Israeli teachers' attitudes toward parental involvement in school: A qualitative study.

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The aim of this qualitative study is to gain in-depth understanding of teachers' views and attitudes toward parental involvement in school. Twenty seven Israeli elementary-school and secondary-school teachers were interviewed and asked to define *parental involvement*, their feelings toward it, and its challenges and benefits. Our findings revealed relatively high level of inconsistency between declared positive attitudes and perceived challenges and threat. This inconsistency manifests a need for significant progress in teacher-parent relationship in Israel. The practical implications of this study are that training programs should be constructed to improve teacher-parent collaboration, focusing on ways of reducing teachers' tension and enhancing their understanding of the possibilities and potential outcomes of parents' involvement.

Introduction

Parents' involvement carries a double meaning, referring both to parents' participation in the educational process (Cooper, Lindsay, & Nye, 2000; Stevenson & Baker, 1987), and parents' expectations and beliefs regarding academic achievement. In both cases, it refers to parental actions at home and in school aimed at improving their children's educational performance (Epstein, 2001; Epstein & Sanders, 2002; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Hill & Taylor, 2004).

What had started as occasional help elicited by teachers has evolved to parental participation in setting school policies, fundraising, participation in school events, and information exchange, all done on a voluntary basis (Ratcliff & Hunt, 2009). At home, parental involvement includes discussions of educational matters, supervising the child, helping with homework, and maintaining ongoing communicating with school personnel (Berthelsen & Walker, 2008).

Parents' involvement in school has proven to be beneficial not only to children's functioning, but also to parents, teachers, and to the development of the entire community (Addi-Raccah & Ainhoren, 2009; Freer & Watson, 1999; Sanders & Lewis, 2005; Tam & Chan, 2009). Such involvement leads to better attendance, higher scores on standardized tests, higher motivation to study, better attendance, and improved behavior at home and in school (Akos, 2005; Darch, Miao, & Shippen, 2004; Epstein, 2008; Ferrara & Ferrara, 2005; Griffith, 2001; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Izzo, Weissberg, Kasprow, & Fendrich, 1999; Koutrouba, Antonopoulou, Tsitsas, & Zenakou, 2009; Kruger & Michalek, 2011; Loges & Barge, 2003; Sanders & Lewis, 2005; Sheldon & Epstein, 2004). Studies reveal that parental involvement improves their attitudes toward school and toward the educational team and increases community support. When join their children in school activities, parent-child relationships are enhanced (Bempechat, 1992; Greenwood & Hickman, 1991). Koutrouba, Antonopoulou, Tsitsas & Zenakou (2009) claim that greater cooperation with parents is accompanied by greater teacher motivation to improve and enhance their instruction methods.

Alongside these benefits of parental involvement is school, the research reveals often

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involvement is limited. Teachers call upon parents for help mostly during the annual or semi-annual teacher-parent conferences, and middle-school and high-school teachers note that they communicates with parents only in cases of the child's negative behavior or achievements (Epstein, 2008). However, while teachers express positive views toward parental involvement (Addi-Raccah & Ainhoren, 2009; Huss-Keller, 1997; Koutrouba et al., 2009; Loges & Barge, 2003), they also express negative views and criticism (Baum & Swick, 2007; Ferrara & Ferrara, 2005). According to Baum and Swick (2007), "teachers (particularly those new to the field), may minimize family involvement opportunities, as a strategy to avoid potential conflict" (p. 580).

Why do teachers not tap the available resource of parental involvement? To begin with, there is an inherent conflict between the roles of parent and teacher in a child's education (Sanders, 2009). A teacher's primary responsibility is to make informed decisions about what is best for the education of *all* children, while a parent's primary responsibility is the education of his/her child. More often than not, these conflicts can be managed amicably but they also can lead to deep distrust and suspicion on both sides. Additionally, educational teams are not sufficiently trained for working with parents (Baum & Swick, 2007; Epstein & Sanders, 2006; Ferrara & Ferrara, 2005; Radcliffe, Malone & Nathan, 1994; Ratcliff & Hunt, 2009), and their negative attitudes toward cooperation with parents could hinder parental involvement (Baum & Swick, 2007). Such involvement could also be hindered by contextual and cultural elements (Ratcliff & Hunt, 2009; Souto-Manning & Swick, 2006), and by parents' diminishing interest in involvement as their children grow up (Berthelsen & Walker, 2008; Epstein, 2008; Nord & Zill, 1996; Vaden-Keman & Davies, 1993). Indeed, it has been observed and documented that parental involvement in education decreased with time and drops dramatically when children reach middle school (Henderson & Mapp, 2002). Other researchers (Epstein and Dauber, 1991; Tozer, Senese, & Violas, 2006) found that elementary- school teachers, more than middle-school teachers, believe more strongly that parental involvement is important for students. Consequently, they provide more opportunities and help for parents to be involved in their children's education.)

Furthermore, teachers state that parents are not always interested in being involved (Dauber &

Epstein, 1993; Epstein & Dauber, 1991). At the same time, teachers hesitate to involve parents because they believe that they – the teachers – are the experts in their field and that they alone should deal with content that pertains to their profession only (Ranson, Martin, & Vincent, 2004).

The various attitudes and degrees to which parental involvement in school is manifested may stem from the fact that such involvement is not clearly defined. Epstein (2007, 2008), has made a major contribution to this issue, having constructed a six-dimensional model of family involvement, which emphasized teachers' central role in creating the relationship with parents. Epstein's dimensions of family involvement are parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with the community, and the model is used to train teachers to direct all parents to cooperate (Epstein, Sanders, Simon, Salinas, Jansorn, & Van Voorhis, 2002; Sanders, 2008).

Parental Involvement in Schools in Israel

When established in 1948, the Israeli educational system was completely centralized, uniform, and bureaucratic, and parental cooperation with school was minimal (Friedman & Fisher, 2002; Noy, 1999). In the early 1980s, primarily in response to the decrease in state-funded educational services decreased, parents were called upon to increase their financial support of the educational system. This encourages parents to "put their mouth where their money is," and they began demanding greater influence on curricular and funding issues (Noy, 1999). Beginning in the mid-1990s, the Israeli Ministry of Education set a policy of home-school collaboration, a policy fraught with a great deal of tension between teachers and parents, as the teachers did not feel sufficiently backed and empowered by their superiors (Fisher, 2009). The parties differ as to the amount and nature of involvement, and these disagreements, combined with poor performance on the PISA tests (PISA, 2010), have led the Ministry of Education to perform a sweeping reform throughout the educational system. In addition to structural reforms, the plan calls for recognizing the parents as significant factors in the children's formal education, emphasizing the system's commitment to communicate openly with parents on a regular basic and to work in a coordinated and structured

7

way to achieve and to define mutual educational goals (Ministry of Education, 2011).

Research Scope and Objectives

Teachers feeling toward parental involvement in school, and their experiences of such involvement, are the issues investigated in this study. The research tool was a four-question research protocol, developed specifically for the research, with questions covering the way teachers define parents' involvement, their feelings toward it, and their perception of its strengths and challenges. Many studies of parents' involvement and family-school relationship use quantitative methods, and provide a wide understanding of teachers' perceptions of this issue (Adams & Christenson, 2000; Huss-Keeler, 1997; Souto-Manning & Swick, 2006). Following Epstein's six-dimensional model of family involvement (Epstein, 2007, 2008), the current study refers to teachers as the active and the efficient factors in advancing parental involvement.

Method

Participants

The interviewees were 27 teachers (22 women, 5 men) all full-time teachers at the time of the study. The teachers taught in three different elementary schools and four secondary schools, with an average student population of 474 for the former, 549 for the latter. They worked in a small (population 40,000), middle-class town in the north of Israel. The town is predominantly (92%) Jewish, of whom 27.8% immigrated to Israel after 1990, mainly from the former Soviet Union (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2008). The teachers interviewed were middle class, age 26-52, had a teaching tenure of 3-26 years. Most were native Israelis, six had immigrated from the Former Soviet Union, two from South America, and one from the United States; 17 (63%) were class-room teachers, the others taught specialized subject matter. Special education teachers were not included in the selection. All the teachers stated that they were aware of the term *parental involvement* to some degree. Some of them met this issue collectively through school activities (lectures, workshops, or seminars), or individually (through talking about it with other teachers, or reading about it).

Sampling Method, Procedure, and Data Collection

The researcher wrote school principals, seeking their approval to interview teachers in their schools. After the principals of the seven participating schools consented, the researcher attended a pre-scheduled teacher's meeting, explained the research to the teachers, and asked for their participation. Next, the researcher set a time for an interview with each of the teachers who agreed to be interviewed. All interviews were private, face-to-face, took place in school, and were recorded with the interviewee's permission. Confidentiality was guaranteed before starting the interview. Participants could elect to withdraw from participation in the study at any time. Interviews were conducted from January 2010 to July 2010.

Research Instrument and Data Analysis

In this qualitative study of teachers' attitudes toward parents' involvement, the grounded theory approach was employed (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Patton, 1990). Participants were invited for personal semi-structured open interviews. This interview format give the participants the opportunity to expand and clarify their answers, and to give examples, allowing the researcher to clearly discern the themes that emerged from the interviews. The interviews were carried out in accordance with the four-question research protocol designed for this study, aimed to take a close and profound look at teacher's personal views on parents' involvement at school. The four questions emerged from the main purposes of the current study: (1) To learn about the way teachers define parents' involvement (How do you define the term "parental involvement in schools"?); (2) To learn about their feelings toward parents' involvement (How do you feel toward parental involvement in schools?); (3) To understand teachers' perception of the challenges of parents' involvement (In your opinion, what are the main (if any) challenges and difficulties associated with parents' involvement?); (4) To understand teachers' perception of the strengths and benefits of parents' involvement (In your opinion, what are the main (if any) points of strength of parental involvement?). After completing the interviews and a careful writing of their content, the researcher analyzed the data using a content-analysis approach. The interviews were compiled and read, and a thematic coding

scheme was developed (Bernard & Ryan 1998; Sabar Ben-Yehoshua, 1995). first a search was done for systematic, repetitive, visible, and direct content. The researcher then referred back to the content, checking for frequency of appearance (objective measure) and her interpretation of their significance to the interviewees (subjective measure). During the interpretation process the content was divided into groups and prominent themes identified and labeled. For example, in the theme "Disrespect and mistrust," statements such as "…. She [the mother] said I wasn't acting like a professional" and "a mother told me that I

obviously didn't know how to control her son, and that she forbade me from punishing him in any way" were subsumed in that theme within the "challenges" research protocol question (see Table 1).

Results

Content analysis of the findings was conducted. For each interview question, themes were listed in the order in which the questions were asked. Table 2 presents the themes identified in every question, by age level.

Table 1

Summary of the research findings: Themes for research question by school level

		Elementary (n = 15)	Secondary (n = 12)
Definition of parental involvement	Volunteering	13 (86%)	11 (92%)
	Supporting the child in his learning	11 (73%)	4 (33%)
Feelings toward parental involvement	Positive attitudes	8 (53%)	8 (66%)
	Criticism, tension	12 (80%)	6 (50%)
Challenges	Getting parents to collaborate	11 (73%)	7 (58%)
	Miscommunication	6 (40%)	5 (42%)
	Helicopter parents	6 (40%)	7 (58%)
	Disrespect and mistrust	9 (60%)	7 (58%)
Strengths	Communication and trust	10 (66%)	8 (66%)
	Appreciation	5 (33%)	3 (25%)

Note: Most of the interviewees suggested more than 1 theme to each question.

Question 1. How do you define the term "parental involvement in schools"?

As shown in Table 2, two main themes were identified regarding this question – Volunteering and Supporting the child in the learning process.

Volunteering.

The vast majority of the teachers interviewed (13 out of 15 elementary-school teachers, and 11 out of 12 secondary-school teachers) defined parents' involvement as volunteering and helping the teachers, especially when the involvement entails help with activities and chores initiated by the school. The most cited examples were fundraising, organizing fairs, accompanying the class to outside school activities, participating in

parents' committees, and helping the team wherever possible. The teaches claimed that parental involvement means asking for the parents' help in various activities, and it is the parents' response to the teachers' request creates parental involvement. Hagit, an elementary school teacher said:

Parental involvement is a when parents are involved in school activities. They mostly help around in organizing and running school events in school, fundraising for various goals, etc. When parents are involved they become part of the whole picture of school activities.

According to this definition, teachers mainly define parental involvement by parents' actual in-school activity, and the needs are defined by the teachers.

Supporting the child in the learning process

Supporting the child in the learning process, the second theme derived, meant involvement with homework and projects, and overall supervising a child's learning and expressing interest in it. According to Table 2, more teachers in elementary schools (11 out of 15) than in secondary schools (4 out of 12 respectively), emphasized this kind of parents' involvement. Inbal, an elementary-school teacher said:

Being an involved parent means showing interest in what the child learns and in his assignments. It means following up on the child's learning and help as needed.

Inbal's definition differs from Hagit's, who limited parental involvement to hands-on activity in school. Inbal's definition of parental involvement includes parent-child interaction, usually at home.

Question 2- How do you feel toward parental involvement in schools?

When referring to this question two major themes were identified which might be seen contradictory – the first was Positive attitudes, and the second Criticism and tension.

Positive attitudes

The findings listed in Table 2 indicate that, for the most part, the teachers have positive feelings toward parental involvement. This feeling was shared by 8 of the 15 elementary-school teachers, and 8 of the 12 secondary-school teachers. These teachers wished for more parental involvement, and understood that it benefits children's progress. Responses such as "It's great," "I'm OK with it," and "I really think it's important" were frequently heard.

Tali, one of the Israeli elementary-school teachers said:

Parents' involvement is important. I know that in many cases, when I work closely with the child's parents, I can see how the child benefits. In various ways he learns better or is better behaved.

When faced with the general question "How do you feel toward parents' involvement?" teachers give positive answers, expressing identification with its goals, and stating the benefit for students.

Criticism and tension

Most interviewees (12 out of 15 elementary-school teachers and 6 out of 12 secondary-school teachers) shared their hesitations about working with parents, and caution with such engagement. At times, they expressed these feelings almost in the same breath with their positive views. . The findings in Table 2 reveal that those feelings were more emphasized in the elementary-school teachers' group, who referred to *helicopter parents* as a special burden and to those who question the teacher's authority and professionalism. When parents do not trust the teacher's judgment, their mistrust may lead to inappropriate, contemptuous behavior. Exposure to such behavior is a source of tension and insecurity t for teachers, as expressed by Ana, a secondary-school teacher:

Parents can be very difficult sometimes. They may have something negative to say about the amount of homework I give or the kinds of assignments the children have to submit. It might be very tiring.

Some teachers have difficulties getting through their daily routine with parents hovering over them, and overall, the findings reveal a note of ambivalence regarding teachers' feelings toward parents' involvement. Together with positive feelings, teachers also expressed their reservations and the difficulties that accompany parents' involvement.

Question 3 – In your opinion, what are the main (if any) challenges and difficulties associated with parental involvement?

Four themes, the highest number derived from the interview questions, were identified in the answers to this question. The themes, as shown in Table 2, are: Getting parents to collaborate, Miscommunication, Helicopter parents, and Disrespect and mistrust. Following is a detailed description regarding these themes.

10

Getting parents to collaborate

The difficulty to get parents to volunteer and collaborate with school initiatives was an issue mentioned by more than half of the interviewees (11 out of 15 elementary-school teachers and 7 out of 12 secondary-school teachers). Parents' reluctance to cooperate was related to in-school activities organized by school personnel, (e.g., Parents' Day, teacher-parent meetings, lectures, or group learning activities). The teachers' criticism of parental low level of involvement made allowances for parents' lack of free time, and the fact that they have other priorities. As Shira, one of the elementary-school teachers put it:

Sometimes it's difficult to get parents' cooperation. For example, if two parents are needed for two hours in the morning to escort the children to an outdoor activity, like a museum or theater, I might find myself sending the same email message over and over again. It takes time until someone agrees to help.

Miscommunication

Miscommunication, according to the teachers (6 out of 15 elementary-school teachers and 5 out of 12 secondary-school teachers), is the difficulty of maintaining open and frequent communication with parents, especially with the parents whose children needed close and consistent attention. Nurit, a secondary-school teacher said:

I have a child in my class who has severe behavior problem. I understand that to achieve any improvement I need the parents on my side. Unfortunately, they are not capable of keeping in touch with me, usually avoiding me. Once I called the mother in the middle of the day due to some problem, and she said: "Just handle him as you see fit, I can't help you right now". Help me???

Helicopter parents

Some teachers (6 out of 15 elementary-school teachers, 7 out of 12 secondary-school teachers) referred to helicopter parents, who are overly attentive to everything that happens in school. Often these parents question the teacher's authority side with the child when there is a teacher-child conflict. The teachers found these parents to be a burden, and one that doubts their professionalism. Helicopter parents are very involved in every detail of the class's daily routine, an involvement that is not comfortable for the teacher. Rachel, one of the elementary-school teachers explained:

I have a mother in my class who can bother me few times a week, asking me a lot of questions like what exactly was the homework, whether I can move her son to a different seat, give less homework. She never gives her son a chance to cope on his own.

Disrespect and mistrust

Many teachers (9 out of 15 elementary-school teachers and 7 out of 12 secondary-school teachers) brought up the theme of Disrespect and mistrust. Elementary-school teachers mentioned feelings such as tension, disappointment, fatigue, disrespect, and ungratefulness. Some of the teachers felt negative attitudes on behalf of the parents, and said that the parents do not know their place, and do not appreciate their work. Hedva, an elementary-school teachers said:

…I was once asked by a mother to change her daughter's grade. She said that her daughter had worked very hard before the test and the grade us wasn't appropriate. She said I wasn't acting like a professional.

Question 4 - In your opinion, what are the main (if any) points of strength of parental involvement?

Two main themes were identified regarding teachers who find parents' involvement at school to be empowering. The themes were Communication and trust, and Appreciation.

Communication and trust

Over a half of the participating teachers (10 out of 15 elementary-school teachers and 8 out of 12 secondary-school teachers) claimed that they can build trust and gain parents' cooperation by keeping the parents informed and updated regarding their children's progress. Teachers feel it is their responsibility to nurture good communication, and that such communication leads to more positive parental attitudes and greater willingness to participate in school activities. Hadas, an elementary-school teacher said:

…If I know how to be proactive and build trust between parents and teachers, it can simply work between us.

Appreciation

This theme was proposed by 5 out of 15 elementary-school teachers, and 3 out of 12 in secondary-school teachers. These teachers stated that they feel encouraged by parents who do not take them for granted and value parents' expressions of appreciation and positive attitude. Such positive feedback encourages teachers to respond more positively to parents and to involve them more. Chanita, one of the elementary-school teachers said:

In some cases parents do know to show their appreciation. They send a thank-you note or just come out and say that they appreciate what I do with their child. That means a lot to me, it gives a sense of meaning to my work.

To conclude, the findings indicate that teachers define the term *parental involvement* mainly as volunteering in school and supporting the children in their learning process. Over half the teachers interviewed valued parental involvement, and the difficulties do not deter them from being empowered by collaboration with parents.

Discussion

Israeli teachers' attitudes toward parental involvement in school were investigated, with the aim of reaching an understanding that transcends the verbal statements. The findings indicate that the teachers, both those teaching in elementary schools and those in secondary schools, express positive attitude toward parental involvement and are empowered by it, confirming findings in previous studies. (Addi-Raccah & Ainhoren, 2009; Finders & Lewis, 1994; Huss-Keeler, 1997; Koutrouba et al., 2009; Loges & Barge, 2003; Tett, 2001; Tozer et al., 2006) . According to these studies, teachers found parental involvement to be important to students' social, emotional, and academic performance. However, the positive attitudes related only to financial and administrative aspects (Fisher, 2009); teachers were reluctant to discuss curricular issues with parents (e.g., Epstein, 2001; Koutrouba et al., 2009), feeling that this would usurping their authority. It seems that the teachers find parental

involvement helpful and beneficial, as long as the parents comply with their guidelines and stay away from matters they feel are solely their domain.

The positive attitudes were accompanied by reservations and tension. Here too, teachers from elementary schools and secondary schools mentioned the difficulties in getting parents to collaborate, and spoke about miscommunication, disrespect, mistrust and the challenge of dealing with helicopter parents. Other difficulties involve actually recruiting parents to school activities, teachers' tendency to avoid discussing professional matters with parents, and a simple lack of time. Epstein (2008) also found that although the teachers believed that parental involvement is important, 97% of secondary-school teachers "noted that working with parents is one of their biggest challenges" (p. 12). Some teachers tend to avoid contact with parents (Cullingford & Morrison, 1999), and some tend to communicate mostly with parents of younger children (Tozer et al., 2006).

Problems with teacher-parent communications could also be attributed to teachers' tendency to resist any type of parents' involvement in areas they perceive as purely professional (Fisher, 2009; Ranson et al., 2004), lack of time to communicate, lack of awareness of the importance of parental involvement, and cultural and language differences between teachers and parents (Bonia, Brouzos, & Kossyvaki, 2008; Sanders & Lewis, 2005). As indicated by Fisher (2009), it was found in the present study, too, that many of the Israeli teachers who were interviewed described difficulties getting parents to collaborate, handling parents who question their authority, interfere, and are overprotective of their children. The interviewees also spoke about difficulties with parents who do not show respect and trust, and who have reservations about the teachers' work.

As noted, parents' involvement decreases as children get older (Epstein & Dauber, 1991; Henderson & Mapp, 2002), and our findings are consistent with this finding. As expected, there were differences in the way elementary-school and secondary-school teachers defined parental involvement, with more elementary-school teachers than their secondary-school counterparts emphasizing the theme Supporting the child in his learning. In keeping with the idea that parents' involvement decreased with their children's growing up, one can anticipate lower rates of

tension among secondary-school teachers because the teacher – parent interaction also decreases. However, our findings indicate quite the opposite – all teachers (elementary and secondary) expressed similar tension, challenges, and ambivalence toward their relations with parents in all the themes identified, perhaps due to the afore-mentioned challenges of the Israeli educational system. Israeli students perform poorly on international assessment tests (PISA, 2010),[1] school violence is on the rise (Benbenishty, Zeira, & Astor, 2000), parents and students disrespect teachers (Fisher, 2009), and there is an overall decline in the social status of the teaching profession (Friedman & Fisher, 2002). The erosion in the Israeli teacher's status, the growing feelings of helplessness brought about by the undermining of teachers' and parents' authority (Freidman & Fisher, 2002; Omer, 2002), together with parents' dissatisfaction with the education system and mistrust of it, are possible reasons for the sensitive relations between teachers and parents in Israel (Addi-Raccah & Ainhoren, 2009; Fisher, 2009; Friedman & Fisher, 2002).

In an attempt to rectify this situation, the Israeli Ministry of Education initiated an educational reform in 2008, to be gradually implemented. This partial implementation only adds to the tenuous position of Israeli teachers and increases their ambivalence toward parental involvement.

As mentioned, elementary-school teachers in particular, tended to define *parental involvement* primarily as volunteering and supporting the child's learning process. Volunteering refers to parents helping teachers in such areas as escorting the class to outdoor activities, helping in decorating the class, or collecting money for parties. The teachers tended to see parents as involved when they fulfilled their expectations regarding special needs and requests, and followed the teachers' instructions (Finders & Lewis, 1994; Tett, 2001). In Epstein's (2001)

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[1] In 2011, a significant improvement was reported in math, science, and reading comprehension, in TIMSS and PIRLS international progress report (http://www.iea.nl/fileadmin/user_upload/General _Assembly/52nd_GA/GA52_TIMSS_PIRLS_2011.p df) . However, a relatively small number of students participated, and as this is a single measurement, it is too soon to estimate the actual improvement.

broader view, teachers can see themselves as active partners, enabling and expanding the parents' possibilities to volunteer. Using questionnaires, teachers can survey parents and create a pool of all available talents, times, and locations of volunteers. Schools should encourage parents by providing a meeting place for volunteers at school, a shared space where ideas and projects can be initiated and developed, extending parents' help beyond ad hoc action. However, it is the teachers who must initiate the circumstances that will lead to achieving such levels and quality of volunteering, and this will be added to their already overloaded list of responsibilities. At the moments, teachers do not implement Epstein's meaning for the volunteering act (2001), and call upon them only on an as-needed basis, without investing the time to create a data pool – even an informal one – of parents' abilities and availability.

Aside from volunteerism, teachers viewed parental involvement as supporting the children's learning process, being aware of the studies themselves, not only grades. These parents kept abreast of the subject matter, made sure to remain informed of grades and special assignments, and helped the child with studies when needed. However, here too, none of the teachers – elementary or secondary – offered any initiative, such as guiding parents, instructing them on how to monitor, or discussing schoolwork at home. Although teachers encourage parents to support their children with their homework, Finder and Lewis (1994) demonstrated, and this finding was repeated in our study, that such help often relies on parents' knowledge, skills, and intuition, and not on effective learning tools provided by teachers. Quite possibly, if teachers were to guide parents to make learning at home consistent with that in school, parents' work with their parents might be more effective. This suggestion is based on previous research conducted in the United States (e.g., Epstein 2007, 2008; Ratcliff & Hunt, 2009; Sanders, 2009), if teachers guided parents so that learning would be consistent at home with school, the results of parents' work with children might be more effective.

Conclusion and Implications

The teachers in this study acknowledge the benefits of parental involvement. The findings indicated that teachers seem to be in favor of such involvement, understand the importance of

collaborating with parents, and are also empowered by parental involvement. But while acknowledging the benefits, the teachers in the current study hold back and are somewhat reserved, expressing relatively high levels of ambivalence about making parents active partners in their children's learning. When weighing the positive attitudes expresses against the challenges and obstacles cited, a clearer picture of teachers' ambiguity and reserved attitude emerges. Because they expect no gratitude or acknowledgement, teachers may find it difficult to be forthcoming in their relations with parents, and are concerned that they will not meet parents' expectations. Therefore, they seek help only in immediate practical matters, refraining from allowing the parents entry in to what they consider their professional turf. Teachers' reluctance to include parents in their work may be a result of parents' criticism of teachers, and this criticism stems from the relatively low achievements of Israeli students.

Our findings show the need for significant progress in teacher-parent relationship in Israel. To that end, teachers must feel more secure with parents. In case of disagreement with parents, teachers should feel that they are able to handle the situation with respect and confidence, while knowing they are backed by their superiors. Extra

training programs for teacher-parent collaboration are required in order to enhance teachers' understanding of the possibilities and potential outcomes of parents' involvement. Teachers will not initiate programs for collaborating with parents unless they are more confident about the boundaries of such involvement. When both parties are clear as to their roles, teachers and parents could increase their collaboration for the benefit of the students and the community, together coming up with new ideas and implementing them.

Limitations

The current study has several limitations, first among them the ability to generalize our findings to the entire Western population. Second, the interviewees were middle-class teachers from a similar socioeconomic environment, and it is likely that interviews with participants in different areas, and from different social backgrounds, might have led us to other results and insights. What was clear, however, was that the teachers voiced honest opinions, and it is the authenticity of their answers that are a main contribution of the current study of this study of teachers' attitudes toward parental involvement.

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