

## The mismatch between results on parental involvement and teachers' attitudes: is convergence ahead?

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### Resumen

*La falta de coherencia entre la implicación de los padres y madres y las actitudes del profesorado: es posible la convergencia?* En los últimos años, la investigación ha reforzado la importancia de la participación de los padres y madres para promover el rendimiento académico de los estudiantes. Sin embargo, muchos profesores tienen imágenes negativas de los padres y madres en los centros y rechazan su participación en los mismos. En el estudio de caso que se presenta hemos analizado estos aspectos a través de entrevistas grupales con profesorado. La muestra ha estado formada por los profesores de cada nivel escolar del centro, formando así un grupo heterogéneo. El análisis de los datos ha confirmado algunas de las expectativas negativas comentadas anteriormente sobre la implicación de los padres en los centros. No obstante, los profesores parecen dispuestos a cooperar con las familias para promover el rendimiento de los estudiantes. También manifiestan que la legislación debe clarificar las funciones a desarrollar por los padres y los profesores. La conclusión final es que los centros y los profesores pueden cambiar para mejorar las relaciones con las familias y que es responsabilidad de los profesores implicar y ayudar a los padres.

### Abstract

For the last few years research has supported the notion of the importance of parental involvement to promote students' learning and success. However, most teachers have negative images of parental role and show reluctance to parental involvement in schools. The case studies described in this paper was designed to have a better insight of teachers' attitudes using a focus group interview. The sample was constituted by teachers from every grade level forming heterogeneous groups. The analysis of the data confirmed some previous negative results. However, teachers seemed eager to cooperate with families to promote students' success. Also, they acknowledged that legislation could be improved in order to clarify both parents' and teachers' roles. The bottom line was that school and teachers can change for the better and that it is the teachers' job to involve and help parents.

## **Introduction**

For the last twenty years the results of the research we have been involved with have been supporting the notion of the importance of individual parental involvement to promote students' achievement and educational success.

Epstein (1987; 1995) has already synthesized the variety of interventions that may contribute to the building of partnerships among school, family and community. Accordingly, the results of the action-research studies and the experimental studies we have conducted have shown that not only students but both parents and teachers and the community agents changed their attitudes and practices. Also, their self-esteem had positively increased in the process and the cultural differences between home and school seemed to have been reduced. Thus, it can be said that there were advantages for everyone involved.

## **Theoretical framework**

School failure is both a social and a cultural problem inasmuch as its origin can be traced back to the family which often fails to develop school value and interest in education in the child. The assumption that parental influence and home environment play an important role in cognitive development and educational achievement is not new and has been supported by recent theories and research findings. Vygotsky's concept of a proximal zone of development has stimulated a great deal of interest in educational research because higher order mental functions like literacy development and the acquisition of mathematical concepts have their origins in the social and cultural activities of everyday life. Bloom (1982) suggested that parents can be encouraged and helped to alter the highly modifiable characteristics of achievement pressure, activity in the home, language models and work and leisure habits which, in turn, would affect the child's achievement in school. He emphasized that relatively low levels of education or occupational status can provide very stimulating home environments for educational achievements. Since then other studies have offered further evidence that not only parent-child interaction and parents' attitudes are important, but also that parents can be encouraged and helped to work with their children at home (Walberg, 1984; Henderson, 1987; Epstein, 1990; Peng & Lee, 1992; Villas-Boas, 1998; 2001; Guimarães & Villas-Boas, 2005; Redding, 2005, among many others)

It is also important to stress that for successful learning the crucial issue is not home or school, but the relationship between them in order to develop what Seeley (1985) called a “productive learning relationship” (p. 11). As early as 1979, Bronfenbrenner had emphasized the need for supporting opportunities for development to occur not only in the child’s primary setting (home, school) but also in the transition from one primary setting to another. This means that a social, academic, emotional interaction between home and school is conducive to development. Thus, according to the evidence of recent research, school can, by working with the families, meet higher educational standards (Coomer, 1990; Henderson & Berla, 1994; Shen, Pang, Tsoi, Yip & Yung., 1994; Davies, 1996; Davies & Johnson, 1996; Martínez-González, 1996; Villas-Boas 2001; Epstein, 2003; Zenhas, 2004; Martins & Villas-Boas, 2005) which are “impossible to reach without such cooperation” (Moles, 1982, p. 44).

Also, during the past twenty years different practices of either collective or individual parental involvement have emerged across the countries which consistently have supported the notion that the positive influence of families and communities on children’s learning is universal. Various attempts have been made in order to characterise all those different practices. However, Epstein’s typology of family-school-community partnerships (Epstein, 1992; Epstein & Connors, 1994; Epstein, Sanders, Simon, Salinas, Jansom & Van Voorhis, 2002) has been considered pertinent (O.E.C.D., 1996) not only by being wholly comprehensive and widely used, but also by being a “combination of existing practices and ideas for further practices” (Epstein & Connors, *op. cit.*, p. 1).

Notwithstanding, bringing the school, the family and the community together is a challenge in itself, inasmuch as it means crossing traditionally well defined barriers (Davies & Johnson, 1996). Home and schools are distinct social institutions and traditionally “parents and teachers are natural enemies” (Waller, 1932, cited by Bosco, 1982, p. 828), so difficulties arise both from parents and teachers and, sometimes, also from the students themselves.

The first important study on this issue, *Schools and Families in Portugal* (Davies, Costa, Dias, Fernandes, Lima, Lourenço, Marques, Oliveira, Silva, Soares, Villas-Boas & Vilhena) was published in 1989 but, since then, this line of research continued to develop with the help of ethnographic methods, using class observations, semi-structured interviews and questionnaires.

According to those studies, whenever teachers and pre-school teachers were interviewed or answered to questionnaires, almost all of them considered home-school partnerships to be very important. But that was all. The great majority of teachers mentioned that they had a negative image of parental role (Davies et al., 1989; Marques, 1989).

Teachers showed their reluctance to either collective or individual parental involvement in school not only because of their ineffective parenting, but also because they thought that parents in school might negatively affect their professional status (Afonso, 1994; Machado, 2000; Santos, 2001; Silva, 2001).

Differences did exist mainly due to the school context, social class or the students' age (Diogo, 1998; Fernandes, 1997; Monteiro, 2000); Silva, 2001; Villas-Boas, 1996). Therefore, teachers and pre-school educators not only expressed more positive opinions but also acted more positively when they worked in private schools or public schools in rural areas, when they had students from medium socio-economic status families, and when their students attended either pre-school or 7<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> grades.

However, what most surprised the researchers was the existence of striking contradictions. Contradictions between what teachers said and the way they acted (Villas-Boas, 1996; Fonseca, Marques, São Pedro & Villas-Boas, 1998) inasmuch as they believed home-school relations to be important but, notwithstanding, they didn't do anything to implement those relations. Contradictions between teachers' representations of parents' interests and the same parents' expression of their own attitudes and interests were also striking in other studies (Afonso, 1994; Davies *et al.*, 1989; Cortezão & Stoer, 1997; Silva & Vieira, 1996).

The sample of the Villas-Boas' study (1996) was constituted by 40 preschool and Basic Schooling (1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> cycles) teachers from the district of Lisbon who were interviewed. The aim of this exploratory study was to know their perspectives on the implementation of partnerships with their students' families. The study by Fonseca, Marques, São Pedro & Villas-Boas (1998) asked about the factors that conditioned and hindered the implementation of home-school-community partnerships and a sample of teachers from 1195 schools which significantly represented the whole population of all the elementary (1<sup>st</sup> cycle) Portuguese public schools answered a questionnaire which was developed according to the study question.

Table 1. *Teachers' perspectives*

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- Home-school relations are very important
  - What Basic Schooling teachers believe is not what they do
  - Teachers' difficulties are due to external factors
  - Differences do exist due to school context
  - Preschool teachers act more consistently with their values
  - 7<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> graders' teachers act more like the preschool teachers do
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The first four perspectives were later (1998) confirmed by the analysed data of the questionnaire answered by the primary school teachers. These results also indicated the existence of very few contacts (only 41% of the teachers had met all their students' families) and very traditional ones (school meetings between principal and parents, talks with parents who had been summoned to school, written messages in the students' exercise-books). Also, 38% conceded that they were not prepared to implement parent-teacher partnerships and, again, the majority had a negative image of parents, considering either that they weren't prepared (50%) or that they were too busy (70%) to be involved in school activities.

Contradictions between teachers' representations of parents' interests and the same parents' expression of their own attitudes and interests were also striking in other studies (Afonso, 1994; Davies *et al.*, 1989; Cortezão & Stoer, 1997; Silva & Vieira, 1996).

Accordingly to these findings, in most of the experimental studies which were mentioned above the successful partnerships could only have been developed with the help of mediating structures such as partnership experts inside those schools.

However, those study results leave us with another set of questions:

1. Are the contradictions between theory and practice due to the fact that basic schooling teachers think their function is to *instruct* rather than to *educate* children?
2. Why most of the mentioned problems have external characteristics?
3. Why do preschool teachers, in first place, and then 7<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> graders' teachers act differently? Is that because they both feel their job as a *preparatory task*? Is that so because they acknowledge that affection plays a germane role both in development stages such as *adolescence* and *infancy*?

Thus, we had come to a situation where although had proved to be productive and where the current legislation had given the teachers the power to develop those partnerships, their behaviours had not consistently changed. However, this situation also meant that new research was needed.

Thus, in this article, we provide a comprehensive review of recent research both on intervention programs to develop family-school-community partnerships and on teachers' perspectives relating the existence of those partnerships. We conclude with a discussion of unresolved issues and directions for future intervention research.

## Partnerships for successful learning in Portugal

A synthesis of the studies on partnerships between families, schools and community, which have involved more than thirty public schools from first to eighth grades all over the country (a few similarities could be found in all of them: the students came from a medium to low social economic status and in at least four studies they came from minority families and, at the beginning, the teachers didn't seem very enthusiastic about involving parents) has provided evidence that those partnerships can be productive for students' learning and educational success.

The objectives of the most recent of those research studies (Villas-Boas, São Pedro & Fonseca, 2000) were defined as follows: (a) to identify the existing problems relating the relationships between each school, its students' families and the community; (b) to develop strategies in order to involve those families and the community agents; and (c) to improve the quality of education.

### *Method*

The study was part of a larger project that had studied teachers' perspectives in a representative sample of 1195 primary schools (Fonseca, Marques, São Pedro & Villas-Boas, 1998), which has already been cited. So, 25 schools were randomly selected, all over the country, from that larger sample and constituted the sample of this new study.

The action research design was chosen and the intervention programs were designed according to the schools or classes pre-identified problems or difficulties and took place for two years. Also, in each school, an *in loco* expert in partnerships helped teachers not only to verbalize the problems but also to develop learning partnerships with their students, their students' families and with the community in order to solve those problems with the help of Epstein's typology of parental involvement. The teachers involved in the action-research study followed three 25 hour seminars on Parents in Education.

Four experimental groups, one class from each of the four existing grades, were randomly chosen in each school. The other classes constituted the control groups.

The evaluation took place after two years of intervention in only 20 of the randomly selected schools. The reason was that, due to the changing of the teachers involved (in two cases) and lack of motivation in the others, five schools did not complete the action-research intervention.

The evaluation was carried out both (a) from inside each school by the partnerships expert who made a continuous qualitative assessment based on observation of all the activities being developed, and by the 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> grade teachers who evaluated every student's cognitive and attitudinal progression quantitatively through a regularly used standard 5 points scaled questionnaire, at the end of the intervention; and (b) from outside the schools by the project researchers (each school research team was not involved) at the end of the study. The latter data was collected through the home-school questionnaire (Fonseca, Marques, São Pedro & Villas-Boas, 1998): so, the teachers and the principals involved in the study answered again the questionnaire (post-test) which had been answered previously as a pre-test to measure teachers' attitudes, and through a normalised test on reading and mathematics to measure students' achievement. Only the 4<sup>th</sup> grade students were tested and the results were compared with the national sample's (4392 students) results. The respective analyses of data were carried out by experts from the Institute of Educational Innovation (IIE). Also, t-tests were used to compare the achievement rate of the experimental groups with the control groups' in every grade.

### *Results*

According to the partnerships experts, the results indicated that all Epstein's six types of parental involvement were implemented. That information on the analysed activities and respective results will be synthesised in the following Tables 2 to 7.

Table 2. *Type I - School helps families on parenting*

<b>No. of schools</b>	<b>Activities</b>	<b>Results</b>
14 (70%)	Workshops on Development of Parenting Skills	— Improvement of parental involvement in child's education
	After School Activities for Children	— Improvement of parents' own education
	Parents Attending Evening School	— Better home conditions for children
	Collaboration with Social Services	— Improvement of children's behaviour at school
	Collaboration with Health Services	— Improvement of attending rate
	Home visits to Improve Home Conditions	

Table 3. *Type II - Communication between home and school*

<b>No. of schools</b>	<b>Activities</b>	<b>Results</b>
20 (100%)	Establishing Home-School Communications	— Teachers' ability to communicate clearly
	Improving the Relation from Delivering a Service to Partnership	— Teachers became aware of need of informing parents
	Reaching out to Hard-to-Reach Parents	— More parents participating
		— Higher rating at school
		— Students stimulated by P-T meetings
		— Awareness of own progress in subjects & skills
		— More parents coming to school

Table 4. *Type III - Volunteering: families help school*

<b>No. of schools</b>	<b>Activities</b>	<b>Results</b>
16 (80%)	Preparing Materials & Games for Reading Development	— Parents improved self confidence and self-esteem
	Bringing their own Knowledge & Skills into Classroom Activities	— Students gained experience in communicating with other adults + were provided a greater diversity of activities
	Organizing Events	
	Assisting Teachers in Students' Security in Visits out of School	— Teachers gave more individual attention to pupils + recognized and valued parents' efforts
	Helping in Making a Bank of Resources	
	Lobbying the Ministry of Education	— Better time-tables + school functioning

Table 5. *Type IV - Learning activities at home*

<b>No. of schools</b>	<b>Activities</b>	<b>Results</b>
20 (100%)	Interactive Homework Activities	— Completion of HW
	Pupils' Writing Books through the Interviewing of Parents	— Reading + Writing development
	Building a Class Library	— Teachers' use of better teaching strategies
	Parents helping Children write on own Cultural Background	— Parents' better understanding of curriculum
	Families' Writing Stories in Collaboration with other Families	— Parents understanding how to help children learning
	Memos on "How to Help with HW" Memos on "Hints on Children' Learning"	

Table 6. *Type V - Decision making on school government*

<b>No. of schools</b>	<b>Activities</b>	<b>Results</b>
9 (45%)	Constitution of Parents' Association	— Awareness of Families'
	P-T Discussion on Legislation on	perspectives in policies and
	Collective Parental Involvement	school decisions
	Parents Participation on School	— Improvement of school conditions
	Security	
	Parents Participation in	
	Curriculum-related Decisions	
	Parents Participation in Decision	
	Making on School Improvement Teams	

Table 7. *Type VI - Collaboration with the community*

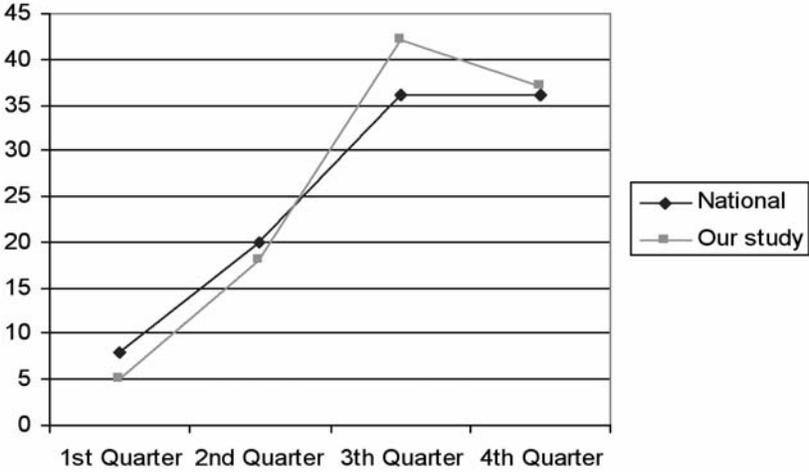
<b>No. of schools</b>	<b>Activities</b>	<b>Results</b>
20 (100%)	Members of Local Authorities joining	— Empowerment of school
	Parents' Association + School Council	— Better school conditions
	School Collaboration with Community	for children
	Agencies and Municipality	— Parents, teachers and students
	Community agents coming to school	knowledge of community
	Students visiting those Institutions	resources
	Municipal Libraries' Collaboration	— Diversity of learning
		— Motivation

It can be said that, in most of the studies, more than one type of parental involvement has often been developed, and that, in a way, all types may have contributed for a consistent and significant (varying from  $p < .001$  to  $p < .05$ ) improvement of students' achievement. Also, according to the teachers' opinion and school records, their in-class behaviour improved and the rate of absenteeism dropped dramatically.

The results found by the outside-the-school evaluation can be assumed as even more impressive. In fact, all the 300 4<sup>th</sup> grade students were tested and normalized tests on Mathematics and Reading were used. The results of these tests indicated that the experimental children's level of achievement had improved not only in comparison with the respective control groups in each school, but also in comparison with the national sample.

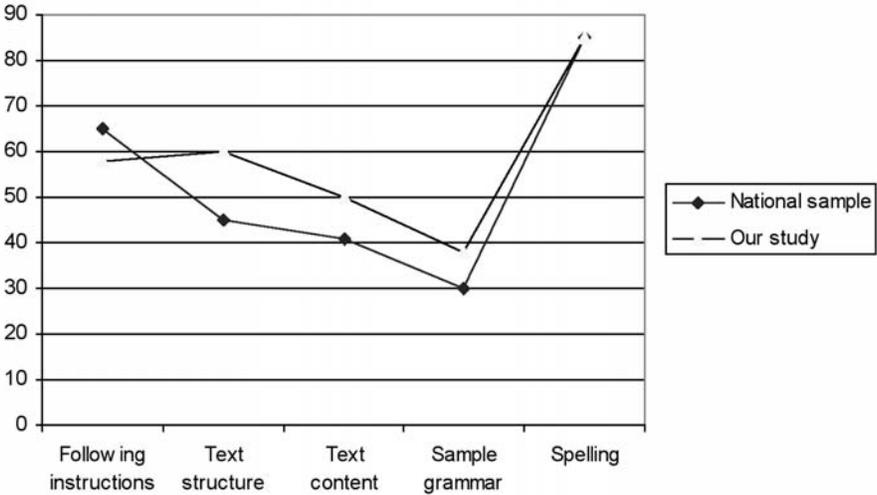
In the Maths Test the mean average (66.6) was higher than the national sample's (63.9) and the results worked consistently through the *Concepts* and *Operations* (Figure 1) and only the very good students (4<sup>th</sup> Quarter) of the national sample caught up with our students.

Figure 1. *Maths Concepts and Operations Test*



In the Reading Comprehension and Writing Test, our sample did better (Figure 2) in every item but one (*Following instructions*) which was more consistent with a teacher-student interaction than with the larger, more interactive strategies that were used in the study and were meant to develop creative thinking in relation to real life and current challenges.

Figure 2. *Reading Comprehension and Writing Test*



The analyzed data of the home-school questionnaire, as can be seen in Table 8, indicated that the situation relating to teachers' attitudes, home-school relations, parental involvement, teaching strategies and community response had positively changed.

Table 8. *Final evaluation: teachers' questionnaires*

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— Increased motivation, commitment and self-esteem
— References to mutual learning
— Teachers establishing further relations with pupils' parents
— Individual involvement of <i>hard-to-reach</i> parents
— Parents' contribution to change + improve teachers' practices
— Development of interactive HW
— Use of more motivating materials
— Surprisingly positive response given by the community agencies

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### **Recent Research on Teachers' Perspectives**

Two orders of studies, using different methodologies, have been developed.

#### *The class tutors performance*

The first group of studies has been using the case study methodology and has focused on class tutors (Guimarães & Villas-Boas, 2005; Martins & Villas-Boas, 2005; Zenhas, 2004). One of the above mentioned cases (Zenhas) followed a qualitative methodology and comprehensively studied the perspectives and behaviour of a class tutor who was well known for her good relationship with parents. So, not only her values were recorded, but also the kind of initiatives she would take to promote parental involvement and the actual activities as well as the results both for the students, the parents and the other teachers of the class were described and evaluated. This teacher has been doing this kind of practice for several years by her own initiative and she admitted that besides the positive effects on students' achievement and behaviour, and the positive partnerships with parents, it has been a highly rewarding experiment for herself.

The two other case studies followed a specific planned intervention which was scientifically evaluated and involved the existence of experimental and control groups.

Questionnaires were used as pre and post-tests in the experimental group to measure the evolution of parents' attitudes towards school and their children's learning and behaviour. The statistical analysis indicated positive significant differences in the post-tests. Also, significant differences between the experimental and control groups were found both in the students' achievement, behaviour and attending rate according to school information. The students' in the experimental groups had better results in all these three variables.

In the second study conducted by Martins & Villas-Boas (2005), as well as in the one conducted by Zenhas (2004), the tutors would take any initiative that would meet the classes' needs. However, here again, the context played its role. While in the first case study some other tutors tried to follow the studied tutor's procedures, in the second study most of the other tutors resented those procedures and even complained about such procedures being developed. Notwithstanding, the other teachers of the class did progressively follow the tutor's practices as they were acknowledging the eventual positive results.

A third study developed by Guimarães & Villas-Boas (2005) relates the case of a tutor who was in charge of five at-risk students from African minority families and took the initiative of visiting their families in order to build a partnership with both the parents and their children. The aim of the partnership was the development of work habits and leisure activities in the family (Bloom, 1982). The followed methodology also involved the existence of a control group so that some variables of the performance of both experimental and control groups could be evaluated and compared. So, all the students were pre-tested on attitudes toward school using a semantic referential test, their achievement was recorded and teachers answered a questionnaire about the students acknowledged disruptive behaviour indicating the kinds of behaviour they most resented. The intervention consisted of regular home visits to discuss the issue and reinforce the families' efforts, and small trips with the families to places either of educational interest or of any other kind of interest. Some of the trips were suggested by the parents themselves. At the end of the school year, it was found out that those students showed more positive attitudes towards school, their achievement had increased and the negative dimensions of their behaviour had diminished and parents seemed more skilful to deal with their children's at-risk situation at home and at school. In comparison with the other at-risk students who also had a tutor of their own but who had not followed a similar experience, the above mentioned changes proved to be significantly different.

Some common lessons could be found:

- a) tutors met regularly (monthly) with parents;
- b) communication functioned both ways;
- c) parents' priorities, students' needs and teachers' pedagogical interests were taken into consideration;
- d) the other class teachers often join the tutors in the Parents' Meetings;
- e) families and tutors would often meet outside the school walls either formally or informally;
- f) teachers were happier as they had acknowledged their students' less disruptive behaviour;
- g) parents' self-esteem seemed raised as they felt more empowered.

In all those studies, parents emerged as collaborators and facilitators rather than partners. Also, parents and teachers seemed to agree that both tutors and teachers emerge as responsible agents for the school and the classroom. However, a relationship seems to have been established and, according to the participants, a productive one.

The results seem to indicate that some tutors, at least, have taken the initiative to follow the current legislation that specifically applies to their own pedagogical function fully and creatively to involve parents in general and, also, hard-to-reach parents, and to develop partnerships with them, their children and some community institutions.

### *Teachers' current perspectives*

The second group of studies (Villas-Boas, Araújo, Costa, Louro, Marques, Martins, Meneses, Morgado, Oliveira, Rodrigues & Santos, 2005) was designed to have a better insight of pre-school teachers', basic schooling and secondary teachers' attitudes and perspectives on school-family community relationships as other set of studies has previously tried to (Afonso, 1994; Davies *et al.*, 1989; Villas-Boas, 1996). However, this time, a different methodology was followed.

First, the focus group technique was used as the methodology of research. The Focus-Group Study aims at promoting the discussion among a group of representatives of a determined population in the presence of a moderator (Amado, 2004). The moderator who, in this case, was a member of the research team has two main objectives: (a) focus the discussion on the proposed theme, and (b) stimulate the interaction among the group members. This way, it was possible to collect data not only about the subjects' own opi-

nions and experiences, but also data from the emergent discussion and from the resulting controversy which provided additional information to the focused theme.

Secondly, the sample was accidental and selected according to four previously defined criteria: (a) subjects had to be representatives of all the education system thus covering the three different basic schooling grades (*First Cycle*, including 1<sup>st</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> grades; *Second Cycle*, including 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grades, and *Third Cycle*, including 7<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> grades), the pre-school education, and the secondary education; (b) subjects had to have some years of practice; (c) they would show reflexive capacity; and (d) they would show willingness to participate. After being selected, the sample was constituted by 36 subjects, twelve men and twenty-four women whose age mean was 32 years old. Then, they were randomly organized into five heterogeneous groups (according to the grade factor) which held separate sessions. None of them had previously met one another.

In the third place, before the moderator introduced the theme of discussion some information on the germane current legislation was issued. So, five documents (one for each group) relating to (a) the Basic Law of the Educational System, (b) the evaluation process, (c) the Parent Association, (d) the school management and (e) the students' enrolment in school were selected to be summarily presented at each session. Then, the teachers and pre-school teachers were invited to discuss their own perspectives and practices, to identify possible difficulties and to suggest ways of improving the situation.

It was evident that some opinions and perspectives changed in a positive way due to the interaction among the focus groups during the process of discussion.

After the data have been analyzed it was found out that the majority of the comments (54%) made by the subjects was favourable to the development of relationships with the families, although differences existed due to teaching grade and age of students. So, pre-school teachers' favourable comments reached 80%, followed by the comments made by elementary students' teachers - *First Cycle* (69%), going down to 45 % (7<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> grade teachers - *Third Cycle*), 35% (secondary teachers) and 31%, (5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grade teachers - *Second Cycle*).

The content analysis of their perspectives indicated that they valued home-school relations and they acknowledged that parents can help resolve many problems with the students and school difficulties. They mentioned

moral development and values, peace and civic education as subjects that should be developed together with the families. Some of the teachers disclosed their own experiences of partnerships with the families and as one of them put it “*When a good dynamic relationship is established between parents and teachers things work out ...it’s Paradise!*”)” Also, they showed interest for continuing teacher education where such subjects could be discussed.

However, some difficulties were acknowledged and, in fact, according to all participants’ opinion, the main existing difficulties related to parents, teachers, and the legislation itself.

So, they expressed their concern relating *parents’* interest in their children’s education and undervalued their role as educators. Some complained that most parents didn’t meet the school efforts to involve them and all agreed that disabled children’s parents acted differently, being more interested and more eager to participate. They, also, might become a bottleneck due to their diversity in terms of socio-economic status, academic level and cultural or ethnic background.

As to the *teachers*, three categories of teachers have been identified: (a) those who definitively favoured home-school partnerships; (b) those who were definitively against them; and (c) a third category of teachers who seemed unaware of the legislation, who had never had much reflexive thought on the issue. Thus, two categories of teachers were accused of preventing the development of school-family partnerships: those who are clear opponents to their existence and those who just don’t feel responsible for the implementation of partnerships and, accordingly, don’t promote parental involvement. Notwithstanding, the latter finally realized that the relationships could be productive for all those involved (students, teachers and parents), providing a clear definitions of rules exists.

As to the *legislation* it was emphasized that it was biased and had mousetraps in which concerned some practices of collective parental involvement.

Despite the identified difficulties, teachers and pre-school teachers believed the situation could be improved and made several suggestions in relation to the current legislation and to the school own strategies.

Thus, the law should clearly (a) define parents’ and teachers’ roles; (b) be more adequate to the current situations in most of the schools; and (c) force the implementation of those strategies which may bring family and school together in order to respond to the students’ actual needs.

For their part, schools could use more creative less formal strategies to involve families and develop partnerships with them. They also expressed

the need for a continuing education to help the acquisition of facilitating methods to perform the above mentioned function.

### **Concluding Comments and Educational Implications**

The analysis of the results confirmed previous data about differences due to age of students (teaching grade) and some negative opinions of parents were also expressed. Alongside with revisited opinions such as lack of parents' time and interest in their children's schooling, some change has been identified.

Thus, this time, the teachers and educators seemed eager to cooperate with families in order to promote students' educational success. Surprisingly, their knowledge of the recent legislation was reduced. However, once having been introduced to the subject, they also seemed eager to increase that knowledge.

One important point for them was that the legislation could and should be improved in order to clarify both parents' and teachers' roles. Although they didn't mention their professional status anymore, they did wish to do their job (instruction) without parents' intrusions. The bottom line in all the five groups was that school and teachers can change for the better and that it is the teachers' role to involve and help the parents and the families.

Given the fact that in recent studies many schools did not know how to implement home-school-community partnerships and that not all teachers and administrators had information how, or found it easy, to involve parents in their children's schoolwork, the use of partnership experts, as mediating structures or facilitators, had been necessary in most of the cases. With the latter studies we have come to the conclusion that teachers' attitudes are changing and that some of them, at least, no longer ask for those experts.

In fact, there seems to be a growing convergence between what they believed to be a helpful means to students' achievement and success - *parental involvement*, and what many of them already do in order to promote it. However, the use of partnership experts should not be neglected and, on the contrary, should be implemented in every centre of schools.

Thus, providing teachers become familiar with the emergent legislation and providing that legislation focuses on individual parental involvement, these studies seem to give us confidence that partnerships between families and schools will be increasingly developed and that the mismatch will be reduced.

So, recently, a new situation seems to be emerging which relates more positively to the concept that the building of partnerships in education brings benefits for all those involved. The data supported the evidence that (a) teachers have begun to act more consistently with their values regarding not only students but also parents and other community agents as their partners in education, and that (b) teachers have begun to realize that they do have a role to diminish the discontinuities between home and school they themselves acknowledge to exist in many cases.

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