school library);
- Effective partnership models form part of a school improvement plan linked to specific outcomes.

In addition to these common themes, Williams and Chavkin (1989, pp. 18–20) stated that the following seven elements should be an integral part of parental involvement programs:

- written policies that specify areas for parent involvement;
- administrative support (resources such as a meeting venue and duplicating facilities, funds and personnel);
- continuous training of teachers and of parents in elements of parent involvement;
- partnership approaches in curricular, management and non-curricular matters, which help parents and teachers develop an attitude of ownership towards the school and take pride in it;
- two-way communication, i.e. regular communication between parents and school, e.g. newsletters, personal visits and telephone calls should exist;
- liaisons with the school with regard to parental involvement programs, helping participants to benefit from each others' experiences;
- continuous evaluation of the school's parent evaluation programme.

Van der Linde (1997, p. 40) adapted Bastiani's model (1996) to suit the South African school situation, and recommended it as an effective model for multicultural schools. Van der Linde specified the following nine areas for developing school-home links:

- communication of information;
- arrangements to discuss problems of individual children, involving parents in their children's learning, and helping with the running of the school;

- developing interest in, understanding of and support for the work of the school;
- use of parental skills, interests and experience;
- providing opportunities for parents' own education and development;
- enlisting parents' views in decision-making policy; active involvement with, and support for, family and community life.

One model that fulfils these criteria and that is used throughout the world was developed by Joyce Epstein. In the 1980s, Epstein developed a theoretical perspective called 'overlapping spheres of influence' that posited that the most effective families have overlapping shared goals and missions concerning children (Epstein, 1995b, p. 214). The model recognised that the three major contexts in which children learn and grow — the family, school and community — could be drawn together or pushed apart. Epstein (2001, pp. 408–410) described six types of family-school-community involvement falling within the areas of overlapping spheres.

Type 1 Epstein terms **Parenting**. The school helps families to support children as learners through workshops and meetings.

Type 2 is **Communicating** and includes printed and non-printed communications, taking into account parents who do not speak English (or whatever is the language of school administration) or who are illiterate. It should also be kept in mind that parents' language difficulties could result in them not understanding the participation opportunities given to them, which often leads to teachers labelling such parents as 'uninterested' (Van Wyk, 2010, p. 217). Possible means of communicating with parents include letters, written reports/profiles, parent evenings and home visitation.

Type 3 **Volunteering**, refers to anyone assisting with children's learning or development in any way, at any time and place. Flexible schedules should be made for volunteers, allowing those who work to participate.

Type 4 **Learning at home**, entails the provision of information and ideas to families about how to help students with homework and other curriculum-related activities, decisions and planning. Garca-Lubeck (as quoted by Chavkin, 1989, p. 282) emphasises that minority parents (i.e. those from a cultural background other than the culture upon which the school

organisation is based) should be assisted to understand the school calendar, school schedule, staff roles, attendance rules, course requirements, benefits and responsibilities of extracurricular activities, homework policy and requirements for holiday and closing of the school.

Type 5 **Decision-making** is the process of partnership, view-sharing and action towards shared views.

Type 6 **Collaborating with the community**, means identifying and integrating resources and co-services from the community to strengthen school programs and student learning and development.

Epstein (1995a, p. 707) asserted that the six types of involvement could guide the development of a balanced, comprehensive program of partnership, with potentially important results for students, parents and teachers.

Multicultural schools

Many countries in the world have become more heterogeneous as a result of various social, economic and political developments (Nkomo, Chisholm, & McKinney, 2004, p. 4). This is also reflected in schools where learners from different racial and ethnic backgrounds, speaking different languages now increasingly have to be accommodated (cf. Meier, Lemmer, & Van Wyk, 2006). These differences, coupled with a global focus on human rights and equal educational opportunities, mean that most schools are looking for ways of educating a diverse learner population equally or equitably. Mda (1999, p. 219) described the diversity of classrooms as socially, linguistically, and economically diverse. Moreover, learners in school classrooms have striking differences in family structures, lifestyle, health, and physical and mental abilities. This is the reality that many teachers in South Africa and elsewhere in the world have to face. One approach is for the school to adopt a multicultural approach to education.

Multicultural education is a multidimensional educational approach according equal recognition to all cultural groups and providing all learners with a meaningful and relevant educational experience. The ideal of multiculturalism involves achieving a positive sense of self-worth in a person's own culture while not diminishing or derogating any other cultural forms. It involves pride in one's own culture along with tolerance, contact and sharing with the other: in other words, a thoroughly unprejudiced approach to people is needed (Sampson, 1999, p. 207). After decades of separation between racial and ethnic groups in South Africa, many see multicultural education as one of the ways

in which understanding and acceptance of all races and cultures in the country can be improved (Sleeter & Grant, 2007; p. 150). This is reinforced by the fact that multicultural education seeks to promote equal educational opportunities, the preservation of cultural identity, the value of human dignity and self-esteem, and the peaceful co-existence of diverse lifestyles (Castagno, 2009, p. 43; Squelch, 1996, p. 61). Embedded in multicultural education is a need for sound working relationships between families, schools and communities. In addition, the benefits of effective home-school relationships, as previously discussed, show that parent-teacher collaboration will maximise all learners' chances of progressing in school. Given the dissonance between the cultural background of minority parents and that of the school as organisation, effective parental involvement in a multicultural school is infinitely more complex than at a mono-cultural school.

Managing parental involvement

Parental involvement is regarded as an integral management area in school management. The challenge in achieving effective parental involvement lies with the principal whose responsibility it is to assure and facilitate the extent of parental involvement (Pearson, 1990, p. 15). This is important as research has shown that the policy and practice of parental involvement as determined by school management is of greater importance than family background variables, such as race, ethnicity, socioeconomic level or marital status in determining the extent of parental involvement in children's education (Epstein & Sanders, 2000, p. 289).

South African context

In 2007, the population of South Africa was 47.9 million, of which 79.6% were Africans, 9.6% white, 8.9% people of mixed racial decent (Commonly referred to as 'Coloureds') and 2.5% Indian/Asian (OECD, 2008, pp. 28–29).

Socio-economic disparities are rife, and often relate to the racial divide within the country: Whites are the most affluent, Blacks the poorest, Indians and people of mixed race somewhere in between. For centuries, the education system of South Africa was characterised by rigid segregation. White schools were, measured by physical resources, teachers' qualifications, learner achievement levels and the like, orders of magnitude better than the Black schools (cf. Wolhuter, 1998). One of the causes of the socio-political turmoil in the years before 1994 was the unequal education system. After the dawn of the new political order in 1994, the education system was redesigned. One of the features of the post-1994 education has been desegregation. However, desegregation has

been very much a one-way process, i.e. of Black students moving from the Black schools to the better endowed Coloured (mixed race), Indian and White schools, students of mixed race to the Indian and White schools, and Indian students to the White schools, giving the historically Mixed race, Indian and White schools (which will be the focus of this article) a multicultural character. In many South African schools, assimilation remains the dominant model of integration, which means that the values, traditions and customs of the dominant group frame the social and cultural contexts of the school (Soudien, 2004, p. 93).

Research questions

In the light of the above, the following objectives for this study may be identified:

- Which factors impinge on effective involvement at multicultural South African schools?
- What role is management playing in parental involvement in multicultural South African schools?
- How can these findings contribute to the effective management of parental involvement in multicultural South African schools?

Research method

A qualitative research design was employed. Since in the 1970s, qualitative research methods have aroused the interest of educational researchers as a valid and useful method, thus resulting in a proliferation of qualitative studies of educational settings and problems (Lemmer, 1992, p. 292). Qualitative research methodology involves documenting real events, recording what people say (with words, gestures and tone) observing specific behaviours, or examining visual images (Neumann, 1999, p. 320). Qualitative research is research that elicits research participants' accounts of meanings, experiences or perceptions. Thus, qualitative research seeks to explore and explain phenomena from the perspectives of those who are studied (Smit, 2010, p. 35). It also produces descriptive data in the participants' own written or spoken words. It therefore involves identifying the participants' beliefs and values that underlie the phenomena (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992, p. 2; De Vos, 1998, p. 243; Lemmer, 1992, p. 293). This case study used a qualitative research design to attempt to understand how school managers, parents and school governing body members experience the management of parental involvement in multicultural schools in particular. As such, the study fulfils the criteria of case studies in that it attempts an in-depth

analysis and understanding of the research phenomena (Smit, 2010, p. 36).

The qualitative research method of focus groups was employed. Interviewing focus groups can be defined as a group discussion in which a small number of participants, typically six to twelve, talk about topics of special relevance to a study, under the guidance of a moderator (Hoberg, 1999, p. 136). According to Cohen and Manion (2000, p. 288), focus groups differ from group interviews, which are characterised by communication between interviewer and group members. In addition, focus groups rely on the interaction between group members. Schumacher and McMillan (1997, p. 453) maintain that by creating a social environment in which group members are stimulated by the perceptions and ideas of each other, the quality and richness of the data obtained would exceed that of data procured by mere interviewing.

Three focus groups involving three schools were constituted. The first focus group included three members of the management team (principal and two teachers of the school management team) of each school, i.e., nine members. The focus group discussion schedule for the school management teams appear in Appendix 1. The second focus group consisted of three member (parents) serving on the school governing body of each school, i.e. also nine members. The focus group discussion schedule for school governing body members appear in Appendix 2. The third focus group was a focus group with parents (who were not members of school governing bodies). Five parents from each of the three schools were involved, i.e. fifteen parents. The focus group discussion schedule for parents appears in Appendix 3. Thus, in total 33 participants were included in the research.

The socio-graphical profile of the focus group participants appear in Table 1.

Table 1: Socio-graphical profile of focus group participants

	Management teams from schools A, B & C	School governing bodies from schools A, B & C	Parents from schools A, B & C
White participants	2	1	1
Indian participants	7	7	8
People of mixed race	0	0	1
Black participants	0	1	5
Male	5	5	3
Female	4	4	12

Following the collection of data, the data was coded. This meant that every theme, concept, interpretation, typology and proposition identified was

coded according to the standard procedures of analysing data collected in qualitative research. The coded data was then clustered into categories, which can later be developed into themes (Smit, 2010, p. 37).

Conclusions

School settings

The three schools involved in the study are secondary schools⁴ in the Umlazi district, which is part of the greater Durban metropolis. It is a part of the country with a large concentration of Indians, although Blacks and Whites do also reside in the area. The language of learning and teaching in all three schools is English. Some characteristics of the three schools are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Characteristics of the three schools involved in the study

Characteristic	School A	School B	School C
Total number of students	1 179	1 136	1 075
Number of students per population group			
– Black	500	352	336
– Indian	662	774	270
– People of mixed race	17	10	42
– White	0	0	427
Number of students per home language *			
– English	684	787	728
– Afrikaans	1	1	20
– Isixhosa	13	11	17
– Siswati	3	2	1
– Isizulu	472	331	304
– Sesotho	5	4	4

* White students are from families where the home language is either Afrikaans or English. The same applies to students of mixed race. Indian students are all from homes with parents who are third generation (and further) South Africans. Hence the indigenous Indian languages (Tamil, Urdu, Telegu, Hindi, Gujarate, Pukhtu, etc.) have long since died out and been replaced by English as the home language. The home languages of Black students are Isizulu, Isixhosa, Sotho and Siswate.

4 Chlidren 13–17 years of age.

Perceptions on role of parents

Participants from school management teams and school governing body teams indicated that parents have financial obligations (buying school uniforms and stationery for their children, paying school fees). In addition, the participants felt that parents should also be committed to seeing to it that their children abide by the school's code of conduct, and support the school in its fundraising efforts. Regarding the multicultural nature of the schools in the study, a school governing body member stated that parental involvement should include '... representing and reflecting the socio-economic values of my community to ensure that the education and teaching is appropriate and relevant and that the management of the school is effective and sustainable'. However, some of the parents who were interviewed, particularly those from poor communities, displayed a very limited understanding of what parental involvement entails, beyond basic obligations such as paying school fees and buying books and uniforms. Indian parents were also reluctant to become involved due to work commitments. It could be argued that this lack of consensus on what roles parents should play excludes the possibility of parents and schools reaching shared goals on parent involvement.

Policy on parent involvement

At all three schools, there is a lack of a written formal policy on parent involvement. Moreover principals do not see any need for such a policy. One of the principals argued that the booklet *The Rights of Parents*, which is given to learners on admission to the school, is sufficient. A school governing body member did, however, acknowledge that if there were a policy on parent involvement, more parents would become involved and much more could be done in upgrading the school resulting in more learning taking place. Another school governing body member expressed the view that in order to raise the standard of education parents need to know about activities taking place outside the classroom situation and be able to render help where possible. Even in unwritten existing policies, no allowances are made for parents coming from different areas, socio-economic backgrounds or diverse cultural and language groupings. Of concern is the view of one principal that 'It is not the school management team's job to get parents involved, it is the state's job.' If this is the viewpoint of the principal it is unlikely that anyone else in the school will be supported in initiating parental involvement and drawing up a policy to guide home-school partnerships.

Communication between school and home

In all three schools, school meetings were held and participants gave views on the communication of parents with the school.

Parent meetings

Parent meetings seem to be the primary means of contact between parents and teachers at all three schools. Attendance by parents is, however, generally poor. A school manager expressed it as follows: 'You know, we get the parents of our bright learners more often coming to meetings. We don't want to see them, and we tell them this. We went to see parents of the learners who give us a hard time at school, but their parents don't come.' However, principals do not make any efforts to find out why these parents are not attending meetings and what can be done to better accommodate them. All meetings at all three schools are conducted in English. Judging by the responses of parents, it seems as if there are language problems that schools are not aware of. Moreover, responses from school management indicate that schools often label non-English speaking parents as 'uncooperative' and do not feel the need to provide translators during parent meetings. However, it needs to be noted that the schools have made an effort to hold parent meetings at times that suit the majority of parents.

Written communication

At all schools, letters are sent to parents in the form of newsletters, term-end letters to inform them of forthcoming meetings, and circulars. Managers reported that funds for all forms of written communication are limited. One of the parents also complained that letters are often ineffective as schools have to rely on learners delivering the letters. Letters are sent to parents in English by all three schools. As is the case with school meetings, the sole use of English in written communication is a problem, as is captured by the words of one of the parent participants: 'Sometimes I tell my child to read for me, I can't read English nice. I don't know if he reads the truth or what.'

Parent-school communication

Managers and principals were of the opinion that no problem exists as school principals have an open door policy and are quite accessible to parents. However, once more the question of language was raised by parents. One Black parent mentioned a problem when she telephoned the school: '... The man who answered, he not understand what I'm saying. He say, speak English, speak English.' All school governing body members of one of the schools expressed

the need for a Parent Support Committee in order to encourage parents of weak learners to communicate with the school regarding their children.

Parents as decision-makers

None of the school governing body members of any of the three schools reflect the racial composition of the schools – Black parents being grossly underrepresented. Since parents on the school governing bodies make decisions on behalf of the general parent body, it is necessary for them to possess certain skills and knowledge in order to have constructive input. This especially puts Black parents from poor and ill-educated backgrounds at a disadvantage. None of the school governing body members at School A have any training. One of them said: 'I have a Grade four education and I am willing to learn.' Unfortunately, none of the schools provide any training for school governors, once again arguing that it is 'the job of the state' to do so. Of the fifteen parents who were interviewed, only seven indicated that they knew who their school governing body members were.

Giving parents support

Many learners from the three schools in the study come from single-parent homes or live with their grandparents. Often, such learners are difficult to control and have many problems associated with poverty. It seems clear that many teachers are concerned about learners in these difficult economic times and in one case have started a feeding scheme paid for out of their own pockets. However, what seems to be lacking is the organised management of such initiatives. In this regard, School C has the advantage of having a social worker on their staff who can deal with some of the problems. However, it appears that parents also have problems that do not directly involve their children. For example, a school governing board member of School C remarked: 'Parents and staff often bring matters to me, for example, medical aid, getting a raise in income, school fees, uniform issues, et cetera. Such matters I take to the school governing body meetings.' School board governing bodies at Schools A and B indicated that parents have not approached them for assistance.

Using parent volunteers

All schools included in the study have used parent volunteers to some extent. For example, at School A the principal identified maintenance work, repairs

and the running of the tuck shop as work carried out by parent volunteers. Upon questioning parents on their involvement in school activities, parents indicated that they would like to help but are too involved with their own lives.

Accommodating cultural differences

All schools strongly emphasised that their school had no reason to believe that racism is a problem at their respective schools. The governing body at each school maintained that parents of all cultural groups were encouraged to participate in school activities. Yet the medium of communication at all schools is solely English; suggesting that school managers have not made a significant effort to overcome language barriers, as they have not recognised it as such.

Barriers to parental involvement

The following barriers to parental involvement were mentioned by school managers, members of school governing bodies and parents:

- Apathy. Many parents are apathetic and do not seem to feel a need to become involved in their children's education.
- Transport. Traveling distances to schools and the lack of transport, have proved to be a problem at all the schools under study.
- Financial problems of schools and families. Parents are expected to contribute to finance and fundraising. As a result, poor parents especially keep their distance as they feel that if they become too involved at the school, they could be asked for additional financial contributions.
- Working parents. Many parents are not involved in school activities due to work commitments.
- Low self-esteem of parents. Many parents feel they cannot communicate adequately with the educators due to language barriers and poor education.
- Lack of knowledge. Many parents are ignorant as many issues pertaining to parental involvement in schools.

Benefits of parental involvement

All participants agreed that there are advantages to be derived from active parental involvement in schools. The benefits mentioned by the participants include:

- developing a sense of ownership and pride in the school;

- morale building, which will have an uplifting effect upon the entire community;
- reduction in costs;
- improved learner behaviour;
- parent awareness of school matters;
- building a sense of community;
- improving academic achievement.

In spite of this awareness of the benefits associated with parent involvement, very little seems to have been done by the schools to encourage parent-school collaboration.

Discussion

The low level of meaningful contact of the schools with parents, especially Black parents, has led to some teachers and principals to conclude that such parents lack sufficient interest in their children's education and do not want to work with the schools. The viewpoint is manifested in interviews conducted in all three schools. Moreover, in all interviews it was stressed that such parents are particularly apathetic regarding issues related to the education of their children. These perceptions are not unique to South Africa, as international research indicates that teachers are less likely to know the parents of children who are culturally different from their own background and to label such parents as 'uninterested' or 'apathetic' (Epstein & Dauber, 1993, p. 289). In South Africa the situation is exacerbated by the fact that few teachers have been taught how to deal with diversity, both in and out of the classroom.

The research has also shown that school managers have low expectations of parents, particularly non-English speaking parents. They expect that certain groups of parents will not attend meetings and therefore do not cater for the needs of non-English speaking parents. The responses given by principals and teachers show that they possess limited understanding of the concept of parental involvement, and are therefore unable to establish a comprehensive parental involvement programme, whereby parents from the different cultural groups can participate. This is unfortunate as a well-designed comprehensive parental involvement programme can offer a variety of ways in which parents from all walks of life can become involved in the education of their children (Van Wyk, 2010, p. 217).

There is an extant lack of an organisational structure to deal with parent involvement. For example, none of the schools have a parent support team.

Similarly, there is an absence of a school policy on parent involvement, which international research has shown to be the most important determinant of effective home-school programmes (Epstein & Sanders, 2000, p. 289). School management also has the perception that parents' low socio-economic status has a detrimental effect on their involvement in school matters. In addition, schools in poorer communities tend to make more contact with parents regarding the problems their children are having at school, rather than making frequent contact with such parents about the positive accomplishments of their children (Van Wyk & Lemmer, 2009, p. 180).

Restricted opportunities for interaction between parents and schools exist, i.e. lack of time and a language barrier (in the case of parents with limited English speaking abilities) are *inter alia* to blame for this. Home-school communication is not always fruitful. One major reason for this is the lack of accommodation of parents who are not proficient in English. This is unfortunate as there is always a potential of problems arising between parents and educators in schools with large numbers of linguistically diverse learners, with differences in ethnicity, educational levels and social class.

Judging by the findings of this research it seems, as if the words of Chrispeels (1991, p. 371) need to be repeated, i.e. that when it comes to parent involvement, schools tend to direct their efforts at 'fixing parents rather than altering school structures and practices'. With this in mind, a few recommendations on ways of improving the management of parental involvement in multicultural schools are offered.

Recommendations

One of the first steps in creating home-school partnerships in multicultural schools is to recognise that the strength of the school lies in the differences families bring to the school (Van Wyk & Lemmer, 2009, p. 166). Schools therefore need to provide a warm welcome to all parents, which includes taking into account the different languages, cultures, traditions, and faiths of the parent body. This includes the acknowledgement that learners and parents of cultures other than the dominant culture of the school deserve respect. This should, *inter alia*, include strengthening communication strategies which take into account the linguistic differences of the community.

Related to this is the need for schools to acknowledge that *all* parents are interested in the welfare of their children. Where parents may be absent from most school activities, the school needs to determine the reason for this, instead of presuming that certain groups of parents do not have the interest of

their children at heart. Extensive research has shown this to be a fallacy and that most parents are interested in their children's schooling and want them to succeed (Epstein, 2001; Van Wyk & Lemmer, 2009).

Traditional views on parental involvement limit rather than increase the potential for educators and parents to work together. In other words, if there is a lack of opportunities for parents to become involved in the education of their children, few will make the effort to do so. However, Epstein et al. (1997) note that research illustrates that when parental involvement is viewed broadly, it is possible to involve virtually all parents in the education of their children, including parents of low income status and those who are illiterate or have limited proficiency in English. It is therefore recommended that schools do research on the institution of a *comprehensive* parental involvement programme. One example of such a programme is that of Epstein, which was discussed at the beginning of this article.

Research also shows that *planning* largely determines the potential and limitations of home-school relations (Michael, 2004, p. 35). Such planning includes the following sub-tasks: determining goals, policy making, problem solving and decision making (Van der Westhuizen, 1995, p. 410). At the heart of these activities lies the leadership role of the principal, as research clearly shows that principals are key agents in bringing about change in schools (Steyn, 2002, p. 115). This means that the principal together with his/her management team should determine the goals of parental involvement programmes, develop a written policy on parental involvement and institute a structure tasked with organising parental involvement in the school. One of the benefits of a written policy is that it ensures a 'shared understanding' of what form parental involvement should take. Obviously, parents should be included in determining such a policy.

Another way of ensuring that parental involvement is effectively managed is to establish a team specifically tasked with improving or establishing parental involvement at the school. Instituting an Action Team consisting of parents, teachers and learners (in secondary schools), as described by Epstein (1997), is recommended. In the case of multicultural schools, care must be taken that the Action Team represents the racial composition of the parent body. The principal and management team should also ensure that all parental involvement programmes are evaluated regularly and that steps suggested to address any problems are implemented.

Unfortunately, initial teacher training programmes seldom include the skills needed for working with parents. Such skills are even more important when the majority of parents in the school belong to a different language, ethnic

or cultural group than the teacher. This lack of knowledge makes it difficult for teachers and the management team to form effective partnerships with parents. It is therefore important for teachers to be trained to work with all kinds of parents, including those from diverse cultural backgrounds, in order to form a true partnership between the home and school which will ultimately benefit all students.

Conclusion

Advocates of multicultural education encourage schools to maintain a strong relationship with families and their communities (Sleeter & Grant, 2007, p. 446). This should include cooperation, communication and understanding between teachers and parents and the institution of an effective comprehensive parental involvement programme. This is important as the family is the most immediate and perhaps the most influential system affecting the child (Walsh & Williams, 1997, p. xi). However, ultimately the success of all parental involvement programmes within diverse school communities will depend on how well the programme matches up with the needs of all parents and caregivers. This means that if a school is sincere in providing education that will lead to the success of all learners, it would do well to involve all parents in this endeavour.

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Appendix 1.

The Focus Group Discussion Schedule: School Management Teams

1. Biographic information of members:
 - a) race group
 - b) age
 - c) gender
 - d) number of years in present position
 - e) language spoken
 - f) place of residence
2. The nature of parental involvement in the school
 - What are the basic obligations regarding the education of their children?
 - What are the basic obligations of the school in this regard?
 - In what ways are parents involved in the school?
 - Does the school have a written or verbal policy of involving parents?
 - What are the opinions of staff at this school about working closely with parents?
3. Communication with parents
 - In what way does the school communicate with parents?
 - Where and when are parent meetings held? How does this suit the needs of all parents?
 - What measures are in place to ensure effective communication with parents during parent evenings?
 - What language(s) are used in written communication with parents?
 - Under what circumstances are individual meetings with parents held?
 - What opportunities are provided for parents to communicate with the school?
 - Generally, who makes use of these opportunities?
4. Parent support of learning at home
 - What is the homework policy of the school?
 - In what way have parents been informed of this?
 - How have parents been assisted to support learners at home?

5. Parents as decision makers
 - In what way does the school governing body reflect the racial composition of the school?
 - How are parents included in decision-making at this school?
 - How do you ensure that the opinion of all racial groups is reflected in the decisions you take?
6. Parent volunteers
 - In what way are parent volunteers used in this school?
 - Which parents generally offer to work at the school? In what capacity?
 - How are volunteers invited?
7. Barriers to parent involvement
 - What factors act as barriers to effective parental involvement in the school?
 - In what ways has the school attempted to rectify the problem?
 - Do you feel that there are negative aspects to parent involvement?
8. Advantages and problems
 - What would you consider to be the advantages of parent involvement?
9. Staff training
 - Have teachers been trained to implement parental involvement in this school?
 - Have teachers been trained to work with children and parents from different social groups?

Appendix 2.

The Focus Group Discussion Schedule: School Governing Bodies

1. Biographic details of members:
 - a) race
 - b) age
 - c) gender
 - d) highest level of education
 - e) place of residence
 - f) language spoken
2. What does parental involvement mean to you?
3. As a parent representative, discuss some of your efforts to gain parent support.
4. You are involved in school governance, making decisions on behalf of parents. How equipped are you in terms of knowledge, skills and values?
5. Describe your experiences as a parent during school visits. What did you like? What did you not like? Why?
6. Which aspects/arenas of school matters do you control or manage? Assess the effectiveness of your involvement.
7. Problems experienced by parents: How often are you consulted as a school governing body member to help with issues? What are some of the issues brought to you by parents?
8. Are racial issues ever discussed at School Government Bodies meetings? Give examples.
9. How accessible are you to the general parent body? Do you particularly assist members of your own race group/cultural group? Have you assisted parents other than your own race group?
10. Reflect on your school situation. Discuss the school's attempts in meeting the needs of a multicultural community.
11. What are your feelings regarding the establishing of a Parent Support Committee? What are some of the aspects that such a committee could assist in?
12. What are some of the things you are happy/unhappy about with regard to parent involvement? How can it be improved?

Appendix 3.

The Focus Group Discussion Schedule: Parents

1. Biographic details of participants:
 - a) race
 - b) age
 - c) place of residence
 - d) language spoken
 - e) marital status
2. What are your feelings regarding parental involvement as a parent of a secondary school learner?
3. As a parent, what basic obligations do you meet?
4. What activities have you been involved in at your child's school?
5. Describe the school climate on your visits to school.
6. Assess the management of learner activities/programs involving parents.
7. Discuss problems experienced with the school.
8. Describe some efforts made by the school/SGB to get you involved.
9. When have you been asked to visit? How successful was the visit? Did you wait to be attended to? Where did you meet the person who asked to see you? Were you satisfied?
10. What can the school do to facilitate parental involvement and make it more effective?
11. What is the school presently doing to have parents involved?
12. Which areas or aspects of school matters would you like to be involved in?
13. Respect for parents by school staff members. Discuss.
14. Teacher attitudes towards parent involvement. Discuss your experiences.
15. School management of parent involvement. Discuss.
16. When have you communicated with the school other than the school contacting you?
17. Discuss your feelings with regard to a Parent Management Team.
18. Communication strategies with parents. Are they acceptable? Have you had any problems? Are they effective?
19. Frequency of newsletters? Assess content in terms of language used. Is it fully understood? What problems have you or other parents you

- know experienced regarding information sent to you?
20. With regard to activities at school, who generally attends? How many parents attend?
 21. How are parent complaints handled?
 22. What literature is given to parents other than term newsletters or learner reports?
 23. Volunteers. Are parents volunteering in any position at school? Have you considered? Discuss.
 24. A school's visiting policy. Does one exist? Is it acceptable/unacceptable? Discuss.
 25. Your relationship with the school's governing body. Do you know who the members are? How effective is the school governing body? Have you had any problems that you have taken to them? Discuss.
 26. Describe your relationship with the school principal. Have you had personal contact with him/her? What are your feelings regarding his/her leadership style? Are parents' input respected by the school principal and management team?
 27. What are your recommendations to improve parent involvement?

Biographical note

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Reconstructing Parents' Meetings in Primary Schools: The Teacher as Expert, the Parent as Advocate and the Pupil as Self-Advocate

GILLIAN INGLIS¹

∞ The efficacy of parents' meetings in primary schools in the UK is an area in need of research. This article uses an approach informed by grounded theory to explore the experiences and satisfaction of parents, teachers and pupils regarding bi-annual meetings to discuss pupil progress. A two-phase approach was utilised, with diary-interviews with parents and teachers and group pupil interviews in Phase 1, followed by a parents' questionnaire in Phase 2 derived from Phase 1 data. The findings from a doctoral study provide an overall more positive depiction of these meetings compared to existing research in the secondary sector. A model of the teacher as the expert and information-giver persists, but a consumerist ideology appears evident as parents seek to participate and advocate on behalf of their child. As parents become more proactive and teachers act to retain their professional authority, the interaction of the professional and advocate has excluded the perspective of the child. This leaves pupils in search of self-advocacy at meetings in which they are the object of discussion, but cannot be present. While pupils generally favour involvement, adults express a protectionist perspective on pupil exclusion with exceptional factors indicated as being the age of the child and the content of the meeting.

Keywords: Advocacy, Parents' meetings, Parents' evenings, Pupil participation

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Prenova sestankov s starši v osnovni šoli – učitelj kot strokovnjak, starši kot zagovorniki in učenec kot samozagovornik

GILLIAN INGLIS

Učinkovitost sestankov s starši v osnovnih šolah v Veliki Britaniji je treba raziskati. V prispevku so na osnovi utemeljene teorije proučevani izkušnje ter zadovoljstvo staršev, učiteljev in učencev s sestanki, ki glede učenčevega napredka potekajo dvakrat letno. Uporabljen je bil dvofazni pristop: v prvi fazi so bili analizirani dnevniški zapisi staršev in učiteljev ter skupinski intervjuji z učenci, v drugi fazi pa je bil na osnovi podatkov iz prve faze pripravljen vprašalnik za starše. Ugotovitve iz doktorske raziskave v splošnem prinašajo nekoliko bolj pozitivno podobo teh sestankov v primerjavi z obstoječimi raziskavami v sekundarnem šolstvu. Model učitelja kot strokovnjaka in posredovalca informacij ostaja, vendar je pri starših očitna porabniška ideologija, saj želijo sodelovati in zagovarjati svojega otroka. S tem ko postajajo starši bolj proaktivni, učitelji pa želijo obdržati svojo strokovno avtoriteto, se v interakciji med strokovnjakom in zagovornikom izgublja vidik otroka. Zato želijo učenci na sestankih, na katerih se razpravlja o njih, svoj vidik predstaviti s samozagovorništvom, a jim prisotnost na sestankih ni dovoljena. Večina učencev odobrava vključenost, odrasli pa jih v želji, da jih zaščitijo – zaradi dejavnikov, kot sta starost otroka in vsebina sestanka –, iz sestankov izključujejo.

Ključne besede: sestanek s starši, večeri za starše, zagovorništvo, participacija učenca

This article provides an overview of the findings of a study into the effectiveness of parents' meetings in Scottish primary schools. These are known elsewhere as 'parents' evenings' or 'parent-teacher conferences'. The study arose from the author's work with qualified primary teachers in which discussions indicated their overt and covert strategies to avoid face-to-face contact with parents. In these circumstances, the only guaranteed contact of this type will be through the contractual obligation of teachers to attend parents' meetings to discuss pupils' progress. This paper considers the roles that parents and teachers assume in these meetings and the extent to which this satisfies their expectations. Their working relationship is analysed using a model for parental involvement developed by Hornby (2000, 2011). The role of pupils in a traditional meeting model and the reactions of the participants to their potential participation are discussed.

The context of the study

The educational context

Scottish primary teachers are predominantly educated to teach children from 3 to 12 years of age, with the assumption that their skills will extend to include working with parents. With 'Reporting 5-14' (SOED, 1992), they received the first widespread advice on constructing parents' meetings; building on the written reporting process, it described two-way communication and joint decision making. The Parental Involvement Act (2006) was followed by further advice in the Parents as Partners Toolkit (SEED, 2006). Recently, Building the Curriculum 5 (2011) has extended the expectation to include pupils in the assessment and reporting process. In reality, the majority of primary schools maintain a traditional model of parents' meetings that excludes pupils.

The theoretical context

A literature search revealed that research into parents' meetings in the UK context has been predominantly about secondary schools (Clark & Power, 1998; Maclure & Walker, 1999; Power & Clark, 2000; Walker, 1998). These studies depict widespread dissatisfaction with the meetings' lack of dialogue and appear to be repetition of the written report (Clark & Power, 1998); these reports were difficult for parents to access for meaning as they were often 'vague and formulaic' (Power & Clark, 2000, p.36). Where parents tried to contribute information regarding their child, there was the perception that it was not treated credibly by teachers. The organisation of these meetings in an open setting provided little confidentiality for open dialogue (Walker, 1998).

Walker (1998) provided a picture of an event that is strongly managed by the teaching profession. Hornby (2011) outlined a variety of models of working with parents that describe different underlying 'assumptions, goals and strategies' (2000, p. 17). In the 'protective model' the parent and teacher assume separate roles that do not involve the parent in school education. The parent prepares the child to be sent to school and further involvement is not encouraged. Elsewhere, Crozier (1999) likened this to a 'division of labour' and suggested that it is more prevalent with working class families. Russell and Granville's (2005) study in Scotland found a perception in some parents that preparation of their child for school, such as providing food and clothing, is the extent of their involvement; that their supporting their child's education need not require further interaction with the school. Hornby states that the most prevalent approach in schools is the protective model. While the 'expert model' allows for contact, the teacher assumes expertise on the child's education. There is an assumption that parents are unable to express a credible viewpoint and have little capacity to support their child's education.

Two models engage parents as an educational resource. The 'transmission model' expects a parent to support aspects of their child's learning and to support the school's goals. A common example is asking parents to listen to reading homework. The parent is not expected to have a viewpoint and the professional communicates enough information on pedagogy in the expectation the parent will comply. However, in the 'curriculum-enrichment' model, there is an acknowledgement by the professional that the parent holds an expertise. An example may be asking a parent with a scientific background to lead classroom experiments. The parent is still engaged at the behest of the teacher.

In Hornby's 'partnership model', parents and teachers have the opportunity to equally bring their strengths to bear in supporting education. Hornby characterises this as two-way communication, mutual support, joint decision making and enhancement of learning. Across these models, we see an arc of power that shifts from the professionally dominated, towards some equity and on to a shift towards parent power in the 'consumer model'. The parent is regarded as a consumer of education as a service; in Scotland, it is the parent who is recognised in education as the 'client'. A series of education acts in the 1980 and 1990s, sought to further the philosophy that education should be open to market forces. Parents were encouraged to assume a proactive role that promoted professional accountability. Elsewhere, it has been debated as to whether this extended democracy or whether the influence of social capital meant that some parents were more able to engage with this philosophy and exercise its powers (Reay, 2005; Crozier, 2001).

To place the consumerist model in the context of parents' meetings, where parents have been repositioned as 'clients,' their role as expert regarding their own child is downplayed (Walker, 1998). As the consumerist paradigm has influenced education, the teaching profession has adopted an approach to parents' meetings that is akin to a 'public relations exercise' (Clark & Power, 1998, p. 48). Maclure and Walker's (1999) analysis of parents' meetings drew parallels to information management strategies in other professions. Thus, the existing research depicted a blend of consumerism and professionalism, so that Walker (1998) concluded these were 'an ambiguous mix of social event and business meeting' (p. 174).

During the mid-1990s, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child began to influence legislation through the Children (Scotland) Act (1995) and Standard in Scotland's Schools, etc. Act (2000). The influence upon pedagogy included the promotion of education for citizenship (McGettrick, 2001). In the context of parents' meetings, while Maclure and Walker (1999) reported examples in which secondary pupils were permitted to attend, many chose not to so as to avoid potentially stressful situations.

The methodological approach

As parents' meetings in the primary school emerged as an unexplored area, a research approach was adopted that was informed by grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Three schools in the central area of Scotland participated; these are referred to as Gateway, Hill and Burgh and represented areas that were average or below average in national levels of income. All necessary ethical procedures were followed to ensure that informed consent and confidentiality were achieved for participants.

While participation in meetings would appear to provide direct information, this was discounted as the relatively short duration afforded little time for participants to adjust to the researcher. Instead, a diary-interview approach was selected as 'an approximation to participant observation' (Burns, 2000, p. 439). In the first phase of the study, three teachers volunteered at each school and two parents' names were randomly selected from their class roll. In reality, nine teachers and 15 parents took part. They kept a semi-structured diary that captured their actions before, during and after the second parents' meeting in the year. Following content analysis, the diaries informed the semi-structured interview schedules. In addition, the researcher completed a broad observation of the meetings and undertook a group interview of a mixed-age sample of six pupils at each school.

A second phase of data collection followed in which a larger sample of parents at each school completed a questionnaire. There was an overall return rate of 92 questionnaires with a reasonably even split between schools. The questionnaire items were derived from the key findings of Phase 1. This data was analysed using SPSS. While this allowed the researcher to check the reliability and validity of Phase 1 findings, the overall data analysis was an iterative process, as one returned to Phase 1 data to illuminate questionnaire results.

Teacher as expert

A shared expectation of the teacher as expert

While probing parent, teacher and pupil expectations, it emerged across the participants that the key purpose of parents' meetings remained that they exist to allow the teacher to transmit information on the pupil. In Phase 1, this was the main answer from pupils and the purpose cited by most teachers. Phase 1 parents had a high expectation of this purpose and Phase 2 parents mainly agreed that the teacher should lead the conversation.

The findings of this study suggest that parents' meetings fall within Hornby's (2011) 'expert model' whereby the teacher is the expert who disseminates information to the parent. This article will aim to argue that parents' meetings shift across Hornby's model to show influences of the 'protective model' and the 'consumer model' as well. In contrast, Building the Curriculum 5 describes a 'partnership model', including two-way exchange of views on the child's progress. However, the study did not find consistent application of this model in the primary school context.

As the expert, the teacher assumes authority in setting the agenda and deciding the valid issues during the parents' meeting. Hornby (2011) identified professional attitudes as potential barriers in work with parents; the corresponding attitude that appears mainly to underpin the expert model is that 'parents are less able' (less able than teachers to observe, perceive and understand information about their child's learning), allowing the teacher to choose to dismiss parental information. Where parents are unwilling to accept the expert view, attitudes that may appear include 'parents as problems' (parents viewed as problematic where they do not agree with the professional's viewpoint) and 'parents as adversaries' (teachers see conflict as inherent to the relationship with parents).

As the main expectation that teachers will transmit information reinforces their expert role, teachers in Phase 1 were the main group that perceived a purpose of parents' meetings in seeking information about the pupils' social

context. The study suggests that implicit judgements are made about families within a relatively short space of time. These are unlikely to be made neutrally, thereby contributing towards teachers' attitudes to parents. One father was criticised by a Hill teacher for participating in the study as he was perceived as not showing interest due to previous non-attendance at meetings. The researcher's visit to the home found that the family had been under stress due to rehousing from another part of the UK, recent parental separation and unemployment. In the interview, the father spoke with enthusiasm about his children's education and revealed his personal disappointment at not completing university.

During the study, the judgements of some teachers reinforced the professional attitude of 'parents as causal' identified by Hornby (2011), that is, they have poor parenting skills. For example, one teacher linked a child's behaviour change to the father returning after a period of parental separation. Her views of the Hill parent were mixed:

And dad did appear... shall I put it this way, rather a rough, tough, scruff from the street but, when you actually spoke to him, he was giving you the most sensible feedback.

It would be misleading to conclude that the participants perceived in this study the sole purpose of parents' meetings being for teachers to transmit information. Parents having a goal of seeking their own information and the aim of achieving a consensus were strongly represented. Clearly, the traditional expectation that parents attend to hear about their child from the professional teacher persists, but it is being challenged by other expectations.

The teacher adopts the role of expert

In investigating what happened during the meeting, content analysis generated the category 'teachers' roles'. Across Phases 1 and 2 of the study, the dominant answer was that the teacher was an information-giver. Over two thirds of Phase 2 parents also indicated that the teacher gave advice during the meeting. Both of these roles support the teacher as expert. Teacher roles that place the professional in a less authoritarian role, such as listening to parents and answering their questions, were disproportionately represented in Phase 1. Phase 2 parents indicated greater use of these roles by teachers; while 97% said the teacher provided progress information, the next most popular role was answering specific parental questions (89%), again suggesting that traditional models persist at parents' meetings but that they are being currently tested. There was a significant difference between schools, with Burgh teachers tending to adopt a more limited range of behaviours and an expert model.

In the study, respondents rarely perceived a singular role for the participants. However, the balance and range of roles varied between parents' meetings. Parents criticised cases in which teachers assumed the singular role of expert as this led to a monologue, leading some parents to question the purpose of their attendance.

It's all black and white because the day's black and white, it's all kind of regimented — this is what we do — and it's as quickly as they can tell you exactly what's happening and out the door.

Elsewhere a parent suggested such teachers may as well write their opinions in a letter rather than have a meeting. Dyches, Carter and Prater (2012) advise strongly against teachers lecturing parents at meetings. Parents' responses on their satisfaction with parents' meetings proposes that this varies between individual teachers rather than being purely about models of practice at each site. Where parents cited more positive experiences, they had perceived that there was a balance and flow to the discussion.

Preparation and professionalism

The outcomes of the study indicate that the 'teacher as expert' view persists but this tradition is not uncontested. Many parents seek more proactive roles in the process and it is argued that the autonomy of the teaching profession has been eroded through a technical model of practice (Patrick, Forde, & McPhee, 2003). Hannay (1993) argued that teachers maintain greater autonomy in private practice that has not been open to policy or legislation: this is achieved through a bureaucratic approach to meetings including in their preparation. All the participating teachers recorded methods of preparation for parents' meetings, with the dominant approaches including the creation of paperwork (making notes) or the collation of information on pupils through existing paperwork (reports, assessment records and pupils' work). In practice, parents have limited access to the same paperwork, as children's work was not uniformly available and some schools had moved to a meeting prior to the written report. In the absence of a school report, parents relied on more informal methods, such as talking to the child. Where meetings gave parents an opportunity to view pupil work, a teacher argued that the amount of work to be digested in a limited time was a disadvantage to the parent.

While schools varied in the sharing of paperwork, it could be argued that the key point here is not whether parents have access to the same documentation, but how the school facilitates parents having meaningful time and an environment to assimilate its contents. It should be considered that, for some parents,

access and time may not be enough to provide an equitable preparation to the professional, as the literacy levels and degree of confidence in dealing with professional papers, such as assessment records, will vary.

The professionals in the study maintained the expert role through their preparation. Several teachers reported dissatisfaction when they had felt unprepared for parents' meetings. This experience was rarely extended to consider the parallel experience of the parent as few teachers in Phase 1 discussed the expectation that parents prepared for the meeting. Nearly three quarters of the Phase 2 parents recorded that the teacher used notes during the meeting. The argument is not that teachers should not use notes, but that schools should reflect on the power imbalance created in the expected preparation for teacher, parents and pupils.

Further, teachers need to reflect on how they make use of these notes during the meeting. The majority of Phase 1 and 2 parents recorded high rates of satisfaction with these meetings. However, Phase 1 parents could cite other experiences of parents' meetings that were less positive. Several parents criticised teachers giving a 'spiel' so that the notes served as a prepared speech. Since several teachers discussed the stress of early experiences of meeting parents, and eight out of nine teachers had no formal training in this area, it is understandable that they may deal with their discomfort by relying upon their preparation. The difficulty here lies in the potentially authoritarian image of the teacher that may be transmitted to the parent. Parents in Phase 1 expressed positive views where teachers' personalities and interpersonal qualities were communicated during the meeting, likening this to being 'with the people next door'. During Phase 1, two teachers identified a positive strategy in student teachers being encouraged to attend parents' meetings during school placement. This has the potential to overcome inexperienced teachers' reservations in meeting parents. How this strategy is supported in the school, including encouraging an open-minded approach to this practice and avoiding introducing teachers at a formative stage to negative professional attitudes towards parents, should be considered.

Overall, the findings support Walker's finding (1998) that teachers continue to hold the props of power at parents' meetings. Teachers need to consider how preparation can facilitate a dialogue rather than create a barrier to communication.

Organising to safeguard the role of the expert

The nature of the meeting organisation was set by each school. The data suggested various overt and covert ways that teachers organise to safeguard their roles as experts through elements such as setting, confidentiality, duration and timing in the school session.

Setting, confidentiality and access to pupil work: Burgh teachers set up tables in the school hall to meet parents due to perceived security risks. This was mentioned in Phase 1 by parents as reducing confidentiality at the meeting. Phase 2 parents were more critical about the setting in Gateway, where the school layout led some teachers to have parents viewing work in the classroom while they conducted meetings; the varying settings in a school possibly raised parental awareness that more confidential meetings were possible. Phase 2 parents perceived the greatest confidentiality at Hill school where individual meetings were held privately in classrooms with pupil work available outside. This affected what parents were prepared to discuss and how comfortable they felt viewing pupil work before and after the meeting while other parents were present. In this open setting, it is reasonable to conclude that parents are less likely to challenge the teacher as expert or for an honest dialogue.

Phase 2 parents in Burgh were significantly more dissatisfied as they did not get access to their children's work. Again, where parents have limited access to their child's work, they may feel less prepared to engage with the teacher's remarks during the meeting. At Burgh, some teachers used children's work as a part of a deficit model of meeting parents, that is, to show parents what pupils could not do. All the sites followed tradition in that, where children's work was available, it was displayed at the meeting. There is potential for schools to consider whether this gives meaningful access to a range of pupils' work in a confidential setting, where parents can prepare themselves to meet with the teacher. Some of the pupils in Phase 1 suggested a potential role for themselves in attending the meeting and showing the work to their parents: this has potentially positive implications for the development of ethos and citizenship in schools.

Time, timing and amount: The schools set the time of the meetings but Phase 1 data revealed that teachers decide the actual duration. Here the study suggested an 'unwritten contract' in which the parent and professional believed that the teacher would give as much time as was needed. This belief was founded on a deficit model of the purposes of parents' meetings, whereby the meetings served little purpose for the parents of children who were progressing well at school, but longer meetings were held when children had difficulties. A Gateway parent summed this up:

I feel happy when it's a short one and you know everything's fine. It's the long ones you have to worry about.

In some cases, meetings appeared to have lost purpose for able children; this needs to be reconsidered. Phase 2 parents generally did not feel rushed at the meetings. Where time was an issue, the study revealed it had an effect on

the parent- teacher dialogue including parents having difficulty in participating, teachers having limited opportunity to encourage parents' input and meetings having a very narrow content focus.

The timing of the meetings in the session was decided by the school. Phase 1 participants were positive when schools had decided to change from the end-of-year report-meeting pattern as it provided time for reinforcement, thus, giving the meeting a real purpose and avoiding repetition by the teacher of the content of the report. Some parents were wary of an early first parents' meeting as they doubted the teachers' knowledge of their child at that point. This presented a threat to the role of the teacher as expert and one parent reported disregarding any professional information at this point. Aspects of timing varied in parental satisfaction; however, parental views were not the driving force as schools set the timing of the meetings in the year.

Achieving satisfaction: the challenge for teachers

The purpose and role of the teacher transmitting information may remain central to expectations and practice, but to what extent was the traditional expert approach sufficient to satisfy teachers, parents and pupils? In an expert model of parents' meetings, it could be expected that participants' highest satisfaction was achieved when the teacher gave positive feedback on pupil progress. While this was important to teachers, the interpersonal qualities of the teacher during the meeting were more important to parents and rated favourably with teachers as well; in particular, the merits of the teachers being perceived as knowledgeable about the child as an individual, being approachable and being honest.

Hornby (2000) stated that the parents have a 'hidden agenda' of finding out whether the teacher knows the child well; this appears to be supported here. This type of information cannot be communicated through formulaic reporting of assessment, as Hornby states that this is more likely to be conveyed through anecdotes on the child. Comments from Phase 1 parents agreed that feedback on children's interests and unique responses lead parents to trust the other judgements of the teacher. This was illustrated in a parent of a five-year-old child who received some negative feedback about her child's behaviour, but gave the meeting the highest rating for satisfaction. In this Burgh teacher, she saw someone who has 'a good understanding of what made him tick'. The teacher had conveyed this through her knowledge of the child's personal interest in nature. Achieving a good degree of knowledge requires that teachers regularly reflect on how they know each child as an individual, and take action to acquaint themselves with this information where it is not evident. The study

suggests that parents bring their observations of the child to the meeting and look for areas of consistency with the professional's feedback.

Both parents and teachers raised the issue of teachers being perceived as honest. The literature states that parents in England found reports to be broad and unclear with parents uncertain on future action (Clark, 1998; Power & Clark, 2000). This study suggests less confusion with the content of meetings, but some professionals were critical that positive written reporting led to disappointment at the parents' meetings as teachers attempted to put the reporting statements into context.

The level of satisfaction also resulted from the perceived approachability of the teacher. This study found that aspects that may be perceived as being professional by teachers, such as using notes and maintaining neutrality can be interpreted by parents as a lack of empathy or unwillingness to engage in a dialogue with the parent. It could be argued that, rather than suppressing individuality in the presentation of the role of expert, parents value teachers allowing their personality to show in these meetings. As stated, one parent likened this to chatting with a neighbour, allowing the parent to feel on an equal standing to the teacher. This proposes that caution must be shown in developing practice regarding parents' meetings: while policy may seek to provide equality of provision, it may reduce more sensitive aspects of teacher individuality that parents value and to which they can relate.

Pupil self-advocacy: a challenge to professionalism

The main expectations of parents' meetings support the model of teacher as expert but it has been argued that the consumer model has informed these meetings as the professionals prepare and feedback with a perception of parents as clients. Nevertheless, the challenge from the parent as active consumer is shifting them towards more proactive roles. As the teaching profession has adjusted since the 1980s to the parent as advocate, it now faces a new challenge to the teacher as expert through the legislation and policy that supports greater pupil self-advocacy.

In Phase 1 of this study, both the teachers and parents had mainly negative or undecided responses to pupil participation at parents' meetings. Teachers supported a protectionist perspective on the child as they believed that absence protected the child from anxiety and low self-esteem. While Roche (1999) identified that acknowledging the right of the child to be consulted is counter to the professional culture, Rudduck (2002) proposed ways in which pupil participation in school could strengthen the quality of teachers' work by accessing the fresh perspective of the child.

Parent as advocate

The shift in parental expectations

The study indicated that the teacher as expert remains dominant. However, as parents assume an advocacy role, other expectations are emerging. In Phase 1, the purpose that parents seek specific information was highly cited by parents. Phase 2 presented a less strong case for proactive behaviour in parents bringing their 'own agenda', suggesting that advocacy behaviour lies in being responsive during the meeting. Regardless, parents described a range of methods that they used to prepare before the meeting. The involvement of the child at this stage was generally to benefit the adult's preparation. Teachers need to consider the extent to which they conduct meetings in a way that permits parents to raise any questions that they have prepared.

Parents in Phase 1 were more likely than teachers to view parents' meetings as a mediation process in which the aim was to arrive at a consensus. In valuing this expectation, it follows that parents believe that their views of the child should be valued equally to those of the professional. This belief runs contrary to the perception of the teacher as expert.

While the relationship between the parent and teacher in the primary school context may be based on the professional spending more time with the pupil than in the secondary school, the literature that states that parents seek a social link to the teacher may be overstating its case (Clark, 1998). The social perspective had some support from Phase 1 participants, but Phase 2 parents were mainly neutral on this issue.

Parents in search of a role

Where the perception is that the teacher assumes the role of expert, passive roles might be expected for the parent. Such parental roles that Phase 1 participants described were supporting the school, listening to the teacher, and providing the teacher with social context information on the child. In this phase, more teachers expected parental support for the school and the provision of background information. Here, the teacher defines the needs to be met by the parent. Hornby (2011) described these clear roles as part of the 'protective' model of working with parents, while Crozier (2000) similarly describes teachers defining partnership by parents meeting the needs of the school.

The rise of the consumer model of education had charged parents with an advocacy role and increased professional accountability. The participants in this study described proactive parental roles that support this argument. Phase

2 parents cited listening to the teacher as their main role during the meeting (97%) but there was also a high incidence of parents asking questions (94%) and expressing their views (87%). Parents also gave a good level of response to supporting their child at the meeting (79%).

Phase 1 teachers were dissatisfied when parents did not participate during the meeting. However, some teachers described discomfort when they felt interrogated. This is exemplified by a parents' meeting at Hill where the teacher rated her satisfaction lower than the parent; while the parent was happy that her concerns had been addressed, the teacher was uncomfortable that she had to address a prior discipline issue that was raised. Parents were expected to be advocates for their child but they could have difficulty in judging a level of involvement at which they would not be judged as a 'problem' or 'adversary' (Hornby, 2011). Moore's (1994) research highlighted a clash in perceptions whereby what the parent sees as a query, the school may interpret as a complaint.

The advocate: the role that unites and divides

Crozier's studies (2000, 2005) conclude that equitable treatment for parents may not mean treating all parents equally. She found that class and ethnicity can have profound effects on parental expectations and their ability and willingness to exercise parental power under the consumerist philosophy of education. These factors were not examined in the present study. However, feedback from parents suggested that factors within the control of the school can affect the ability of parents to act proactively at these meetings. As previously discussed, these include the organisation of the meeting and the interpersonal qualities of the teacher. Some parents were able to prepare more fully for meetings and assume proactive roles. These often reflected their individual abilities whereas schools should aim to empower more parents by including approaches that encourage genuine parental input and by considering the differing support that parents may need to participate.

As the consumerist philosophy has arguably empowered some parents, it has also divided parents by their ability and willingness to assume the advocacy role. Debatably, disempowering parents reinforces the role of the teacher as expert. However, parents being without a genuine voice at parents' meetings leads to a monologue from the professional rather than a dialogue between interested and informed parties.

Appraising the process

The parent as advocate is supported by parental perceptions of satisfaction with parents' meetings. For Phase 1 teachers, the interpersonal qualities of

the teacher at the meeting followed by the child making good progress were the main sources of satisfaction. However, Phase 1 parents favoured the interpersonal qualities of the teacher and the perception that a consensus was reached during the meeting. Phase 2 parents identified key teacher qualities and most agreed or strongly agreed that they had reached a consensus at the meeting. Phase 1 suggested that parents may not frequently and explicitly identify reaching a consensus as a purpose, but they are aware when they reflect on the meeting of whether they are satisfied that a consensus was achieved. To reach a consensus, the parent places equal value on his/her perception of the child in the reporting process. Following the meeting, many parents continued to take action to support their child. The parent and pupil descriptors of the content of feedback after the meeting matched in Phase 1. About half of the Phase 2 parents reported taking action including supporting their children and talking to the children about their progress. The findings of this study illuminate a practical example of how parent-teacher dialogue may lead to support for pupil learning being extended into the home environment.

Pupil self-advocacy: a challenge to the new order

The role of the parent as advocate is prompted and reinforced by the absence of the focus of these meetings: the pupil. The consumerist model has created a proactive role for some parents and they appear to be shifting their expectations and roles as parents' meetings in alignment with this philosophy. Parents have new expectations that include gaining specific information from the teacher, and they adopt roles that support this aim including asking questions and expressing their views. Phase 1 parents, in agreement with the teachers, were hesitant to move to complete pupil participation. An irony is suggested in this study in that some parents believe it is their role to mediate information to the child and that some pupils demonstrated awareness that information was mediated to them. However, a frequently cited parental reason to exclude pupils was the fear that parents would then have moderated information given to them by the teacher. Parents perceived that they were making progress in gaining access to the specific information that they wanted but they did not want to extend advocacy to children as they felt it would be detrimental to the gains in parental rights. These findings are consistent with the assertion of Prout (2000) that parental rights and pupil rights are often viewed as being in diametric opposition. Phase 2 parents were more likely to accept pupil participation in some form, but this still mainly depended on the type of information discussed at these meetings.

Pupils in search of self-advocacy

Limited expectations

Pupils' expectations related closely to the answer to the current structure and content of parents' meetings. Pupils were not present at any of the parents' meetings in the study and this limited their perspective on what happened at the current meetings. In Phase 1, nearly half of the parents and a few teachers reported involving the child before the meeting; however, the pupil participants did not perceive of any preparation at this stage. Closer consideration of the type of involvement by parents shows that children were consulted before parents' meetings primarily to prepare the adult.

Reinforcing the role of teacher as expert

The second-hand experience of the pupils of parents' meetings led many to hold traditional expectations of these events. They saw the teacher's role as mainly to report information on their progress. They had little knowledge of what their parents did at these meetings. The pupils had a narrow perspective on the content of the meetings, believing that they focussed on their cognitive and social development only.

Children as self-advocates at parents' meetings

The current practice described in this study indicates that pupils' non-attendance at parents' meetings is due to a paternalistic or protectionist perspective by the adults. Franklin (2002) described children's welfare rights that protect them from perceived harm. Here, adults identify this harm as damage to the child's self-esteem and the creation of anxiety. A logical development of this is view is that adults believe that children are ignorant of the information about them that is discussed. In the study, pupils had a narrow perspective of content but they did know that their work and behaviour were reviewed. Further, some Phase 1 parents described talking to their child before the meeting to ask for a prediction of its content and for any issues that should be raised. It could be argued that there is a contradiction in parents believing that children are knowledgeable enough about their progress in school to prepare the parent but not aware enough to participate when these issues are discussed during the meeting.

Franklin (2002) also discussed children's rights of self-determination. The practice described in this study did not suggest that pupils' powers of self-advocacy were enhanced: they reported little preparation before the meeting, they were excluded from the meeting and they had information mediated to them by adults after the meeting.

The potential to participate was welcomed by the majority of pupil participants. The teachers and parents in Phase 1 were more hesitant, but the majority of Phase 2 parents were willing to participate in meetings with children present in some form. The key variables linked to participants agreeing to pupil participation were age and the issues being discussed. Roche (1999) argued that pupils' rights should increase with age. The adult participants in Phase 1 agreed that pupil participation was appropriate as pupils progressed through primary school. Alternatively, Phase 2 parents stated that the main variable in pupils attending would be the issues that were being discussed at the meeting.

When participants were asked to consider the role that pupils would have at a parents' meeting, the responses included expressing a viewpoint, hearing the views of the teacher or parent and identifying aspects of school work where they needed support. Pupils were able to suggest further roles, such as showing their work to the parent. The comparison of suggested roles indicated that pupils were looking to be actively involved, mainly through expressing their views, rather than having a non-participatory role. This has implications for the development of parents' meetings in that children must perceive that they have a meaningful participatory role in which they are to be genuinely engaged with the process.

Although the majority of the children in this study were positive about potential participation and they could envisage proactive roles for themselves, developments to support the right of the pupil to attend these meetings should be sensitive to potentially empowering and diminishing the child (Garner & Sandow, 1995). To this end, adults would have to acknowledge the child's right to non-attendance (Walker, 1996). Maclure and Walker (1999) found that pupils were concerned that their presence would lead to a 'show trial' and the responses in the present study, particularly from Hill pupils, seemed to agree:

I wouldn't like to be there because, if I got a bad report, I'd probably get shouted at inside the school or something.

This indicates that such meetings need a shared purpose and agenda that respects the presence and views of all the participants.

Thinking outside the box

Clearly, when the researcher spoke to Phase 1 participants, the potential for pupil participation was more frequently interpreted as, 'How can we fit children into the current parents' meetings?' It is, therefore, understandable that Walker (1996) concluded that meetings would be longer and more complicated. Similarly, one can relate to why pupils fear a 'show trial' where the purpose and

content of meetings indicated a deficit model. Alternative models of parents' meetings with pupil participation have been explored by writers such as Dyches, Carter and Prater (2012).

Where schools and parents are willing to consider the potential for pupils to engage as self-advocates, a fresh approach is needed for the structure and agenda of parents' meetings. This point was raised by some of the Phase 1 teachers. Participants need to reflect on the variety of purposes proposed by this study and start by considering a title for these meetings that genuinely reflects the expectations of parents, teachers and pupils. An innovative title that reflects purposes based on pupil, teacher and parent participation should help to define new roles for the participants. Sharing the agenda and potential roles in a meaningful way to parents and at an appropriate level to the stage and understanding of the child should help to reassure children that this meeting should contribute positively to their education; communicating to parents that they are not expected to chastise their child during the meeting to demonstrate that they are supportive parents. It should also indicate to professionals that they have a broad educational expertise to offer but they should listen and learn from the child and parent to support the education of their common interest – the child.

Final considerations

The justification for this study rested on a lack of research on parents' meetings in the primary school compared to the secondary sector; the data indicates comparatively higher parental satisfaction. However, the research impetus came from observations regarding personal contact between teachers and parents. Thus, the outcomes refer specifically to parents' meetings with some broader implications. It is questionable whether 'partnership' can be achieved in a 5-to-10-minute interview in which one participant holds more information on the child's educational progress. Perhaps it is more realistic to suggest that teachers will move towards a partnership model through consistently using a positive approach across a range of contacts with parents, of which parents' meetings are one.

In this study, including teachers in training in meetings was viewed positively. There needs to be a consistent exploration of working with parents that foster positive attitudes across Initial Teacher Education courses. In the one-year Induction Scheme that follows graduation, parents' meetings are often tackled; while it is important that novice teachers know what to expect, this study indicates they need to understand how to engage as parents highly valued teachers' interpersonal skills. Beyond the early professional stage, there is merit

in staff evaluating their frequent 'private practice' of meeting with parents.

In the changed education setting of the 21st century, this study suggests that teachers need to re-evaluate the purpose of parents' meetings. During the last 50 years, Scottish primary education has experienced curricular and pedagogic change as it moved from the Primary Memorandum (1965), through the 5–14 Curriculum Guidelines (1991) to A Curriculum for Excellence (2004); regardless, the format of parents' meetings has remained constant. In this study, the duration and content of meetings indicated a drift towards a deficit model; the purpose for children progressing well was lost. The positioning of parents in relationship to the school has not remained static; the data shows that many parents seek a proactive role, but they can be frustrated when teachers do not engage with their views or hamper their ability to prepare meaningfully.

As A Curriculum for Excellence principles are embedded in practice, it reveals a professional focus on teacher responsiveness, curricular integration and pupil-led learning. It is hoped that its messages on teacher, parent and pupil engagement with assessment are not subsumed. Is it not incomprehensible that child advocacy is currently promoted through greater pupil engagement with school management, such as Pupil Councils, and their leadership in learning, through a revised curriculum, but the thread of consistency in thought is broken when it comes to reporting on pupil progress? After 50 years, the method by which pupil achievement at primary school is shared deserves a review.

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Cooperation Between Migrant Parents and Teachers in School: A Resource?

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Even smaller Western countries receive immigrants from remote areas with poorer living conditions. As stated in the U.N. Child Convention, immigrant children should be given equal opportunities in education. Parents are always interested in their children's future, and education may gain from stronger cooperation between school and parents. Some research shows that even illiterate parents may support their children's training in a second language (Cummins, 1986/2001, p. 665). Dialogues between teachers and parents promote mutual understanding and increase parents' knowledge of school and society. This might make the parents trust society more, enhance their acculturation and reduce future intergenerational conflicts (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). A professional teacher needs cultural knowledge and understanding in order to give her/his students an education adapted to their needs. Migrant students especially should feel that there is coherence in their education, because cultural conflicts sap their energy and may also cause identity problems and lead to lack of motivation. For teachers it is important that education policy provides for equal opportunities. Norway has an inclusive policy concerning immigrant children. The students have language support to a certain degree both in their mother tongue and in Norwegian when needed. Parents and schools are obliged to cooperate in education, and some support is therefore given to translation. Cooperation is required by conferences and meetings. There are gains for all parties in cooperation between school and migrant parents, but it is difficult to develop mutual cultural understanding for all students and equal opportunities for migrant students. This requires a clear school policy, the means to implement it, and teacher competence. It takes a process to learn how to cooperate and give adequate support. The Norwegian policy shows a will to cooperation, but the implementation of the policy can still be improved.

Keywords: Cooperation school/migrant parents, Dialogue teacher/parents, Multicultural schools, School policy for migrant students

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Sodelovanje med starši migranti in učitelji

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≈ Celo majhne zahodne države sprejemajo priseljence iz oddaljenih držav z revnejšimi življenjskimi pogoji. Kot je zapisano tudi v Konvenciji o otrokovih pravicah, želimo otrokom priseljencem omogočiti enake možnosti za izobraževanje. Starše vedno zanima prihodnost njihovih otrok; izobraževanje pridobi na kakovosti, če je sodelovanje med šolo in starši trdno. Raziskave kažejo, da lahko celo nepismeni starši podpirajo otroke pri urjenju drugega jezika (J. Cummins, 1986/2001, str. 665). Dialog med učitelji in starši spodbuja medsebojno razumevanje ter povečuje poznavanje šole in družbe s strani staršev. Posledično bodo mogoče starši bolj zaupali družbi, izboljšali svojo akulturacijo in zmanjšali prihodnje medgeneracijske konflikte (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). Profesionalni učitelj mora poznati in razumeti kulturo učenca, da bi mu lahko nudil prilagojeno izobraževanje. Še posebno učenci migranti bi morali občutiti skladnost v izobraževanju, saj jim kulturni konflikti jemljejo energijo, povzročijo težave z identiteto in vodijo v pomanjkanje motivacije.

Za učitelje je pomembno, da izobraževalna politika omogoča enake možnosti. Norveška ima uveljavljeno inkluzivno politiko za otroke priseljence. Učencem se nudi pomoč do določene mere pri usvajanju jezika – maternega in norveškega, če je potrebno. Sodelovanje med šolo in starši je obvezno, zato je omogočeno tudi prevajanje. Sodelovanje poteka pri konferencah in sestankih.

V procesu sodelovanja pridobita obe strani – šola in starši migranti –, vendar je težko vzpostaviti medsebojno kulturno razumevanje za vse učence in enake možnosti za učence migrante. To zahteva jasno šolsko politiko, sredstva za izvajanje in ustrezne učiteljeve kompetence. Učenje sodelovanja in nudenja primerne pomoči je proces. Norveška politika kaže voljo za sodelovanje, vendar so pri izvajanju politike še mogoče izboljšave.

Ključne besede: sodelovanje šola – starši migranti, multikulturne šole, dialog učitelji – starši, politika šole glede učencev migrantov

Introduction

The aim of the education system has always been to give every generation possibilities to develop their competence for a social life. Migrant families bring with them various school experiences, and encounter different educational practices and knowledge that cause discontinuity in the education of the children. This might result in a poorer basis for development in a new society. Nowadays, we discuss the importance of language competence, how to meet cultural differences or secure socioeconomic status, and how to give migrant children equal opportunities. There has always been contact between schools and parents through parent-teacher meetings, or especially when students have problems. Kindergarten teachers meet parents bringing their children every day, and they can have a small talk when needed. The last immigration wave in Norway started in the years after 1970 and has increased gradually, especially the previous ten years (Brochmann & Kjelstadli, 2008). The official obligation to cooperate was stated in the Education Act and Regulations by the Ministry of Education and Research (2005). Some goals were presented by the same ministry in the 'Strategic Plan. Equal education in practice, (2004–2009)' (hereinafter: 'Strategic Plan').

Currently, all municipalities in Norway have immigrants and the responsibility to provide equal education opportunities to majority and minority children. Migrant parents often struggle with their own challenges related to language, culture, economy, and also some fears of a new and different society. The Pisa studies show lower school results for migrant students (Pisa 2009 results: Vol. II OECD, 2010, p.65 ff). The official policy targets the significance of cooperation between parents and, not least, immigrant parents in schools. To be more conscious about prerequisites for cooperation and improved results for migrant students should be possible. Therefore, the following questions will be addressed here:

1. Why should schools cooperate with migrant parents?
2. What are the possibilities and challenges in official Norwegian policy?
3. What are teachers' experiences?

To obtain answers to the questions, it is necessary to examine research literature about migrants' situation and education experiences. Knowledge about immigrants' education processes and consequences for schools, students and families might give support to the way forward. The Norwegian policy regarding the education for migrant students is found in the Education Act and Regulations (2005) and different framework documents. The present situation has to be seen in the light of desired goals for future perspectives.

The sources might give interdisciplinary answers and elements relevant in different degree to the three questions.

Why should schools cooperate with migrant parents?

The general situation

To what extent is the Pisa test of the OECD relevant for defining necessary qualifications in the life in European society? It tests the students' knowledge and skills in using the knowledge in the three subjects (language, science and mathematics) considered to be necessary for the future of Western society. The Pisa test results show lower scores by first and second generation migrant students than by those of majority students (Pisa 2009 results: Vol. II OECD, 2010). Skills such as social competence, creativity or tolerance are not tested. The aims of the 1989 UN Child Convention serve as a guard to securing fair treatment for all children, giving them equal education possibilities, and developing mutual cultural respect in school and society. It seems as the aims of the Pisa tests compared to the aims of equal possibilities and mutual cultural respect could lead to different education programs. This question must be dealt with elsewhere.

The Norwegian Framework Plan for elementary education, 'Kunnskapsløftet' (Knowledge Promotion), combines the aspects of knowledge and cultural education by maintaining that 'teachers and instructors also have to have multicultural competence and knowledge about diverse starting points and strategies of learning among students' (Knowledge Promotion, 2008, p. 5). Different aspects of Norway's official policy, to which I will return, might give limitations and possibilities in questions of education.

Knowledge Promotion defines equality as students, regardless of gender, age, language etc., having equal opportunities to develop their competence in an inclusive environment (ibid., 2008). Comparing the aim of equal education for all with minority children's significantly lower result in the Pisa test, we see that most likely there are factors in the education of this group that a receiving country has to improve to secure equality. Teachers and parents share responsibilities for mutual cooperation, which is important to create good conditions for learning according to Knowledge Promotion (ibid, 2008, p. 5). The socio-economic situation has to be solved outside school.

Jim Cummins' article 'Empowering minority students: A framework for Intervention' (1986) was republished 15 years later in the same journal, *Herald Education Review* (HER, (1986/2001); the reprinting showed its relevance. In Cummins' thinking about the necessity of cooperation between parents and

school, he uses the concept of power. Parents, teachers and students have power; teachers are formally responsible for the education at school, and parents are at home. Students have the resources and drive to develop both identity and capacity. There is mutual dynamism and one might say they 'work in the same field'. Interpretations of intentions and aims expressed in official documents might vary. Therefore, cooperation between school and parents is of importance in secure coherence in education and avoiding discrepancies. According to the Child Convention, the aim of education for all is to develop the students' personality, which includes respect for the language, the parents, cultural identity and values of one's own and other countries (U.N. Child Convention, 1989, § 29). Therefore, coherence in education seems to be in accordance with the aim of the convention. Since language and culture questions are especially important elements in the migrant children's family and school situation, I have chosen culture and language as main areas to investigate.

Cooperation in questions of culture

Culture includes traditions, social rules, values, and the way of life. Even if culture is regarded as being the 'glue' of a society, its elements are not static. Acquired cultural values become included in personal identity. Immigrant students will be in the process of developing their own identity and have to find their own way between their parents' cultural values, the values of the new country presented at school and the special culture of the students (Cummins, 1986/2001). Migrant parents want their children to become well educated for the future prosperity in a new society (Sjögren, 2000). Traditionally, for the many of the migrant families Sjögren interviewed, the teacher was regarded as having all necessary knowledge, which students learnt by repetition (ibid, 2000, p. 15). Repeated knowledge might be part of the qualifications the Pisa tests represent, but competence to use the knowledge in a relevant way is also required. Thus, there might be differences between parents and the school regarding what kind of knowledge is appreciated.

At the same time, migrant parents are sceptical of some other values in their new country, especially of religious questions regarding values being part of their identity and culture (Barry, 2001). These processes to acquire and develop their own identity have many facets. Even in a majority culture, there are tendencies to reject some or include other influences; this pulls people in different directions. This dynamism, which we may call 'acculturation', is found in both national and minority cultures. The process of acculturation is a special challenge for migrant groups. However open the new country and majority are, a minority will always live in an identity challenge and have less power than

the majority (Cummins, 1986/2001; Nieto, 2010; Parekh, Robins 2003; 2008; Simon; 2004).

Cummins calls this 'a process of negotiating identities' (1986/2001, p. 653). This is an on-going process for students in school and in the family. Parekh indicated the importance of feeling welcome (Parekh, 2008, p. 87). Simon said it is important to acknowledge the culture, language and also the creative and intellectual resources that students bring with them (Simon, 2004). In other words, the teacher has to care about this openness, and be aware of, include, develop and present the students' resources. The openness to impulses from other cultures is necessary, Robins stated. Without openness, the culture will become only the past (Robins, 2003). To do this in a balanced way, teachers need to be well acquainted with the students and their cultural background, but parents also have to be aware of which differences the school represents to accept the way forward for their children in the new world.

The meaning of respect might, for example, be necessary to clarify for immigrant parents in Nordic countries. Annick Sjögren writes about differences between Swedish teachers' opinions and parents' approach from foreign, more authoritarian cultures (Sjögren, 2000). The teachers from a more egalitarian society thought that respect between student and teachers had to be based on personal integrity and equality rather than on an authoritarian hierarchy where age or social status counted. As personal identity often is rooted in cultural identity, questions about cultural differences, especially religious values, cause strong feelings (Barry, 2001, p. 33). The discussion about the hijab as a Muslim code for clothing is well known from many countries. In France, it became the subject of a troublesome national discussion. For teachers, parents and students, mutual respect in discussions and information situations is essential.

Without this dialogue and mutual understanding between school and parents, cooperation may be difficult, and possibly end in intergenerational family conflicts about traditions and values. Conflicts of different kinds take energy. In their research, Portes et al. registered a special drive for education in immigrant students at the beginning of their attendance at school. Dissonant acculturation, poor schools and weak families could make students 'abandon their educational goals as "unattainable dreams", which means a slower drive and less learning activities' (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001, p. 268).

Coherence in the education of students gives security. In my interviews in Norwegian schools, a teacher in one school and a director in another indicated the positive reactions they registered in the students when they could say that 'I met your parents yesterday', 'Your mother was at our meeting; she saw your classroom' or 'On my holiday, I visited your country [...], and look, I

brought a book in your language from the trip.' The children were smiling (Lea, 2007, 2009). This is an inclusive way of saying 'I see you, know your mother and know where you come from'. It also emphasises the informal possibilities of creating an open atmosphere, like in kindergartens where the teacher meets one of the parents every day. This clarification of, and openness to cultural differences in school are important to ease the processes of acculturation and identity development for both students and parents, also for the majority.

Cooperation in language learning

Language is a vital part of culture, the communication, identity building and consequently in education. There have been heated discussions about methods of language learning. Those who want a one-way assimilation into the majority's system have believed in the forced use of the majority language both for students and also in the family. Cummins refers to a British project, the Haringey project, where illiterate parents without competence in English agreed to listen to their children's reading on a regular basis. This group was compared with another group with some extra teaching support by a specialist. The progress was significantly greater in the group reading to the parents than the group getting support from specialists. The teachers also reported progress in the students' increased learning and better behaviour (Cummins, 1986/2001). This showed that even illiterate parents could support their children's language learning. Sonia Nieto refers to research of second language competence in immigrant students living in families where their mother tongue is practiced. This showed that the bilingual additive practice improved the language competence. Suppressed native language at home did not. Her conclusion was: 'This research confirms that simply speaking English is no guarantee that academic success will follow. [...] (But) when children are able to keep up with their native language at home, they develop meta-linguistic awareness, i.e. a greater understanding of how language itself works, and to use language for further learning' (Nieto, 2010, p. 147).

Portes and Rumbaut wrote: 'Early parent-child conflict and limited bilingualism reduce ambition [...] the pattern is confirmed with the opposite effect of fluent bilingualism' (2001, p. 227). This shows the importance of using the mother tongue in second language learning.

It is one thing is to understand the use of words and sentences in everyday speech; another is to understand a concept. An ordinary Norwegian activity for a class is to make 'a trip to a cottage'. Immigrant parents as well as students might be afraid of what kind of activity this includes. This understanding develops through experience, explanations and communication. Therefore, the

general information to parents about activities at school and possibly inclusion in them supports their understanding of school life in a new society, and promises a secure life for their children.

Another linguistic aspect is the difference between everyday language and the language as tool for thinking. Anne Høigård referred to a Swedish researcher, Kenneth Hyltenstam, who has found that it takes five to seven years to develop a second language for thinking and learning in school even with fluent every-day language. This development needs systematic language support for years (2006, p. 191).

Where cooperation does not function

One of the signs showing that cooperation does not function might be when students drop out of school. We know that the education for Roma children often is characterised as disruptive in several countries. This does not need to be so. In a Pestalozzi conference in Slovenia (2011), a director in a Slovenian school in Maribor reported positive cooperation with Roma parents and that the Roma students stayed in school.²

In a final research paper, I discussed the situation of Cape Verde students in Portugal trying to pass nine years of obligatory school, but where the drop-out percentage is high (Lea, 2008). The situation is described in an article (Ferreira & Cardoso, 2004). The reasons the students give for dropping out of school are partly problems with disruptive behaviour meeting educational norms unfamiliar to them and failing in school. They are discriminated against by peers and adults, including teachers. The school content does not seem relevant for their expected future, according to the drop-outs. Their understanding of the Portuguese language is insufficient in education, as their mother tongue is more or less a Creole language. All teaching is in Portuguese, although the Portuguese Education Law No 6, Article 8, from the Ministry of Education (2001) says that the schools must provide special activities for students with Portuguese as a second language. The conclusion of the Portuguese researchers is that teachers neither respect these students' language, nor their culture, and they have the stereotypical idea of their families as being dysfunctional. They express this directly in the article: '[...] teachers have low expectation about these children and reduce their chances of being successful at school' (Ferreira & Cardoso, 2004, p. 82; Lea, 2008).

I visited a slum area in Lisbon where Cape Verde families had been

2 Pestalozzi Workshop with the topic: 'Intercultural education for everyday practice: Pedagogical illusion or practicable reality?' Ljubljana, April, 2011.

living for years. Some Portuguese young people gave voluntary support in different ways. For example, one young migrant boy had built his own computer as result of this voluntary assistance. The voluntary support seems to meet them more on their own turf. The dropout examples show catastrophic results for students when the school does not respect the students' language, background or their parents. The education becomes irrelevant for the students. Thus far, I have not found research about the effects of voluntary contributions.

Cooperation, a win-win situation for all parts

Through the research, we have seen that the mother tongue is valuable in learning a second language. Even illiterate parents' support of their children in their second language learning is valuable. Conflicts between school and parents might be avoided with open dialogue about how to understand and respect differences in cultural attitudes and values. It gives both parts a wider horizon. Even informal comments to the students may connect their two worlds and contribute to harmonising the educational environment for the students and thereby facilitate their identity development. Cooperation and dialogue between teachers and parents have a triple effect, both for each group and for the immigrant students. Cultural differences are important. Schools represent the students' future where they are introduced to and included in society in a gradual and on-going way. One condition is that they feel they are welcome. When parents do not become acquainted with or misunderstand this society, its values and their children's changing 'world', generational conflicts occur. Therefore, through sharing information about vital cultural values unclarified and unaccepted differences between parents and school can be avoided, and security can be created. Mutual understanding, information and common acceptance of solutions lead to more coherent education and stable situation for students. Language understanding and cultural acceptance are prerequisites for meaningful dialogue.

In the following, I present The Norwegian Education Act and its regulations, which give the main aim, framework and intentions of the school policy for the youngest generation of migrants and their parents.

What are the opportunities and challenges in official Norwegian policy?

Opportunities

According to the Norwegian Act of Education and its regulations, the school must provide education in cooperation with the children's homes (2005). This is not only an obligation for the school, but also for the parents, because

they have the right to education for their children. The regulations specifically say that at least twice a year there has to be a planned and structured conference with the parents about the status of their student. In addition, there has to be a common meeting each term of the year for all parents of the students at the same level.

The Education Act also prescribes democratic organs, such as a parents' council and a committee for cooperation, where parents are represented. The intention is to give the whole parent group a 'voice', and to share the responsibility for collaboration in the education situation (Education Act, § 11-1 ff). The parents are obliged to participate in organised meetings and coordinating assemblies, while teachers or the school are responsible for organisation and information. Immigrant parents are not especially mentioned in this connection, but this aspect is underlined and concretised in several other official documents, like the Strategic Plan from the Ministry of Education and Research: 'Equal Education in Practice, 2004–2009', (later 'Strategic Plan'). The plan says that Norway has become a multicultural society, and that it has developed multicultural schools. The latter is described this way: 'The ministry is of the opinion that a multicultural school is characterised by a staff who regard cultural and linguistic diversity among pupils, parents and teachers as the norm, and who base their school development on this' (Strategic Plan, 2004–2009, p. 9).

The necessity of the parents' contribution is emphasised directly: 'The ministry is of the opinion that raising parents' awareness, increasing their involvement and assigning them responsibility are critical factors for the success of the Strategic Plan's overriding goals [...]' (ibid, p. 21).

The latest official document offers a thorough presentation of the total education of students with a minority language, which is to give multi-lingual children, youths and adults the advantage of education (NOU 2010:7, *Mangfold og Mestring*³ [*Cultural diversity and Mastering*]).

The Education Act gives students who have a mother tongue another than Norwegian a right to special education in Norwegian and even some support in their own language 'as far as possible' and 'when needed' (§ 2-8). Thus far, 'needed' has been interpreted by teachers or schools, while the schools or municipality has to evaluate to which degree there are necessary resources and possibilities for support. This ambiguity might lead to opportunities being

3 An NOU is an official study and recommendation to the Ministry usually followed by an agreed White Paper.

This NOU 2010: 7 'Manifold and Mastering' has the subtitle: 'Multilingual children, young and adults in the education system.' Most likely the present NOU will be followed by a White Paper.

different in different places. Newly arrived migrant parents have a right and a duty to take a language course in Norwegian, and an introduction program about society. Schools have the opportunity to hire interpreters for some meetings, within some economic limits.

All parents, minority and majority, are obliged to cooperate in their children's education at school. This includes participation in meetings where one gets information about the school society and relevant external instances and a possibility to discuss general questions. The conferences between teacher and each parent give the opportunity for mutual information about their child's status and what support parents can give, e.g. in students' homework.

Finally, the Education Act prescribes non-tolerance for bullying and discrimination of racial or ethnic reasons (Education Act, § 9a).

The overall policy is to qualify both migrant parents and their children to participate in Norwegian society with rights and duties. The minister's preface to the Action Plan begins with: 'Norway intends to be the most inclusive society in the world' (Action Plan, p. 2). With this premise also follows responsibility. Equality in obligations and duties is also part of the official immigration policy expressed in each relevant White Paper and plan document, as is expressed in the Action Plan:

The goal for the Government's social inclusion policy is that each person who lives in Norway shall participate in society and have equal opportunities. The Government's job is to ensure that immigrants are able to contribute their resources in working life and general society as quickly as possible (ibid, 2007, p. 6).

This is a positive and balanced policy, but there are challenges for optimal practice.

Challenges in implementing the policy

We see four main challenges: the geography of a long country with fjords and mountains, the spread of immigrants, the lack of sufficient multicultural and linguistic competence, and the economy. The country has 429 municipalities of varied areas, natures, economies and competences to care for immigrant children's right to adequate language support, which is a local responsibility. One might find schools with two or three nationalities represented in the classes, but also with 20% immigrant children. There are more immigrants in towns where they often live in special areas and then with more languages represented. One of the interviewed directors in an ordinary school said they had 48% minority students, and 30–35 languages represented (Lea, 2009). The average in

Oslo schools is 39%. There are two schools in Oslo with over 90% immigrant children and one with 3%, according to the web source (<http://www.abcnhyeter.no/nyheter/090822/39-prosent-av-oslos-elever-er-minoriteter>).

Evidently this creates great challenges for the directors, the teachers and the municipalities to enhance the acculturation process, to find relevant linguistic competence or economic resources. Resources and competence for translation support are limited and vary throughout the country. As mentioned, it is the schools' or municipalities' responsibility to evaluate the students' need for support and when possible to give this support. There is a newly developed test for language evaluation, but there are challenges. Dyslexia or other language problems in the mother tongue cannot be diagnosed easily.

The aim is that all teachers shall have multicultural competence, as stated in the Knowledge Promotion. Even if they do their best, we see that in-service courses do not reach all. In the autumn of 2011, the first students started with a revised teacher education framework plan in which qualification for the migrant situation in schools were incorporated. The students graduate in 2015. One might say that Norway has started the road to multicultural competence for teachers. How the present challenges might be experienced by parents and teachers is dealt with in the following.

What experiences do teachers encounter?

It is easy to see that the challenges colour the teachers' perceptions of their situation. The policy gives the general aims, which have to be put into practice in the 429 different municipalities.

They have to allocate the economic resources according to general obligations to support schools, but this also competes with other obligations. Each level of administration has to evaluate how to meet obligations. Even if the framework and intentions are the same in two multicultural schools, the practice might be different in the everyday life with students and parents (Vedøy, 2008). The philosophy of the director will influence the teachers. The framework's plans and regulations give goals and prescriptions that have to be implemented in the teaching. This leaves an openness to choose an effective way to organise the teaching. This 'openness' gives teachers power to define, for example, what is most important in a certain class, as Cummins says, (1986/2001, p. 653). If teachers might doubt their own multicultural competence in meeting many nationalities, one can try to get a supplementary course, another might do as the Catalan Professor X. B. Costa suggests, and start discussions between students and teacher or between students from different cultures to compare

similar features or possible differences in culture and language (Costa, 1997). Well-handled challenges might lead to new solutions, but teachers have to find learn put these solutions into practice.

The teachers' practice is varied. In the interviews with directors and teachers of some primary schools, their experience showed both possibilities and limitations (Lea, 2007, 2009). Two schools were especially responsible for receiving newcomers, still in mixed groups. One was defined as a 'focus school', responsible for giving advice to others.⁴ One ordinary school had a high percentage of migrant students. This shows that the schools had to take care of the multicultural aspect on somehow different conditions. Each school was a small society with its own atmosphere, dependent on factors like size, priorities, persons and economy. As Vedøy showed, the schools had their own rules and practice for behaviour (2008). It was impossible to say that one was better than the other without further observations.

Regarding the question of bullying or discrimination, we know that it can be a rather hidden issue. In her doctoral work, Fandrem found that there are differences in reasons for bullying between Norwegian and immigrant youngsters. The immigrant youngsters wanted to get into a group to be included, while the Norwegian ones wanted to show power (Fandrem, 2009). Insight in reasons for bullying might make it easier to handle. Communication between minority and majority students is vulnerable, but so too is the communication between school and parents.

This is documented in Elsa Westergård's PhD thesis, in which she presents what she calls 'parental disillusionment with school' (2010). Her conclusion is that there are difficulties in communication when a teacher does not recognise the problem for students or parents. For example, if it agreed that there is a bullying problem, parents and teachers might disagree about the cause of or the solution to the bullying. Elements in the teachers' workload, professional security or cultural background can hinder professional receptivity in a situation or their ability to make adjustments. Unclear expectations regarding the roles of the teacher or parent might disturb the communication between the two parties when cooperating, e.g. the earlier referred example of cultural based disagreement about the basis for authority. The teachers' challenge is to analyse the situation, clarify their own possible prejudices and role expectations, to be

4 Focus school. A National Centre for multicultural Education gives service to a multicultural school (and kindergarten) in every county. The school has the obligation to develop their competency in multicultural competence and be a model for other schools and to create a network.

open and to be clear. With less mutual knowledge of ways of living and thinking and or language differences, the possibilities for misunderstanding are greater. Without cultural knowledge, one might be tolerant, but in an indifferent way, without respectful understanding.

The conference with each parent couple gives the mutual opportunity to ask and answer questions. Every week, the teacher sends a plan for the school activities next week, which gives parents an opportunity to support the child and be oriented about the content in education. Parents might always ask questions when needed, but the conference is obligatory. The conference time is 20 minutes, twice a school year, at school, where teachers say they need more time to talk about the students' social and subject activities, find out what kind of resource the parents are, and discuss ways of doing things. In plans sent home, they include (for example) 'word banks' to discuss and learn, relevant for a subject. According to one teacher, the conference time is not sufficient for everybody, so she added unpaid time to the conference (Lea, 2007, p. 17). Sometimes, parents might ask if their child behaves well or does what is expected of them. It seems, however, as if the information mostly goes from teacher to parent, which might signal parents' authority respect or experience from a culture where parents were never asked, or (as the teacher said) too little time to the conferences. One school had limited interpreter support for four years per class for conferences (Lea, 2007). This varies according to need and economy, and the teacher has no influence on the funds available.

The meetings for all parents have to be relevant for both the majority and the minority. It is not an easy task, because of the diverse situation in different schools. There is a national committee for parents in elementary school (Foreldreutvalget for grunnskolen (FUG)) who has developed material for cooperation between school and parents, including migrant parents: 2010, *Broer mellom hjem og skole*, [*Bridges between home and schools*]. The web-pages are open for ideas and pamphlets, some translated to many different languages (www.fug.no).

The situation of planning arrangements together is an open occasion. Language is then crucial. The impression is that the conferences have the priority use of translators. The meetings give parents an opportunity to become acquainted with each other. Thus, both teachers and school directors try to find ways, for example by letting more experienced parents translate in their language for small groups in the common meetings. The subjects presented are varied. It might be discussions around topics from school policy, rules and culture, information from institutions the school cooperate, including child welfare, police and health security (Hauge, 2004). If they choose presentations of their own specialties and competences, one of the directors emphasised that

these presentations from immigrants easily become marked by a ‘kind of show’, which he warns against. It can result in stereotypic pictures, exotic for the majority group. Telling about the culture of today from different countries important to themselves, leads to more understanding. In this way, all parents may become resources and enhance the acculturation (Lea, 2009).

The informants affirm that the language capacity or the availability of translators is decisive in meaningful communication with the migrant parent, both in conferences and meetings (Lea, 2007). Restricted opportunities for language interpretation are particularly important to address. Difficulties in language capability may also have something to do with the fact emphasised by Hoigård (2010) that even understanding an everyday language, is (also for parents) not sufficient to understand a more advanced language. The meetings, therefore, have to be planned carefully in order to reach everyone.⁵ This will become easier when all migrants participate in the newly introduced obligatory course in Norwegian language. This shows that many challenges in mutual understanding of each other in the parents’ group, in meetings, in conferences or in dialogues are dependent on the language capability and translation. The teacher’s communicative competence and understanding is exceedingly important in direct dialogues.

Concluding remarks

Cooperation between parents and school is exceedingly important for the students, the migrant parents, their family life and the teachers. Immigrant parents have to raise their children considering their future in a new society, and want the best qualifications for their children. In addition, they have to take care of the family life, where values and traditions are often different from the style in Norwegian families.

Norwegian policy has an ‘equal education for all’ perspective for all students in the education system, described systematically in official documents. We find the obligation to cooperate for parents and school in the Norwegian Education Act and its regulations. The equality aspect is dealt with in the extra language support for migrant students in their mother tongue or in Norwegian language when needed. There is also added support to translation in the cooperation with immigrant parents in conferences or meetings.

Research has shown that this cooperation is important for all parts.

5 In the appendix, I present an overview for shared duties and responsibilities in a school. This ‘service declaration’ is a result of the parents’ council’s cooperation in this school, where migrant parents naturally are included.

Immigrant families live in an acculturation process to become acquainted to a new society with a different language and culture. Research also shows that cooperation between school and parents has favourable effects. Cultural values of the other part might be strange, not really understandable or even threatening. Through information and dialogues, one might arrive at mutual understanding and practicable solutions. This contributes to the parents' understanding of the school policy and how they can support the education. When realising how crucial language competence is for the students' understanding in the teaching situation, it can be supported by parents, school or experts in different ways. This gives a more coherent education situation for the students, favourable to the learning process. Furthermore, the cooperation might prevent intergenerational conflicts in the migrant family, because parents understand more of what a future in the new society means.

Mutual communication and cooperation between migrant and majority parents in conferences and common meetings can clarify cultural differences and give information about the students' education situation. This openness enhances the acculturation process for all parts and supports the education. Cooperation enhances teachers' multicultural and professional competence, gives security to parents and a coherent education to students.

As said, the intentions of the Norwegian policy are to include immigrants, welcome them and give equal education to all. Still there are challenges in the implementation process of the official policy which have to be mentioned. The challenges point towards future improvements. One needs resources and competence at all levels, including school practice. All municipalities and all schools all over the country have to provide language support 'when needed', and this requires competence, good tools, expertise and economy. The reality is that municipalities differ greatly in size, in geography and also in different language competence or money available. Even in central areas, the need of mother tongue support and translations are still greater than the available financial means and available language competence, because of the many nations represented in some schools. Schools might also have teachers without necessary information about how to evaluate language capacity or to handle cultural differences. The multicultural competence in teaching and cooperation still has to become more professional. The newest national idea is to develop the language competence in immigrant pupils is by giving migrant children under the school age an obligatory start in kindergarten. This does not solve all the challenges of immigrant students above that age.

If the earlier-mentioned Pisa tests indicate the ability of migrant youth to participate on equal footing in the society, there is still a way to go. Nevertheless, the intentions in the Norwegian education policy point to the Child

Convention principles of mutual respect for parents, language and culture. It seems as if we need both aspects. In this connection, I have not analysed the selection of the content in different subjects in school, which also is an important factor that has to be meaningful to the students. The dynamism in acculturation and education processes in both minority and majority groups have so many facets and factors that it is impossible to say 'Do this and the result will be that'.

Every teacher's communicative skills, language learning, cultural knowledge and understanding ease the teaching in the schools and the cooperation where both minority and majority parents are important resources. Research has documented that the cooperation between teachers and parents is of fundamental significance for creating coherence in the education of the students, which is also important for the family and school. There is more awareness of the complexity today than a few years ago. There are new challenges for all involved and responsible levels of education from official policy to the single teacher. The challenges are found in the equality perspective of policy compared to the reality, in allocation of money, school practice and also in developing linguistic and multicultural competence in the new generation of teachers.

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Appendix

Servicedeclaration	The school	The pupils	The parents			Evaluation
Aim	Content	Content	Content	Method		
Fundamental skills: <ul style="list-style-type: none">to express oneself orally,to express oneself in writings,to be able in mathematical,to be able to use digital tools.	Communicate clear aims and expectations.	Be active in the teaching situation.	Read the week plan and informations which are sent.	Conferences about development.	One to one meeting about development.	
	Care for individual adaptation in education.	Do your obligations both at school and at home. Ask for help when needed.	Show up and involve yourself in parent' meetings. Be active in guidance and support in home work.	Meetings for parents. News from the school. Weekly news. Guidance. IKT.	And pupils. Tests. Observation.	
	Be precise about the schools regulations and rules. Use the Zero plan actively.	Show the behavior to your comrades at school like you want them to behave against you.	Teach your children about respect and discipline. Talk positively about school. Include all grown-ups and children, also the ones with different ethnic background.	Talking about development. Meetings for parents. News from the school. Weekly news. Guidance.	One to one meeting about development. And pupils.	
	Care for open dialogues about behavior.	Contribute to find Win/ winn solutions in conflict. Talk with other pupils, parents and teachers if you meet troubles. Take care of the school's property.	Be active in asking information from school.	Plan for home work. A monthly letter?	Monthly letter. The aim for next month/ or next year. Have to be signed by the parents.	
Orderliness: Follow the schools rules for orderliness.	Be role models. Give both praise and criticism when needed. Early contact when parents if the rules and expectations are not followed.	Show up precisely. Keep your own cases and affairs in order being at school. Follow the regulations and rules.	Use the book for messages. Scheck the order in school-bag and the daily wear. Care for the pupil to meet up precisely and with correct equipment.	Conferences about development. Meetings for parents. News from the school. Weekly news. Guidance.	One to one meeting about development. And pupils. Observation.	

Biographical note

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The Role and Potential Dangers of Visualisation when Learning about Sub-Microscopic Explanations in Chemistry Education

INGO EILKS^{*1}, TORSTEN WITTECK² AND VERENA PIETZNER³

∞ The core of theory-driven chemistry education consists of the constant shift between the different representational domains of chemical thinking: the macroscopic, the sub-microscopic, and the symbolic domains. Because the sub-microscopic domain can neither be seen nor directly visualised, it requires specific forms of visualisation, i.e. pictures and animations illustrating the model-based level of discrete particles, atoms, or molecular structures. This paper considers the central role visualisations play when learning about the model-based, sub-microscopic level, but it also reflects the dangers inherent in employing insufficiently examined, poorly considered, or even misleading visualisations. This is outlined using different examples taken from both textbooks for lower secondary chemistry education (for students aged 10 to 15) and from the internet. Implications for structuring and using sub-micro visualisations in chemistry education are also given.

Keywords: Chemistry education, Representational levels, Students' misconceptions, Visualisation

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Vloga in potencialne nevarnosti vizualizacije pri učenju submikroskopskih razlag pri pouku kemije

INGO EILKS*, TORSTEN WITTECK AND VERENA PIETZNER

☞ Bistvo učenja kemije, ki temelji na teorijah, je sestavljeno iz nenehnega prehajanja med različnimi predstavitvami v kemijskem mišljenju: makroskopska, submikroskopska in simbolna raven predstavitve. Ker se submikroskopske ravni ne da videti niti si je ne moremo neposredno predstavljati, so potrebne specifične oblike vizualizacije, tj. slike in animacije, ki prikazujejo raven delcev; atomov ali molekul. Prispevek predstavlja ključno vlogo, ki jo ima vizualizacija pri učenju o submikroskopski ravni kemijskih pojmov. Opozarja pa tudi na nevarnosti uporabe nezadostno proučenih, slabo domišljenih ali celo zavajajočih vizualizacij. To je podkrepljeno z različnimi primeri iz učbenikov za učence med 10 in 15 letim starosti ter s primeri s spleta. Podani so tudi nekateri predlogi za uporabo submikroskopskih predstavitev pri pouku kemije.

Ključne besede: pouk kemije, ravni predstav, napačna predstava pri učencih, vizualizacija

The essential role of visualisation for teaching and learning chemistry

Understanding the learning of science is today regularly referred to the theory of 'constructivism' (Bodner, 1986). From constructivism, we understand learning chemistry as students developing their knowledge and understanding within an active process of constructing new knowledge. This process is firmly based upon and connected to any prior knowledge and concepts that the learners possess. New information is processed in the foreground of the cognitive framework that pupils already have in their minds. All previously-existing information in the mind of the learner constantly influences any and all interpretation of newly-acquired information. The newly-constructed framework will emerge as a conglomerate of prior knowledge and any new pieces of information gained.

One of the major sources of students' pre-conceptions influencing their learning process is their everyday-life experience. Learners always try to initially apply their personal experiences when explaining newly presented phenomena, regardless of whether radically different concepts must be applied to gain a scientific reliable understanding (Pfundt, 1982). For example, everyone knows that a candle shrinks while burning. After combustion has ended, the candle is 'no longer there'. The candle has obviously disappeared (at least from the place where the candle originally was). An obvious conclusion based on everyday observation is that the wax in the candle disappeared due to something inherent in the process of combustion. Unfortunately, students over-generalise this interpretation, until they falsely conclude that all objects become 'lighter' and disappear during any processes of combustion (Pfundt, 1982).

Taking into account that chemistry not only describes phenomena, but also explains them with theory, a further problem emerges. Students often transfer their observations from the phenomenological macroscopic level to their understanding of the sub-microscopic level, the level of atoms and molecules. In the candle example above, students wrongly conclude that matter on the sub-microscopic level (atoms and molecules) can also 'disappear' completely, effectively a complete contradiction of the Law of Conservation of Mass and the Law of Conservation of Atoms. Modern science theorises that atoms and their constituent parts never disappear during chemical changes. Only this theory can explain why mass is always conserved and why the sub-microscopic entities involved in the combustion process never disappear. They can only change in certain, specific fashions. These two concepts in the learning process stand in direct contradiction to one another. For the neophyte student, the

more familiar explanation (the one gained from everyday life experience) may hinder learning the scientifically accepted concept. This is why, based on the theory of constructivism, research into students' pre- and alternative conceptions have become a central focus of science education research (Wandersee, Mintzes, & Novak, 1994).

Ever since early research on students' alternative conceptions in science education was published by Pfundt (1975) and Novick and Nussbaum (1978), curriculum developers throughout the world have plead for science teaching to take the alternative beliefs of students into account, when teaching science or developing new curricula and learning materials. One of the most popular ideas suggested by science education to overcome alternative conceptions has been the development of teaching strategies and materials that provoke a 'cognitive conflict' in the learner. The idea is to falsify naïve ideas by contrasting them with contradictory evidence, i.e. via experiments (Posner, Strike, Hewson, & Gertzog, 1982). A cognitive conflict can then be used to promote conceptual change and to overcome naïve, not scientifically accepted ideas. An example for combustion is to observe the burning of iron wool. Iron wool becomes heavier during combustion because of the formation of solid iron-oxide.

Unfortunately, the use of cognitive conflict in connection with experiments and students' range of experience is limited to the phenomenological level. However, modern chemistry education also has to deal with the theoretical side of chemistry. Modern chemistry is characterised by interdependent, networked thinking in different representational domains. This consideration is in the core of Johnstone's (1991) famous contribution: 'Why is science difficult to learn?' Johnstone explained that learning and thinking in modern chemistry always take place in a constant shift between three different representational domains: the macroscopic, sub-microscopic, and symbolic domain (Fig. 1). If these three domains (including the accompanying levels between the macroscopic and sub-microscopic domains) and their interactions are misinterpreted, scientifically unreliable interpretations will necessarily emerge as a result (Eilks, Möllering, & Valanides, 2007; Johnstone, 1991).

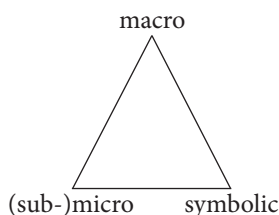


Figure 1. The 'Johnstone triangle'

If there is a mismatch in students' thinking concerning the observable, macroscopic level, we may use a certain experiment to force the students into a cognitive conflict. Unfortunately, the same is not possible with the sub-microscopic domain in school-level chemistry courses. The necessary chemical and analytical technologies are neither available nor applicable in schools. Thus, the domain of sub-microscopic interpretations can hardly be touched upon by observations and experimental learning at the school level. Because of the invisible and non-tactile nature of the particle level, chemistry education deals with the sub-microscopic domain almost exclusively on a theoretical, model-based approach. Instead of phenomena and experiments, the use of models is believed to lead to a theory-based understanding at the sub-micro level. We use models to help us better understand phenomena at the sub-microscopic level. However, even the process of learning about models and using them correctly is a difficult task in itself (Justi & Gilbert, 2002a, 2002b).

To aid the learning process on the sub-micro level, scientific models are used and illustrated using static (e.g. Brandt et al., 2001) or animated visualisations (e.g. Williamson & Abraham, 1995). Such visualisations in a stable format are available in every textbook for secondary school chemistry. With advanced improvements in modern ICT, animated visualisations have also become readily available for teaching and learning. For example, computer-generated animations and simulations are now available on the internet for nearly every common topic within a typical chemistry curriculum.

Research suggests that the use of visualisation can foster students' learning of model-based explanations of the sub-microscopic world. Pictures, animations and simulations are powerful tools for teaching and learning chemistry. There is great potential in the use of these visualisations, because they help foster students' understanding of three-dimensional structures (Williamson & Abraham, 1995), aid in developing learners' spatial abilities (Barnea & Dori, 1999), provide a resource for reducing students' misconceptions about basic chemical principles (Kozma & Russel, 2005b; Sanger & Greenbowe, 2000; Yang, Greenbowe, & Andre, 2004), and increase students' motivation when learning about chemistry (Tsui & Treagust, 2004). Ardac and Akaygun (2005) as well as Stieff (2011) or Plass et al. (2011) showed that students could perform better when working with dynamic visualisations, in comparison to working with static visualisations. The study of Noh and Scharmann (1997) indicated that instruction with visualisations of the molecular level can help students to construct more scientifically correct conceptions. The positive effect of dynamic visualisations could be increased when the students have to create their own drawings based on them (Zhang, 2011). Niaz and Robinson (1993) stated that the ability of students to visualise is

important in solving conceptual problems. Levie and Lentz (1982) summarised the research about the effects of static visualisations and pointed out that the use of text-redundant visualisations can not only help the learner to understand the text, especially when they are poor readers, but also can support learning by evoking affective reactions.

However, animated visualisations are believed to have decided advantages over static images (Mayer, 2003). Animated visualisations add details, which can support an understanding of the sub-microscopic world far beyond the potential of static pictures alone. They allow us to visualise the dynamic nature of the sub-microscopic world and can lead to a better understanding of the underlying chemistry concepts involved (Sanger & Greenbowe, 2000; Williamson & Abraham, 1995; or Kozma & Russell, 2005a, 2005b; Yang, Greenbowe, & Andre, 2004). However, static visualisations are more readily available, i.e. in typical textbooks, and can more easily be copied by the students into their notebooks.

At any rate, there are also hindering factors reducing the principally positive potential of static or animated visualisations when learning chemistry. Such negative aspects include an inadequate demand for the use of meta-cognitive competencies (Azevedo, 2004; Schwartz, Andersen, Hong, Howard, & McGee, 2004), discounting a lack of students' prior knowledge (Shapiro, 1999), overestimating learners' ability to recognise and use proper spatial relations (Lee, 2007), and not taking into account limited learner attention spans when viewing animations (Ploetzner, Bodemer, & Neudert, 2008), or the need of the learners to make relations between the symbols used in the visualisation and the chemical concepts they represent (Jones, Jordan, & Stillings, 2005). However, this is the case in any other field of learning.

In summation, we recognise promising potential in the use of static and animated visualisations or graphically presented simulations for teaching and learning chemistry. However, this potential is not self-evident (Schnotz & Bannert, 2003). Beyond the generally positive potential of graphics in the classroom, the danger also exists that visualisations themselves may hinder or even sidetrack the learning process (Eilks, 2003; Hill, 1988). Students may remember properly what they have seen in an animation and can make appropriate drawings, but they will not necessarily understand what they have seen (Kelly & Jones, 2007). Learning through visualisations is based on a semantic process that only can lead to successful learning if it is properly related to the prior-knowledge of the learner (Schnotz & Bannert, 2003) and portrays the scientific concept in a correct way (Hill, 1988). Therefore, if effective learning is expected to take place by using visualisations in science education, these visual aids need to be structured under consideration of the learner's prior knowledge concerning the respective

topic or theory. The relationship between the scientifically accepted explanation, the sub-microscopic model chosen for the task, and the modelled nature of the explanation itself must be taken into account (Eilks, Witteck, & Pietzner, 2009, 2010). Additionally, the visualisations in textbooks often only focus on the details of experiments, but not the scientific process and inquiry that are behind the experiments, which would help the learner to understand the aim of the experiment (Niaz, 1998).

To make the last thought more explicit, we should briefly touch upon two opposing points of view, which are somewhat self-evident, and may even lead us further in our discussion:

- 1) If the learner's preconceptions are scientifically reliable, illustrations should confirm, foster and strengthen them.
- 2) If the learner's preconceptions of a topic are scientifically unreliable, illustrations should induce a cognitive conflict which leads to overcoming the formerly-held ideas.

In both cases, all illustrations need to be scientifically reliable in the foreground of the applied level of theory. They should not demonstrate or call upon incorrect or conflicting explanations.

The potentially misleading character of visualisations of the sub-microscopic domain, from textbooks and the internet

Coming from the abovementioned theoretical reflections, the role of potentially misleading illustrations shall be discussed along with an analysis of illustrations from German chemistry and physics textbooks, and animations from the internet (e.g. Eilks, 2003; Eilks et al., 2009, 2010). The field of interest to be scrutinised in this paper is understanding the states of matter and dissolution. Both of these topics are quite typically found in nearly every curriculum for early lower secondary school chemistry or science lessons.

Research on students' understanding of the central concepts of science is a long-standing tradition. One of the most intensely researched topics has long been students' understanding of the particulate nature of matter. Since the 1970s (Novick & Nussbaum, 1978), large quantities of research evidence has been made available for this topic. Studies have been performed that investigate students' alternative conceptions, how they are related to understanding the states of matter, which changes take place between them, and what types of sub-microscopic, model-based explanations are given for them (e.g. Garnett et al., 1995). The importance of this research for improving the teaching of science

has been widely acknowledged (e.g. Taber, 2001b). Government standards for teacher training have also been instituted, requiring prospective teachers to be aware of the existing evidence on learners' alternative conceptions and to take it into account when they teach (Taber, 2001a).

Regardless, there still seems to be widespread failure in translating and disseminating such outcomes about students' alternative conceptions into practice, which is also the case in many other fields of science education (Costa, Marquez & Kempa, 2000; de Jong, 2000). Moreover, research has also indicated that teachers and teacher trainees themselves often exhibit alternative conceptions in their thoughts and actions, which are similar (or even identical) to their students' conceptions (Goodwin, 2000; de Jong, 2000b; Valanides, 2000a, 2000b). It has also been frequently observed that even curriculum developers and textbook authors do not always take sufficient care to carefully incorporate important research evidence when preparing teaching and learning materials (Eilks, 2003; Eilks, Möllering, & Valanides, 2009).

Our examples look at sub-microscopic visualisations taken from German lower secondary chemistry and physics textbooks for students aged 10 to 15, showing how they deal with the states of matter and dissolution. Secondary school chemistry education in German schools focuses beyond the phenomenological macroscopic level, aiming to offer explanations of and teaching on the sub-microscopic domain. When introducing the states of matter and their changes, students should acquire understanding and develop an internal image of the sub-microscopic world and how it can help us in understanding the macroscopic behaviour of matter and substances. Graphic representations are used because of the inaccessibility of the sub-microscopic domain to human senses. The visualisations are based on an initial, simple model of discrete particles. Central issues within this model include the existence of the particles themselves, their continuous movement, their average kinetic energy depending on the ambient temperature, and the forces and interactions between the particles.

Another central issue is the complete emptiness between the particles. This so-called 'horror vacui' is difficult for students to believe in, because it directly contradicts their macroscopic experiences. In the macroscopic world, there is always either air, water, or some other type of matter present between any two bodies (Novick & Nussbaum, 1978). Every teacher knows the situation of asking students about the particulate nature of matter: 'What does water or air actually consist of?' Students frequently answer: 'Water consists of water particles, air consist of particles of oxygen and nitrogen, etc.' Yet a second question reveals the existing danger: 'But what is between the particles?' Very often the students consider water or air to be between the particles. In this case, water

consists of water particles within a liquid water continuum (e.g. Johnson, 1998; Lee et al., 1993; Novick & Nussbaum, 1978). Effectively, matter is simultaneously described as continuous and yet discontinuous.

The roots of the scientifically unreliable ‘particles-in-a-continuum’ interpretation by the students are clearly understandable. It is, however, more difficult to understand why chemistry textbooks often explicitly depict this continuous type of matter between the particles shown in their visualisations. Many textbook figures colour the empty space existing between particles, which is automatically interpreted in the pupils’ imaginations as being either water or air. This continuum is often made blue for water and shows a surface, just like water in a beaker would have in a photograph. Figure 2 below is remarkable, mainly because of the blue background presented behind or between the particles. Figure 2a draws a direct parallel between the macroscopic phenomenon and the particle-based explanation, effectively mixing two separate domain levels together: the macroscopic and the sub-microscopic level. The graphics shown in Figure 2 have great potential for provoking or fostering in inexperienced students similar incorrect thinking that is not in line with chemical theory. The examples taken from these textbooks correlate directly with research evidence on students’ potential misconceptions about water and any other types of liquids. Students often consider liquids to consist of different types of particles dissolved in water, e.g. water consists of water particles in liquid water, or alcohol consists of alcohol particles in a continuum of water (Stavy & Stachel, 1985).

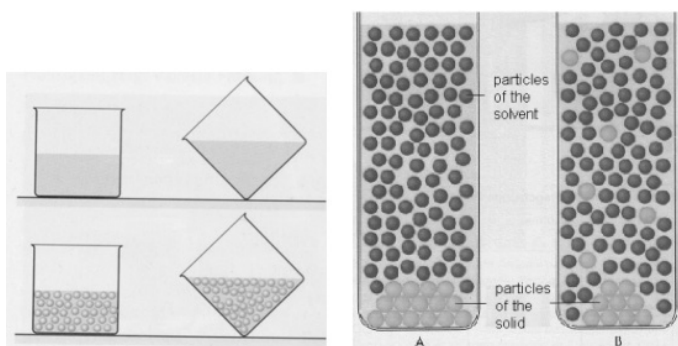


Figure 2. Model visualisation of liquids and dissolution: (a) connecting the macroscopic behaviour of a liquid to the sub-microscopic model explanation, with a liquid represented as if it were made up of particles within a blue continuum, implying that it would be the continuum causing the macroscopic

behaviour (Kuhn, 1996), and (b) particles of the solvent shown in green, particles of the solid in yellow within a blue continuum showing that liquids are made by different particles 'dissolved' in a continuum (Tausch & von Wachtendonk, 1996).

Figure 2 also suggests that a liquid is made up of particles within a continuum. However, it also portrays a concept showing that the particles in a liquid might be spread from each other. This also is reported in research findings on students' alternative conceptions. Evidence has shown that students often have difficulties in correctly estimating and expressing the distances between particles in the different states of matter (Johnson, 1998). It seems quite easy for them to accept that particles in the solid state are packed closely to each other. Large particle distances in the gaseous state are also readily accepted, although the average distances in the gaseous state are very often perceived as being much smaller than they actually are. It is easy to see why many students consider particle distances in the liquid state as being somewhere in between those in the gaseous and solid forms. Sometimes pupils even use the arithmetic mean between these two states of matter to form their ideas of approximate inter-particle distances in liquids (Johnson, 1998). Figure 3 shows us a representation of just such a remarkable distance.

In Figure 4, the arithmetic mean is even explicitly suggested. However, to understand the phenomenological behaviour of substances in the liquid state, one of the most basic and essential ideas is the idea of incompressibility. This is important for any type of hydraulic applications of liquids. On the sub-microscopic level, the incompressibility of liquids is caused by the fact that the distances between the particles are very small. There is no free room to move them much closer by external pressure. The particle distance in liquids is very near to the particle distances found in the solid state. Every scientifically coherent model representing the liquid state will thus avoid large gaps between the particles. The second important point in understanding phase changes in matter is that going from the solid to the liquid phase only requires minor changes in volume. The volume changes dramatically when going from liquid to the gaseous state, yet Figure 4 seemingly suggests that there is a major increase in particle spacing occurring during the melting process, which eventually ends in the over-inflated particle distances shown in the middle container. The given particle model-based visualisation used in this textbook suggests this interpretation has been scientifically proven and accepted by all teachers of science, thus giving it credence in the learner's eyes. Unfortunately, such an interpretation is a complete contradiction of the macroscopic behaviour of matter.

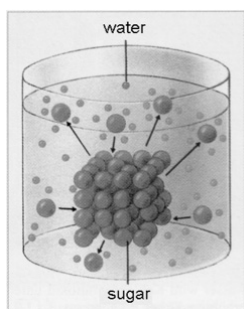


Figure 3. Dissolution: Water particles in blue, sugar particles in green, continuum in blue (Häusler & Schmidkunz, 1996)

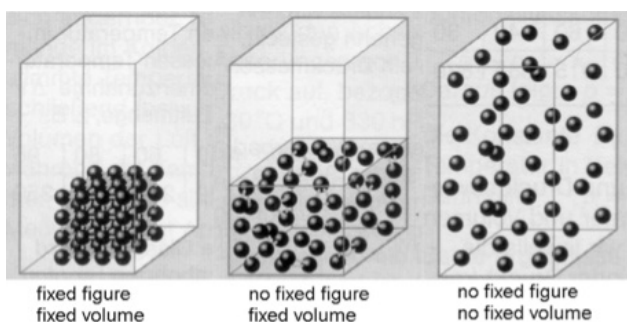


Figure 4. The three states of matter: spheres in black, continuum in blue (Bredthauer et al., 1993)

Figures 2b and 3 also introduced a second, very common topic in initial chemical education curricula: dissolution. In introductory chemistry education, the topic of dissolution is normally also explained at the sub-microscopic level by using a simple model of discrete particles. Students often explain dissolution as the spreading of particles into the solvent continuum. In this case, the students sometimes neglect the particulate nature of the solvent itself (Andersson, 1990; Stavy & Stachel, 1985). These ideas are also frequently found in textbooks, e.g. see Figure 5.

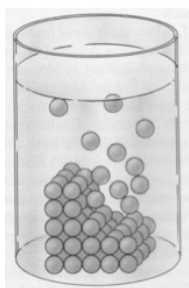


Figure 5. Dissolution - spheres of the solid in orange, continuum in blue (Fischer & Glöckner, 1994)

Discussing the illustrations presented here may help us illustrate exactly how students' thinking is affected by these visualisations. If the learners are not explicitly made aware that Figure 5 is a visualisation of dissolution on the sub-microscopic level, they can arrive at completely different, but very rational interpretations. In answering 'What will happen next?', some of our student teachers in different teacher training seminars mentioned that only particles from the very top of the 'crystal' are moving away. All of these particles also happen to be depicted moving upwards. The resulting interpretation was that small balls, like table tennis balls, are fixed to each other at the start, but are now moving away from each other. In the end, we might expect a carpet of balls on the surface of the liquid to form. Another interpretation was that bubbles of an orange gas are rising and will pop upon reaching the surface, like in sparkling water. Another interpretation was the distribution of bubbles from each other. The students were led to think that the bubbles will at some time pop within the liquid, thus leading to an orange-coloured liquid as the end result. All these interpretations are plausible and sound, in and of themselves. Unfortunately, they do not have anything in common with the commonly accepted, sub-microscopic model explanation of dissolution. The scientifically accepted theory is different. Theory does not consider dissolution to be driven by the solving substance or the particles of the solving substance. Dissolution is caused by the particle-particle interactions taking place between the particles of the solvent and the particles of the solute. These interacting forces and the free movement of the particles of the solvent cause the process of dissolution. If there are no solvent particles, a scientifically correct explanation is not possible using the visualisation presented in Figure 5.

Similar examples for confusing students with unsuitable visualisations can also easily be found in the internet. Figure 6 relates to several misconceptions from the literature on science education research. One misconception concerning the particulate nature of matter is pupils' understanding of particles within a continuum (Novick & Nussbaum, 1978). We can see an explicit visualisation in the animation on the left. Students often do not accept that there is empty space between the particles. They consider the particles as being 'dissolved in air or water' (Johnson, 1998). Within this interpretation, the students consider water itself to consist of 'water particles' within a continuum of liquid water (Lee et al., 1993), see above. We can see this in the animated visualisation on the left: the particles are 'dissolved' in a grey continuum, which seems to belong to the water (in the solid and liquid state) without being defined in more detail. The particles later move into a continuum of air (or into completely empty space).

Students often interpret macroscopic changes by describing them with similar changes occurring on the sub-microscopic level (Lee et al., 1993). Whenever matter is no longer visible after a chemical change, it seems to disappear, and they transfer this concept to the particles too (Osborne, Bell, & Gilbert, 1983; Stavy, 1990). We can see this in the animated visualisation for evaporation shown on the left: The particles disappear after having left 'the liquid'. Also, students sometimes have the idea that new substances or particles are formed during evaporation, ones which had not been part of the initial liquid (Osborne et al., 1983). This scientifically incorrect concept is portrayed in the right animation (lower picture): the water molecules are generated inside the bubbles within the boiling water. The same concept is visualised in the left picture: particles are continuously leaving the grey continuum without affecting the total number of particles 'in the liquid' or the grey continuum. Finally, students sometimes think that particles in the liquid state have considerable distances between them. The distance is often emphasised as being somewhat similar to the mathematical mean of the distances in the solid and the gaseous states (Garnett, Garnett, & Hackling, 1995; Johnson, 1998). Just as we saw from the textbook illustrations, we can observe similar distances represented in both of the animated visualisations.

The figure clearly shows how these findings relate to two learning aids in the form of animations from the internet, including how they each visualise the alternative conceptions explicitly. Many other examples exist that specifically deal with commonly known alternative conceptions among learners for both this topic and for many other topics in the internet, e.g. Eilks et al. (2009, 2010) gave a detailed discussion of the mismatch still occurring between current research evidence and classroom materials prepared for visualisation of the Daniell voltaic cell.

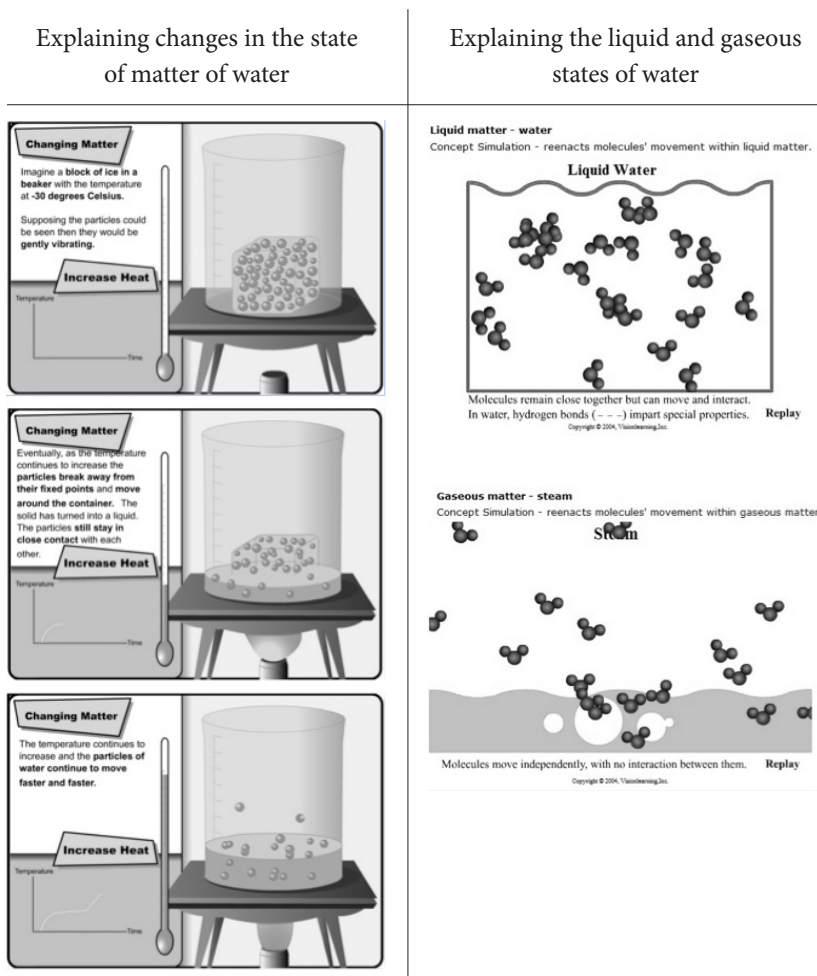


Figure 6. Animations of the states of matter and phase changes. The animations support the students in keeping alternate conceptions about the chemical concepts shown in the animations.

(www.bgfl.org/bgfl/custom/resources_ftp/client_ftp/ks3/science/changing_matter/index.htm and Carpi, A. (2004). 'Matter: States of Matter,' Visionlearning, CHE-3(1). www.visionlearning.com/library/module_viewer.php?mid=120. Both retrieved on November 01, 2008.)

While discussing animated internet visualisations of electrochemical cells in Eilks et al. (2009, 2010), we started our argumentation by referring to the time before WYSIWIG ('What you see is what you get') technology became established in the late 1980s. WYSIWYG was developed for real-time

visualisation on the computer screen of work actively in progress. Until the shift towards WYSIWYG, text editors and graphic tools were unable to accurately depict materials on a computer screen and simultaneously alter them in real-time. Frequently, this led to various, unpleasant surprises when printing out a hard copy of the material after having changed it. Modern computer programs can correctly display fonts, page layouts or graphic elements on the computer screen, while simultaneously editing the respective documents, sometimes even in advance of making the changes.

After drawing this analogy, the question might similarly occur for both textbook illustrations and computer-based animated or static visualisations as discussed above: what is the result when students work with these tools? Constructivist learning theory (e.g. Bodner, 1986) says that information is not simply recorded by the learners, even when learning with visual stimuli. All information is filtered and then re-interpreted in the framework of the learner's prior conceptions. Using the terminology of ICT, learning is never a simple 'copy-paste' process. Therefore, when static or graphical visualisations are used in textbooks or by digital media, we might still be surprised by what the learner's mind produces after having learned with any visualisations.

The reason behind this is neglecting to maintain a thorough focus on the target group selected for the visualisations, in this case learners of initial chemistry. Textbooks and teaching aids on the internet are, in most cases, written by experts in chemistry. These experts know what exists behind the concept being employed. The experts know what the correct interpretation of the respective visualisation should be. For experts, just like the authors of textbooks and also most other teachers, these illustrations are easily understandable and may be helpful in supporting their imagination. High-level consumers are able to intentionally understand which model is being used, which domain level of representation is being referred to, and which aspects within the visualisation are (or are not) important. This is not the case for novices, such as students (Borges & Gilbert, 1999; Coll & Treagust, 2001; Jones & Stillings, 2005; Taber, 2001b). The visualised content is not automatically understood and properly classified. This means that if a student is on the right path and working in a self-reflective manner, he or she will experience a cognitive conflict between the learned concept and the misleading visualisation. However, if the learner is insecure, uninformed or chooses the incorrect path of interpretation, incorrect ideas and/or foreknowledge may be strengthened and confirmed in the wrong direction.

Textbook and media authors need to more thoroughly reflect upon the most effective pathways for visualising at the particle level in chemistry education. Research findings summarising students' alternative conceptions offer a

helpful foundation for such reflection. Research evidence may help us determine whether an illustration actually expresses an alternative student conception and, thus, may actually be misleading. The same must also hold true for chemistry teachers who spontaneously portray the particle level on the blackboard. A concise knowledge of the alternative conceptions possibly existing in the heads of our pupils may lead us to a more sensitive, meaningful use of visualisations and help these illustrations do their proper job, just as we expect them to. This means helping students more easily understand and learn scientifically acceptable aspects of the particulate nature of matter. It also entails avoiding the construction of previously non-existent misconceptions in our learners and an avoidance of false reinforcement in the case of already existing false concepts (including carefully defusing such incorrect ideas).

Another far-reaching implication of the discussion above is scrutinising the mechanisms of curriculum development and teacher training. Because of the inaccessibility of the sub-microscopic level to direct human senses and its model-based character (e.g. Johnstone, 1991), chemistry teaching is reliant upon the use of different types of visualisations. From research findings, we know that explicitly dealing with models in science, and understanding their true nature is not an easy task. Neither the students (Grosslight, Unger, Jay, & Smith, 1991) nor the teachers have a sufficient understanding of models and modelling in many cases (e.g. van Driel & Verloop, 1999; Justi & Gilbert, 2002a, 2002b; Sprotte & Eilks, 2007). One of the main failures in using models to explain sub-microscopic phenomena in chemistry is frequent mixing of model-based sub-micro level occurrences and the 'real world' phenomenological level. This is the reason that students and textbook authors are tempted to embed particles of water in a water continuum, both in their imaginations and in the visualisations discussed above. This means that both teachers and the authors of such learning materials first and foremost must develop a sufficiently elaborated understanding of scientific models and their use in their own minds. Taber (2008) plead for the development of a specific curriculum for teacher trainees that explicitly emphasised learning about models and modelling. This would develop not only teachers' content knowledge, but also expand their Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK) of models and modelling in science education (van Driel & Verloop, 1999). We agree with this position. Additionally, this position might be connected thoroughly to specific elements of teacher training focusing students' development in Multiple Literacy with a focus on coping with the use of digital media in our today's world (Fehring, 2010). The above discourse, just like the one previously presented in Eilks et al. (2009, 2010), was started from many teacher training seminars showing that

reflecting visualisations in the foreground of educational research on students' alternative conceptions, i.e. those that are obviously misleading, can sensitise student teachers and teachers to this problem and build up their skill in self-reflection and in analysing learning materials.

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Christenson, S. and Reschly, A. (Eds.) (2010).
Handbook of School-Family Partnership. New York:
Routledge, Taylor and Francis. 544 p., ISBN 10: 0-415-
96376 / ISBN 13: 978-0-415-96376-3.

Reviewed by JOHN W. EAGLE¹ AND SHANNON DOWD-EAGLE²

SANDRA CHRISTENSON, Dr., received her Ph.D. in Educational Psychology (School Psychology) from the University of Minnesota in 1988. She is a prolific author, having contributed to over 100 articles or book chapters and five books on topics including school-family partnerships and student engagement. Noteworthy accomplishments include the prestigious 1992 Lightner Witmer award from the American Psychological Association for early career accomplishments, the 2005 Blanche F. Ittleson Award for her research related to school-family partnerships, and the 2007 recipient of the Senior Scientist Award from APA Division 16 in recognition for career-long contributions and scholarship to the field of School Psychology.

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The assertion that school and family contexts play an integral role in the academic, behavioural, and social-emotional development of children is unquestionable. Although research efforts have often explored the respective contributions of these primary systems, recent attention has emphasised the reciprocal influences between home and school contexts as a means to promote learning and to enhance student outcomes. Grounded in ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1992), empirical work has identified numerous benefits associated with the formation of school-family partnerships including improved student performance, increased positive attitudes regarding school, better school attendance, fewer behavioural problems and better study and

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homework habits (Christenson & Sheridan, 2001). The implications of these findings have informed policy decisions and served as driving forces behind educational reform efforts, reflected in several national initiatives including the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (1997) and National Education Goals in the United States.

The Handbook of School-Family Partnerships provides a comprehensive review of theory, research and practice as it relates to meaningful collaboration between families and schools. It is divided into three sections: (I) the theoretical and empirical underpinnings of partnerships, (II) partnership considerations across developmental levels, and (III) the establishment of a research agenda to inform policy and practice. The editors provided a synthesis of themes that were evident in all chapters included in the text:

- It is critical to understand and appreciate the role culture plays in the development of positive home-school partnerships.
- Numerous evidence-based home-school interventions exist that promote the academic, behavioural and social-emotional competence of students across developmental levels.
- Effective home-school relationships are predicated upon the belief that families are part of the solution in enhancing student outcomes. They are not the problem.
- The development of constructive partnerships across the primary systems in a child's life is necessary to minimise educational disparities.
- The conditions that support effective cross-setting connections are clear and grounded in research.
- Additional research, particularly related to the terminology, measurement, design and the generalisation of effective practices, is needed.
- It is time to promote a comprehensive, systematic and continuous approach for home-school partnerships.

Section I of the book consists of five chapters, which outline the theoretical and empirical bases of school-family partnerships. The selected authors are experts in the field and provide a high level of professional discourse and vision. They begin with a presentation of the developmental/ecological model as a conceptual framework for current and future research, programs, and public policies related to family-school partnerships and child outcomes. Authors Jason Downer and Sonya Myers clearly demonstrate how both ecological systems and developmental theories are applied when considering the complexities and multiple characteristics of family-school partnerships. Drawing from Bronfenbrenner's (1986) ecological systems theory and Pianta and Walsh's (1996) developmental

adaptation, the authors highlight the importance of understanding the patterns of interactions among key systems in a child's life over time. Based on this theoretical orientation, child development occurs in the context of multiple environmental systems that are interrelated including the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem and chronosystem. The mesosystem, comprised of relationships between primary microsystems, is considered the theoretical cornerstone for home-school partnerships and provides a basis for understanding the reciprocal and ever-changing influences on a child's social, behavioural, and academic success. Chapters 2 and 3 extend the discussion by exploring conditions that facilitate the formation of productive mesosystemic relationships. These contributions provide theoretical and empirical insights into questions such as "what" motivates families and educational professionals to partner and "what" elements are necessary to develop healthy relationships. The authors also examine underlying belief systems, commitment to partnering and the importance of congruence across home and school contexts. Section I concludes with a discussion of culture, the importance of diversity in families and its role in a child's development and learning. Lynn Okagaki and Gary Bingham present empirical research that attempts to evaluate cultural models related to their involvement in their child's education. Cultural and economic diversity are portrayed in relation to parental aspirations and expectations for their child. Nancy Hill extends the multicultural conversation by presenting how culturally-based world views can impact family-school interactions. The author focuses on how cultural and familial beliefs, values, and practices, across ethnic groups affect family engagement in educational settings. Perspectives from African-American, Asian-American, and Latino families are highlighted.

Section II presents nine chapters from researchers who provide empirical evidence supporting the role of cross-setting partnerships in promoting children's competence across developmental levels. This developmental perspective adds to the comprehensiveness of the text that covers areas of academic achievement, social-emotional skills, communication skills, and school connectedness. A common theme in this section relates to the challenges and opportunities for enhancing family-school partnerships in educational settings.

The initial focus of this section relates to the importance of family engagement for student academic achievement. Specific aspects of family-school partnerships explored by authors include: (a) the type of parent-child activities, parent-child relationships, and parenting styles that are associated with a child's academic achievement; (b) enhanced student outcomes, long-term results, and greater academic gains; and (c) the specific impact on reading and mathematics achievement. Other authors concentrated on research-based interventions that

include substantial family engagement, specifically Carolyn Webster-Stratton and M. Jamila Reid discuss the Incredible Years (IY) program and Elizabeth Stormshak, Thomas Dishion, and Corrina Falkenstein present the ECOFit model. Researchers of both programs provide empirical support for the models and how to incorporate these intervention programs in schools. Finally, a discourse surrounding the importance of school-family partnerships for both interventions with young children and the development of such partnerships during adolescent years is provided.

The seven chapters in Section III bring together expert commentary and research to provide a framework for future policy and practice change. The section begins by challenging the notion of the “hard-to-reach” parent and suggests that it is the educational institution, not the families, that are “hard-to-reach.” The adoption of a strength-based approach that re-conceptualises families as part of the solution, rather than the problem, is at the heart of family-school partnership research. Throughout this section, several authors provide empirical support for the formation of constructive home-school relationships including increases in parents’ reported feelings of self efficacy, improved family well-being, enhanced child functioning and competence, deeper understanding related to the roles all parties play in child development, and improved student achievement. Although a strong empirical base exists, the need for additional research was a consistent theme identified by contributors to the Handbook. Several authors outlined conceptual and methodological concerns including issues related to terminology, measurement, design and generalisation of practices. In response to the need for more sophisticated measurement, structural equation modelling was offered as a promising approach for future research. The implications of research advancements on policy and practice are also discussed in this section. Authors Heather Weiss and Naomi Stephen highlight that current thinking about educational reform has adopted a broader view, emphasising the role of family, school and community partnerships in minimising educational disparities. They contend that the next step is to move beyond “random acts of parent involvement” (Gil Kressley, 2008) to promote a comprehensive, systematic and continuous approach for home-school partnerships.

In conclusion, the editors of this comprehensive volume have put together an array of state-of-the-art research and discourse related to family-school partnerships. They have provided a text that effectively balances research and practice. It is an essential body of reading for educators and researchers alike. The theoretical and empirical support for family-school partnerships is clearly outlined, as is a framework for how to maintain and enhance these partnerships in the future. The editors and authors have created an exceptional work that presents

technical, empirical data in a format that is easily digestible for practitioners. It is an essential component to any school, district, or academic institutions that is interested in developing more effective school-home partnerships.

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Letna naročnina (letnik 1, 2011, 4 številke). Posamezniki 45 €; pravne osebe 90 €. Naročila po e-pošti: info@cepsj.si; pošti: Revija **CEPS**, Pedagoška fakulteta, Univerza v Ljubljani, Kardeljeva ploščad 16, 1000 Ljubljana, Slovenia.

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C·E·P·S Journal

Center for Educational
Policy Studies JournalRevija Centra za študij
edukacijskih strategij

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