Home-School Relationships in Primary Schools Parents' Perspectives.

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This paper presents the results from the second phase of a case study exploring home-school relationships in Cyprus based on parents' perspectives. Interviews with parents indicated that they understood that home-school co-operation might benefit children's attainments, emphasising the family's role in education and in formation of character. Parents confirmed that current home-school relationships were limited to parents' meetings and routine communication with teachers. Many parents however emphasised that the nature of home-school relationships depended upon the teachers' approach and suggested that teachers should initiate more contact and increase the frequency of meetings. Some parents were also critical of other parents who were seen to create problems and not accept teachers' views. This suggested that improvement of home-school relationships would be challenging and could vary from a parent to parent. The relationship between school culture and orientation of the family to that culture is not straightforward and mediated implicitly through the child's social behaviour and academic achievement. The current situation in Cyprus suggests that school teachers bring two key constructs to home-school relations: one relates to children's conduct, character and manners; the other to learning, acquisition of knowledge and academic attainment. Where there are concerns about either of these, teachers regard it as the parents' responsibility to address them. Parents meanwhile acknowledge the dominant role of teachers in defining the home-school relationship and accept that the nature of the relationship depends upon the parent as well as the teacher. However, they would welcome more opportunity to renegotiate this role.

Keywords: Home-school relationships, parental involvement, family, Cyprus

It is generally accepted that the family is one of the most important influences on the education of the children. In fact, parents are the first educators of children. Their influence is of paramount importance in a range of stages in the life of a child. Moreover, the literature indicates that parents' involvement in schooling can affect significantly their children's school attainments (Fan & Chen, 2001; Epstein, Sanders, Sheldon et al., 2009).

Until recently in Cyprus, there has not been much emphasis paid to home-school relationships. At the present time, however, Cyprus is in a process of improving its educational system through implementation of educational reform that proposes more independence for schools. One aspect of this independence will be the cultivation of appropriate relationships between the home and schools in order that parents will become important partners involved in the educational process (Committee of Educational Reform, 2004). Hence there is a particular stimulus to examine the present partnership situation through the eyes of parents, as well as teachers, since parents' voices can give an important steer in the establishment of more effective home-school relationships.

Accordingly this paper aims to examine the current home-school relationships, and parents' views, reported practices aspirations and expectations about further involvement.

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Research Question

The research questions investigated are:
1) What are current reported practices of parents with regard to home-school relationships?
2) What are parents' aspirations, views and understandings of parental involvement in education?

Context

The centralisation of the educational system of Cyprus has led to the development of one-way relationships with the home (Georgiou, 1996a) in which the nature of involvement of parents has been determined and controlled by schools and teachers (Georgiou, 1996b). Previous research conducted in Cypriot primary schools led to the conclusion that home-school relationships have been limited to providing oral information to parents about their children's performance (Symeou, 2002), mostly through the establishment of a preset, weekly visiting period in which parents can meet the teacher and discuss their child's achievements, behaviour, and related issues (Symeou, 2008). Teachers appear to have avoided giving any written information to parents that reports children's progress and academic achievements. It seems, however, that they mostly send notes to home when behavioural problems are observed (Symeou, 2002).

Symeou (2007) suggested that teachers have preferred to have formal relationships with parents, whilst ten years earlier Georgiou (1996b) had indicated that parents wished to become more involved in their children's education. Teachers, however, are not in favour of written or telephone communication, even though parents regard immediate and direct information about their children as one of their priorities (Symeou, 2002). Furthermore, each school has a Parents Association (PA) in which parents, generally from higher socio-economic status (SES), have typically been involved. Their main concerns have been to provide financial support to the schools (Georgiou, 1996b). Their role, however, is not to deal with important school and educational issues (Edwards & Redfern, 1988) or to participate in any decision-making process. Interestingly, political parties influence the PA elections in some central urban schools (Georgiou, 1995). As a result, often parents taking part in the political arena of Cyprus participate in the PAs of schools have power and networks in order to influence school matters (Georgiou, 1996b).

The present paper, focusing on parents, comprises one element of a broader case study involving teachers, parents and children that aims to examine the home-school relationships in Cypriot primary schools. In a previous paper in which the teachers' views were reported (Zaoura & Aubrey, 2010), it was found that home-school relationships, as presented from the teachers' perspective, are to be limited to communication about children's performance, parents' meetings and the organisation of some activities involving parents. Teachers appeared to understand the important role of parents, especially in relation to their child's social behaviour but in learning as well. They see this role, however, as one of helping children with their homework. They also believe that parents could show more interest by communicating more often with the teachers and by regularly attending parents' meetings, in order to be informed by teachers. Even though teachers recognise the valuable role of parents, at the same time they regard some home-school practices as potentially problematic. In particular, they talk about parents intervening in their job and they try to keep a distance in order to guard what they perceive as their professional role.

Background Literature

The involvement of parents in schooling includes a variety of parenting practices (Balli, 1996) that leads to various definitions (Harris & Goodall, 2007). This arises because such practices span visits to school through to participation in the leadership of the school, all of which can be placed under the same umbrella term of 'parental involvement' (Brito & Waller, 1994). Hence Ho (2009) highlighted that individuals may interpret the term of parental involvement in their own particular way. Indeed, parental involvement has two possible locations and may be focused on the home as well as the school. As noted by Ho (1995: 40), a more comprehensive definition of parent involvement as a process of mobilizing the potential of parents both at home and in school may be proposed 'for the benefit of (parents) themselves, their children and the school community'.

Even though constructed typologies have identified different dimensions of involvement (Epstein, 1997; Tomlinson & Ross, 1991; Martin et al., 1997), there is a lack of consensus about

different levels of usefulness and the relative importance of different types of involvement (Georgiou, 1996b). Recent literature reviews have indicated that some indirect home parenting practices such as encouragement, high aspirations and value of education affect children's learning and behaviour (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003) and this raises a question about whether raising of parenting skill is called for (Zaoura & Aubrey, 2010) or working to increase direct participation in schools is best, as Epstein (1997) suggested.

Interestingly Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995, 1997) developed a model indicating the process in which parents are persuaded to increase their involvement as they realise their important impact on children. Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's (1995, 1997) model is presented in Figure 1.

This model presents some factors that influence and determine the involvement of parents (such as employment and family demands, invitations from schools). When parents reach level three, they develop parenting practices that indirectly affect the children's achievements, as children appear to be more confident as learners thus affecting their performance, as Alexander (2010) has also suggested. At this point, parents are able to identify improvement in their children and they recognise their important role, leading them to possess a positive attitude towards their involvement.

Whilst barriers and facilitating factors of parental involvement may relate to home or school and school practices or classroom characteristics are recognised to be important, the focus of this paper is on the contribution of the family. Features such as parents' SES (education, occupation and income), ethnicity and family structure may influence the extent of involvement (Coleman, 1987; Lareau, 1987). Social, economic and cultural differences may contribute to participation or exclusion, whether the barrier is language for minority groups or scarcity of family resources and time in the case of single parents. Bourdieu's (1986) notion of 'capital' as power and as a resource has been widely used to explain the impact of SES where parents' cultural, social and economic capital may afford advantages of confidence, social connection and income or constraints, in the case of families with fewer resources.

In a similar manner, the dominant public (and professional) narrative (or discourse) of good parenting, often 'good mothering', is constrained by class, poverty, gender, ethnicity and marital status (Lawler, 2000; Reay, 1998) that excludes alternative social constructions.

Methodology

A qualitative and interpretive approach was adopted that attempted to understand and capture parents' multiple and constructed views, beliefs and practices (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000) and grounded theory drawn upon to present the findings from semi-structured interviews with parents.

Sixteen parents were interviewed, from six different primary schools that participated in the broader case study research located in and around two cities in Cyprus (Larnaca and Nicosia). These were selected from urban, rural and peri-rural areas which drew on different catchment areas to provide a maximum variation sample of social, cultural and ethnic groups. Furthermore the research was conducted in the fourth, fifth and sixth grades (ages 9- 12). Parents' participants' characteristics are presented in the table in Appendix.

From Table 1 it can be observed that the sample of parents varied in education, occupation, income, nationality and gender.

Analysis

Interview schedules were sufficiently structured to allow the researcher to explore current reported home-school practices from the parents' perspective but also to facilitate the uncovering of more personal aspirations, views and understandings of parental involvement. In terms of analysis, the research questions that framed the interview schedule investigated were grouped in three main areas: views and attitudes; current practices; and future aspirations. The interviews were audiotaped and transcribed.

Key areas that represented parents' current practices, views and aspirations for the future constituted the *a priori* categories were thus generated derived from the questions used in the interview schedules. However new issues and surprises emerged from the data analysis with the help of NVivo software, so grounded categories were also constructed (Freeman, 1998).
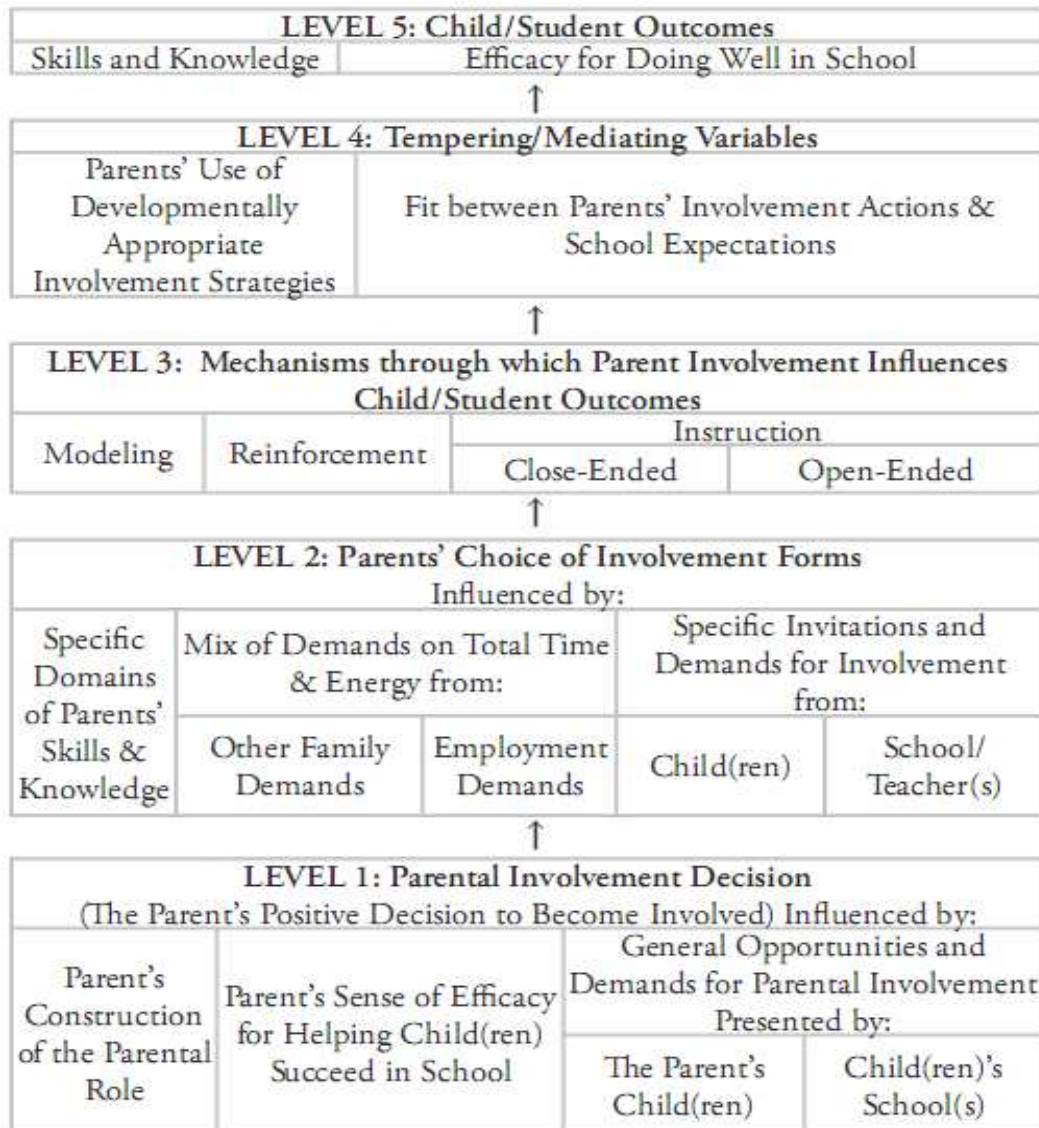
14

LEVEL 5: Child/Student Outcomes

LEVEL 5: Child/Student Outcomes	
Skills and Knowledge	Efficacy for Doing Well in School

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LEVEL 4: Tempering/Mediating Variables	
Parents' Use of Developmentally Appropriate Involvement Strategies	Fit between Parents' Involvement Actions & School Expectations

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LEVEL 3: Mechanisms through which Parent Involvement Influences Child/Student Outcomes			
Modeling	Reinforcement	Instruction	
		Close-Ended	Open-Ended

↑

LEVEL 2: Parents' Choice of Involvement Forms Influenced by:			
Specific Domains of Parents' Skills & Knowledge	Mix of Demands on Total Time & Energy from:		Specific Invitations and Demands for Involvement from:
	Other Family Demands	Employment Demands	Child(ren)	School/ Teacher(s)

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LEVEL 1: Parental Involvement Decision (The Parent's Positive Decision to Become Involved) Influenced by:			
Parent's Construction of the Parental Role	Parent's Sense of Efficacy for Helping Child(ren) Succeed in School	General Opportunities and Demands for Parental Involvement Presented by:	
		The Parent's Child(ren)	Child(ren)'s School(s)

Figure 1. Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler's (1995, 1997) model of parental involvement

Results

a) Practices

Parents' meeting.

All of the parents interviewed stated that they visited schools in the preset hours in order to be informed about their children. The frequency of their attendance in such meetings differed from parent to parent. Some visited teachers three or four times a year, some others once a month and still others only when they were invited individually by a teacher. Four parents stated that they did not attend such meetings as often as they would have liked as they were working in the mornings (Laura, Maria, George and Sofi). Interestingly, it seems that it depended on parents whether they would obtain information about their children's achievements and behaviour. For instance, one mother said:

The quality of home-school relationships is dependent upon parents- whether they are interested to go to parents' meetings and ask for information about their

15

children. Parents have the main role in the education of their children (Elena).

Moreover, Kate stated:

If parents don't go to ask about their children, then they are informed only when their children face serious problems, either behavioral or academic.

Additionally, some schools appeared to organise evening parents' meeting once or twice a year. In such meetings, each teacher met the parents of the class and discussed general issues that concerned parents such as the behaviour of the children, the existence of rules, some tips about how to educate them, and issues related to the academic performance of children (Loukas, Sotos Vera). For instance, a teacher might advise parents about how to help their children to overcome any difficulties they face. These parents believed that the dialogue was a very productive way to take on board ideas and discuss with other parents and the teacher, subjects related to the appropriate upbringing of the children.

Communication.

In terms of written communication that parents received from schools, these were about celebration events, organisation of fairs and other activities but parents tended not to be informed about their children's achievements and progress.

It seems that the teachers determined the communication with the parents of their children. In particular, the majority of parents mentioned that it was only if they went to the school to ask for information that they would learn things about their children. However two parents stated that they interacted with the teacher by calling her, and the teacher, in turn, called them also when something important happened.

Also Reveka mentioned that she had an exercise book for communication in which she could exchange with the teacher or, when the teacher wished to inform the parents about something she would write it in the exercise book. Additionally, Christala and Christopher stated that they could identify how their children got on at school from their tests and the comments of teachers in the exercise books.

Parents' Association.

PAs existed in each primary school in Cyprus. From the sample, three out of sixteen parents were members of the PA (Kate, Lefteris, Stella), and two others had been members in previous years (Costantina, Christopher). The role of PAs seems to be one of support to the school, mainly by providing financial help. Kate stated that the members of the PA communicated with other parents and informed them about problems of the school. These were mostly about material and technical infrastructure and parents tried to provide financial support for the solution of such problems. She continued by saying that nowadays the PA's voice was listened to more than previously, as the Minister recognised the important role of organised parents. As a result, parents could handle other issues, apart from the financial support of the school. Lefteris and Christopher agreed that PAs were responsible for improving the school, providing better conditions for the children of the school, as well as future students.

Stella said that parents organised a range of events, agreeing that the aim was to raise money for the school's needs. A very common practice mentioned by parents, for instance, was the organisation of fairs in which games were organised and sweets and toys sold, in order that the PA raised money to help some poor families of the school as well as to support the school.

Moreover, it seems that recently the organisation of lectures for parents in an evening time, in collaboration with the *School of Parents*, has become a common practice in Cypriot primary schools. Nine parents referred to these lectures saying that, some specialist educated people, like educational psychologists, might be invited to the schools to provide a lecture for the parents about a particular issue.

Interestingly, an emergent category was constructed by three parents, who appeared to be dissatisfied with the PAs. These three parents came from three different schools and they belonged to the low to medium SES. Even though the PA's role was regarded as important for the operation of the school by many parents, there were some parents who stated that they did not like to be involved in such boards and appeared to be strongly against them. Vera, a minority-group parent (Russian) expressed her negative feelings for the PA by saying that she went on one occasion and everyone was talking only about

money, funds, organisation of events to raise money and they did not mention anything about the children.

She continued saying:

They do not talk about important things and they do not operate as a team. This might be my fault and I might feel like this because I don't know Greek well and I am uncomfortable there but I don't like to go there.

It is interestingly to highlight that this mother studied Biology in Russia and was a high school teacher before moving to Cyprus. So, for this mother who came from the field of the education, the discussion of the well-being of the children in school was considered as significantly important in her country, while this attitude was not met by the PA in Cyprus. Yet another parent, Loukas said:

I don't like to be involved in the PA. Parents are involved for personal gain in PA, so that their children will be benefited. I see them everyday intervening and I don't like it, because I don't like to see my children to be in a disadvantaged position, just because other specific children are benefitted.

Christalla criticised the fact that the PA invited her to a range of events, saying that she never went. She explained that she was not attending because the PA remembered the parents when the elections are coming up for the new board but they were not close to parents for other issues. So she doubted the importance of PA in the school's operation.

b) Views

Firstly, it was explored whether or not parents believed that home-school relationships could affect school progress. All the parents strongly agreed that parents have a direct relationship with children's attainments. They recognised the important role of family in the children's education.

For instance, Kate said:

Many times parents might notice problems that their children faced and they should inform the teacher about that in order to work together to overcome any

problem. By contrast, if the teacher observes any difficulties and tells them to the parents, then it's our responsibility to work hard with our child to help her/him to overcome them.

Vera said that when parents visited the school, children felt that their parents cared about them and tried to do better. Additionally, Loucas highlighted that teachers should be informed about the home environment of the children, because they cannot understand what might be hidden in the 'psychological world of the child'. For example, a violent behaviour of a child might be the result of an emptiness that a child might feel due to the loss of a parent, or a divorce. So it should be ensured that the school will support them and protect them and not punish them about their behaviour. Elena, a mother coming from Moldavia, stated that only close home-school relationships can bring good results. Interestingly, Elina, a Russian mother, said that teachers paid special attention to your child when you went to meet them and, as a result, these children could progress in more rapid steps.

Parents expressed views about whether or not they believed that education is the school's or the family's job. Eight parents appeared to believe that education is a joint responsibility of home and school.

Reveca highlighted:

If the parent is not interested, the teacher can't pay attention only to your child. He has many students in the class.

Kate added that nowadays education was the responsibility of both home and school but she believed that this was wrong as schools should have been fully responsible for the education of the children. Also four parents believed that the education of a child is the job of the family (Elena, Lefteris, Loukas, Christalla).

Interestingly, Lefteris believed that the teachers possessed the attitude of "if you want to learn, learn, if not, the parent is responsible for your education" and consequently parents are required to accept this responsibility. Loucas stated that if a child does not have support from home then it is sure that he/she will not make as much progress as the other ones. Finally, the remaining four parents believed that the education of children was mostly a responsibility of schools but parents should help also.

For instance, Sotia told:

Education is by 90% school's responsibility. We know that we have to help nowadays. But I don't agree that the parents should carry more responsibilities than the school.

Sophi agreed:

We are in favour of co-operation but the school is mostly responsible for the children's education. Parents just monitor their children's work.

As far as the role of the family in the discipline and the behaviour of the child was concerned, all of the parents appeared to agree and admit that the behaviour of the child begins in the home. Reveka possessed the following thought: "If the parents do not advise their children, then who is going to advise them?" Lefteris said that the family is the 'alpha and the omega' determinant of the behaviour of the children. Stella added:

Everything happens at home, it is reflected outside of the house as well. So a climate of love should exist in the house, avoiding violence and hate, as whatever a child sees, he/she repeats it as well. Christalla gave an example: "If a child swears at home and this is acceptable to the family, he/she will do it at school as well. If this type of behaviour is restricted at home, he/she will not dare to do it at school".

Sotia mentioned that the education and the development of behaviour of the child begins at home. She continued

…You can't deny helping your child when the teacher mentions that your child possesses some disciplinary problems. It's your responsibility to sit and talk with the child and work with his/her behaviour in order for it to be improved. Our fault nowadays is that we pay much attention to materialism and we are missing the main point of life. This makes them envious, wishing to have everything.

Elena emphasised the importance of home-school relationships to the appropriate development of the behaviour of the children. She said that the child might avoid telling school about something bad she had done at home but the teacher was obliged to mention it in order for it to be taken seriously at home. Kate and Loukas agreed that the communication and the provision of information from teachers about behaviour were of paramount importance.

Parents were also asked if they were satisfied with the level of their involvement. Vera and Elina who they were sales assistants and worked long hours, said they felt that they had to go to school more often but they did not have time. Also Sophie, a bank employee, said that she was not satisfied as she had many other things to do, as she had a young baby as well. The other thirteen parents appeared to be satisfied with their involvement.

There were some parents who saw their children's performance as their absolute responsibility. For instance, George stated:

My philosophy is that everything is dependent on the family. Each problem begins in the family first. For example, if a child faces problems in working in a team or co-operating with other children, this is a fault of the family as they didn't teach their children to be acceptable, to discuss and listen to others.

c) Aspirations-expectations

Parents expressed their views about how they would feel about the increase in the organisation of extra-curricular activities involving parents. Thirteen out of sixteen appeared to be positive. However, four of them had doubts about whether each parent could attend such activities if they were organised in school time. They believed that these kinds of activities were more successful when they were organised at evenings or weekends. Five of them talked about the existence, nowadays, of such activities that were not on a frequent basis. Christopher agreed that there was a need to increase the organisation of such events but he believed that it should not be organised on a frequent basis due to the busy programmes parents have.

Mentioning the positive aspects of these kinds of activities, five parents were focused on developing a relationship with the teachers, that is, the parents as well as their own children. Two parents talked about the organisation of lectures

18

of an educational nature, in order to learn how to raise their children or how to react in specific difficult occasions (Reveca, Kate). Moreover, three parents appeared to enjoy activities in which they contributed by themselves as well, such as cooking or doing handicrafts with children.

On the other hand, three parents appeared to disagree with the increase of extracurricular activities. Elena said that she could organise these kinds of activities individually with her own children. In the school the child should be independent. Lefteris believed that the parents should be more interested in the existing activities first. He believed that the majority of parents were apathetic. Sophi said that improvement in the communication with parents was a more important task than increasing the frequency of activities and events, which she added, were not so important.

As far as participation of parents in school decision-making processes was concerned, the views were divided. Seven parents were strongly against the participation of parents in such processes. They mentioned the fact that those parents tended to intervene for individual gains, being selfish and supporting their own views only. Sophi interestingly stated:

> It is not easy to have the parents involved. People in Cyprus are not working for the good of school, but for themselves and their children. If more responsibilities were given to parents, these parents would need to be selected carefully, selecting the ones who really care for the school.

Also parents appeared to trust teachers saying that they had the knowledge and the skills to handle any issues emerging, leading to the right decisions. Sotia said: "PAs sometimes create conflicts and they might lead to wrong decisions, as they did not work for the good of the whole". George highlighted the danger of creating a chaotic situation. Kate said that it would be a good idea if parents' views were heard but not taking a direct part in the final decision-making.

The rest of the parents appeared to be positive about being involved. Particularly Stella said:

> Parents know better than anyone the right decision that will benefit their children. Parents' views are always for the best of the children.

Laoura talked about a 'discreet' contribution, in the way that parents would not be involved in specifically educational matters.

Parents expressed their views about how they would feel if they had the opportunity to participate in the learning of their children by participating in a class lesson. Six of them expressed the view that they preferred to watch a lesson, rather than teach something. Some parents had already participated in open lessons when their children were in younger classes. It seemed that many teachers did invite parents into the class when children were in the first or second grade, but this practice did not continue as they grew up. In particular, Christalla mentioned that when her child was younger she went into an open lesson which was extremely interesting. She saw the methods of teaching the teachers used and she gained ideas about how to help her child understand certain things. Loucas felt the same as Christalla. George also observed such a lesson and felt that it was really beneficial.

Furthermore, parents believed that it was beneficial when parents taught something in which they were specialised. They shared their experiences describing some events in which parents talked to the children about their job or showed something from the culture of another country, such as cooking a traditional dish. Parents attending these kinds of events appeared to be very excited about them, expressing the view that these should be organised more often as children found them very attractive and beneficial as their knowledge was enriched (Sotos, Kate, Lefteris, Constantina, Sotia). For instance, Kate said that parents might be invited to talk about the customs or religion habits of a country, as they knew them better than many young teachers and these kinds of activities could benefit teachers as well.

Three parents, however, believed that even though these activities were really beneficial they were not easy to organise. For instance, Stella said that teachers were more specialised than anyone else to do that job and parents should leave them to educate their children. Also Kate mentioned that even though the participation of parents in class could benefit children, it was a little utopian to believe that this could be achieved, taking into consideration the fact that the majority of parents were working nowadays. For that reason, Christopher proposed organising such events only sporadically.

Finally, ten parents suggested ways of improving the current home-school relationships. They emphasised the importance of improving communication channels between home and school. Elena, a minority group parent from Moldavia, having a university degree and having a privileged SES background, emphasised that in Cyprus there was a need for better communication, giving more flexibility and freedom to parents to visit the school. She added that the one preset weekly parent meeting period could be restricting for the majority of parents. Also she believed that parents should have the chance to participate in an open lesson in which they could watch how their children behaved and interacted during the lesson. She said that she had asked in previous years for such a lesson to be organised, in order to see for herself how her child was involved in class. She continued: 'I don't want only to hear from the teacher the pros and cons of my child. I need to see them by myself'. Also Vera, a Russian mother, agreed that there was a need for organising more parents' meetings, especially in evening time.

Sotia and Sophi also suggested that teachers should approach parents, sacrifice some time for the parents, especially to the ones who were not close to the school. Particularly Sophi said:

> Teachers should approach parents by sacrificing time to call the parents and inform them about their children. Actually, we are dependent on the availability and the will of the teachers to approach the parents.

Laoura and Stella blamed parents for not establishing good home-school relationships. Laoura said that the transmitter and receiver should co-operate and parents should listen carefully to teachers and not insist that they were right. Stella believed that parents should not be aggressive when the teacher shouted at their child, for example. She noted that parents should support teachers by not being obstacles to their job.

Discussion

The parents appeared to recognise their important role in the education of their children. However the educational system of Cyprus generally and the schools in particular appear to deny them of being more involved. The distance of parents from the school is maintained indirectly, as teachers do not approach them. It seems that schools in Cyprus do not have very good communication with parents that is one of the first stages of the involvement of parents in the majority of typologies (Epstein, 1997; Tomlinson & Ross, 1991). It seems too that lack of communication discourages parents from being involved. The schools do not give them opportunity to engage in the parental involvement process and to deepen understanding of their valuable role. In other words, when a child enters school, parents take an important decision - whether and how much they are going to seek to be involved. As Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995, 1997) highlighted, this first stage is of paramount importance as parents construct their first ideas for their role. Recognising that their contribution is beneficial to their children, they may or may not decide to be involved. However, the system does not seem to develop the means to encourage and keep the parents close to the school and, as a result, teachers lose an important ally and partner that could be on their side.

In our previous paper it was concluded that teachers appeared to expect parents to keep in good contact and communications (Zaoura & Aubrey, 2010). It seems that both sides expect the other to take the initiative to move closer. Parents expect the teachers to inform them and approach them, while teachers expect the parents to communicate and attend parents' meetings and engage in their organised activities. Teachers believe that parents who do not attend parents' meetings are disinterested and they do not try to encourage them, unless behavioural problems are revealed. Indeed, it is extremely interesting to highlight that teachers send written notes to parents only for behavioural problems, otherwise exchange is limited to oral communication for other matters (Symeou, 2002). However the involvement of parents cannot be achieved if, during the year, teachers do not pay attention to parents. Increase in involvement can be achieved only if teachers behave in a more appropriate way by giving up time to consult parents, giving them the opportunity to express their concerns and building together a good and productive relationship. In such a way, parents can be more confident and be better involved in educational processes. The basis of the Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler model (1995, 1997) is explanatory here - if schools fail to approach parents, then they miss

the opportunity to establish productive relationships.

Moreover, it was revealed that PAs in Cyprus appear to handle mainly financial matters, avoiding issues related to the improvement of education for their children. Parents who were involved tended to come from higher SES groups with greater social and cultural capital. They recognised personal and/or political gains from their involvement and influence, either from being a member of a political party or simply in order for their children to benefit. This finding is in line with those of Georgiou (1996b). At the same time, these attitudes of PA members may discourage other parents who are less confident, less advantaged and with less social and cultural capital from becoming involved.

Parents from different social and cultural backgrounds seemed to hold different views about the home-school relationships. In particular, parents who belonged to PAs in general were better educated, had available resources and the networks established. Children coming from higher socio-economical backgrounds were familiar with the accepted behaviours, aptitudes and habits promoted by school. On the other hand, the other students may not be so well-equipped with these skills, knowledge and advantages (Bourdieu, 1986). Their parents may not be willing to participate in PAs if they do not feel that its role is beneficial for all the children. If they doubt the importance of PA, believing that its members work for individual gain, they may be afraid of potential injustices that might ensue. The impact of social and cultural capital of parents in home-school relationships is significant and may go unnoticed. Inequalities may be promoted if teachers remain unaware of its operation in their relationships with all parents.

As far as behaviour is concerned, parents appeared to agree with the teachers that the role of family in the formation of the character and social behaviour of the child is of paramount importance (Zaoura & Aubrey, 2010). They understand that they are responsible for the indiscipline of their children, something that was highlighted by the teachers in phase one, as well. However, they also believe that close home-school relationships can improve significantly misbehaviour in their children.

Furthermore, parents appear to be ready to increase their involvement if the schools can change their practices and actively involve them more. For instance, they are in favour of open

lessons as they are really interested to see how their children interact and behave at class but also because they believe that parents have valuable experiences that they can offer to children too.

Finally a very important issue was revealed - that some parents were critical of other parents and, in particular, the PA. This was due to the fact that some parents disagreed with the intervening of other parents in what was perceived as the teachers' job. There seemed also to be fear that their children might become a lower priority for the teachers. This finding is particularly interesting, suggesting as it may be that some parents were willing actively to challenge stereotypes of 'good' parenting behaviour hence rejecting the constraining conditions and social relations in which they may have found themselves. In so doing, they were seeking to redefine and reconstruct notions of 'good' parenting. It is also a reminder that parents within and across schools may have widely differing views about the nature and extent of parent involvement.

Conclusion

In conclusion, parents in Cyprus understand their valuable role in children's school progress and behaviour. It was identified however that there were limited communications between home and school and parents expect the teachers to take the leading role in approaching them and developing an appropriate relationship.

In particular, in examining current practices it was concluded that these were limited to parents' meetings and participation in activities organised by school or PA. In addition, one-way communication existed in Cypriot primary schools. Specifically, teachers were available to discuss with parents mostly in face-to-face parents' meetings. Any other means of communication developed such as written notices and phone calls were dependent on individual teachers' willingness and were not a school's strategy. This suggests that schools need to empower parents in order that they can become more actively involved in their children's education, regardless of SES, gender and ethnicity. Parents remain a resource to be further exploited.

In addition, by examining the parents' views it can be concluded that parents generally tend to recognise that the establishment of good home-school relationships can affect children's progress. They also accept that they are responsible for

21

their children's behaviour. The majority of parents appeared to recognise that children's learning is a shared responsibility between home and school.

Expressing their expectations about future home-school relationships parents appeared to be in favour of the provision of more opportunities for involvement. Special emphasis was also paid to the improvement of communication between home and school by offering more communication options. Even though the majority of parents appeared to be positive about increasing parental involvement they seemed to doubt the importance of involving parents in decision-making processes. One group of parents particularly appeared to criticise the parents who were involved in PAs, expressing the view that they were not in the position to work for the good of the whole. This suggests that parents themselves may challenge the operation of family capital activated by certain parents in order to take advantage in parental participation if this is at the expense of inclusiveness for all parents and equality of access to school resources. This also suggests that the concept of 'capital' is insufficient in itself to account for parents' willingness (or unwillingness) to take an active role in their children's education.

Another very interesting finding was that some parents appeared to criticise the behaviour of other parents of the school. In this case, one group of parents was regarded as creating problems in schools by causing conflicts with teachers while another group of parents were characterised as disinterested as they were not attending activities and events organised by schools. Clearly, these parents did not conform to generally accepted norms of 'good' parenting and it would be intriguing to understanding more deeply what had led to their negative social construction and problematisation and how this occurred.

It seems after all that social and cultural capital of individual families does appear powerful in influencing the decision of parents to become involved, directly and indirectly. In particular, the school's social and cultural mores and operations match well their own way of life, habits and needs. Their children appear to be prepared to adjust easily to the school's life and parents feel confident to be involved. This may create a kind of hostility between the parents who do not feel so confident to be involved as they fear that their children may not be perceived as equal to others. Indeed, they fear social injustices.

Parents who come from less advantaged backgrounds avoid being involved with the PA as they care mostly for the individual needs of their children rather than the financial support of the school. Unfortunately, this is not one of the priorities of PAs whose members are able to serve the school and the personal needs of their children. Some parents remain distant from schools even thought their children are very young. This picture is worrying as it seems that the perception that parents have of schools with respect to home-school relationships are negative and a gradual decrease of parental involvement may be probably be observed as their children grow up.

So it seems that some parents still need to be convinced of the important influence they can have on their children's schooling and how their involvement can bring positive results to children's attainments. This may be stimulated firstly, as suggested by Zaoura and Aubrey (2010), by helping parents to understand more deeply their role in motivating their children, helping them develop self-confidence, achievement and social adjustment. By entering this process, parents will come to understand better their important role in their children's education and, hence, increase their involvement (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). At the present time, the powerful operation of social and cultural factors underpinning home-school relationships is as yet imperfectly understood.

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Appendix

Table 1. Parent participants

N/N	Name*	Sex	School	Catchment Area	Occupation	Education	Nationality
1.	Kate	F	Georgiou	Rural L	Business (owner)	High School	Cypriot
2.	Stella	F	Georgiou	Rural L	Accountant	University	Cypriot
3.	Laoura	F	Lazarou	Rural N	Theologian	University	Cypriot
4.	Maria	F	Ioannou	Urban N	Shop Assistant	University (Accountant)	Russian
5.	Vera	F	Ioannou	Urban N	Shop Assistant	University (Biology)	Russian
6.	Constantina	F	Andreou	Suburban N	Housewife	High School	Cypriot
7.	Sotos	M	Andreou	Suburban N	Employee / logistics	University (Computers)	Cypriot
8.	Loucas	M	Andreou	Suburban N	Developer/ self-employed	Technical School	Cypriot
9.	Reveca	F	Andreou	Suburban N	Housewife	High School	Cypriot
10.	Christalla	F	Gavriel	Suburban L	Waitress in cafe	Primary School	Cypriot
11.	Christopher	M	Gavriel	Suburban L	Electrical Engineering	University	Cypriot
12.	George	M	Gavriel	Suburban L	Work in waterboard	College	Cypriot
13.	Lefteris	M	Gavriel	Suburban L	Policeman	High School	Cypriot
14.	Sophi	F	Petrou	Urban L	Bank employee (managerial position)	College	Cypriot
15.	Elena	F	Petrou	Urban L	Real estate agent	University (Biology)	Moldavia
16.	Sotia	F	Petrou	Urban L	Work in govermental position	University (Economics)	Cypriot