

Parents' Involvement in School: Attitudes of Teachers and School Counselors

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This qualitative study compares the attitudes of teachers and school counselors toward parents' involvement in school. The method and procedure is: A semi-structured interview (four open questions on informing parents about school, the child, strengths, and challenges) was conducted with 12 Israeli elementary-school teachers and 11 Israeli elementary-school counselors. The results are: Teachers and counselors saw the importance of parents' involvement in school, although each group expressed different benefits and professional reinforcement derived from their interactions with parents. Teachers expressed more personal difficulties dealing with some parents than did counselors who referred to challenges mostly from an ethical-professional perspective. Implications of the findings are discussed.

Keywords: parents' involvement in school, teachers' attitudes, counselors' attitudes, strength, challenges

Introduction

Parents' involvement in school is of increasing interest to researchers of education systems. "Parents' involvement" is a catch-all term (Epstein, 2008; Hoover-Dempsey, Battiato, Walker, Reed, & DeJong, 2001; Ratcliff & Hunt, 2009), describing such diverse activities as policy setting, information exchange, parent guidance, parental volunteerism, home-based involvement, and fundraising. Recent studies (Anderson & Minke, 2007; Lavenda, 2009; Seginer, 2006) have differentiated between "home involvement"—being acquainted with the learning material and promoting the child's cognitive, behavioral, motivation, academic achievements, and "school involvement"—organization, event planning, or school maintenance.

Can parents' involvement be clearly defined? According to Ratcliff and Hunt (2009), the lack of a uniform and accepted definition can be seen as something of an obstacle in properly using this resource. Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997) focused on parents' attitudes toward school, how these attitudes were manifested at home, and the ways parents' support positively influenced children's educational outcomes.

Epstein's (2007; 2008) six-dimensional model of family involvement could help focus and tighten the definition of parents' involvement. The model covers parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, and collaborating with the community, and emphasizes the need to encourage and direct all parents to cooperate and engage in two-way communication. Epstein's model also calls for the school to relate to the child as a child, not only as a student, and to view both family and community as the school's natural partners in the development and education of all children.

Parents' involvement in the children's learning enhances children's academic achievements, intellectual

skills, and motivation to study, decreases classroom discipline problems and lowers absenteeism, in addition to improving children's self-image (Akos, 2005; Darch, Miao, & Shippen, 2004; Epstein, 2008; M. M. Ferrara & P. J. Ferrara, 2005; Griffith, 2001; Izzo, Weissberg, Kasprow, & Fendrich, 1999; Koutrouba, Antonopoulou, Tsitsas, & Zenakou, 2009; Loges & Barge, 2003; Sanders & Lewis, 2005). Parents' involvement improves parents' attitudes toward school (Bempechat, 1992; Greenwood & Hickman, 1991) and enhances their collaboration with it (Tam & Chan, 2009), while also motivating teachers to seek ever-better instruction methods (Koutrouba, Antonopoulou, Tsitsas, & Zenakou, 2009).

However, with all the benefits on record, interaction and collaboration between teachers and parents are often quite limited. Epstein (2008) reported that many middle-school and high-school teachers admit that they usually communicate with parents only in cases of negative student behavior or achievements. Educational and cultural gaps may also hinder easy and effective communication between parents and the educational team (Chavkin & Williams, 1993; Davies, 1987; Deslandes & Bertrand, 2005; Ratcliff & Hunt, 2009), and parents are less inclined to be involved as children get older (Adams & Christenson, 2000; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005; Simon, 2004). Another factor possibly limiting communication is teachers' negative attitude toward collaboration with parents (Baum & Swick, 2008) and their perception that parents are not interested in being involved (Dauber & Epstein, 1993; Epstein & Dauber, 1991). Quite possibly and understandably, teachers may object to parents' involvement in content that they perceive as relating only to the teaching profession (Ranson, Martin, & Vincent, 2004). Empowering parents to participate in decision-making in school could entail conflict between teachers and parents, and in some cases, teachers may even feel that such collaboration undermines their professional status (De-Carvalho, 2001; Sanders & Epstein, 2005).

The current study addresses the relations between school professionals and parents, focusing on two professions teachers and counselors, who "seem to have distinctive understandings of some basic educational concepts" (Rich & Shiram, 2005, p. 367). Despite overlaps between the two professions, this study proposes that the difference in the professional preparation and philosophy between teachers and counselors may lead to different approaches and means for dealing with challenges in school (Shoffner & Briggs, 2001). This idea is expanded by Rich and Shiram (2005) who claimed that in their professional training, counseling and teaching curricula differ in aim and scope. The teaching program usually focuses on instrumental manners that underscore implications for students' learning and is based generally on the perception that a teacher needs a wide professional knowledge in order to enhance students' academic learning and achievements (Hiebert, Gallimore, & Stigler, 2002; Rich, 1993). The counseling program aims to improve one's awareness of self and others, and focuses on normal and abnormal processes of development, theories, and diagnosis of individual, group, and organizational problems (Rich & Shiram, 2005). Thus, "The counselor education curriculum probably encourages thinking about school-related situations and concepts in a more comprehensive manner than the narrower perspective emphasizing student learning nurtured by professional teacher education" (Rich & Shiram, 2005, p. 368).

In addition to the differences in training and philosophy, teachers and counselors work under very different conditions vis-à-vis students and parents (Rich & Shiram 2005; Sabers, Gushing, & Berliner, 1991). Working conditions, including degree and immediacy of contact, might significantly influence these professionals' identity and attitudes toward educational issues in general and toward parents' involvement in particular.

If so, such differences could either affect the approach of the entire school personnel toward parents' involvement, or might lead to dissimilar interactions and levels of willingness to cooperate with parents.

In Israel, where this study was conducted, relationships between school professionals and parents are changing as the education system undergoing reform, shifting from a centralized, uniform, and bureaucratic model with minimum parental involvement (Friedman & Fisher, 2002; Noy, 1999), to a recognition of parents as significant factors in the children's formal education. This reform, affecting every grade level, has resulted in teachers' ambivalence toward working with parents, and they express both positive attitudes (Addi-Racah & Ainhoren, 2009) and discomfort. The discomfort is related to difficulties in getting parents to collaborate, and also to teachers' coping with parents' feelings of disrespect and mistrust toward them, and to parents' over protectiveness of their children or questioning teachers' authority (Fisher, 2009).

Previous studies have compared attitudes and functioning of teachers and counselors (Reis & Cornell, 2008; Tatar & Bekerman, 2009; Thomas, Curtis, & Shippen, 2011), yet a search of the literature did not yield comparisons of the attitudes of teachers and counselors toward parents' involvement in school. The results of research examined for this study indicate both positive attitudes (Addi-Racah & Ainhoren, 2009; Koutrouba et al., 2009; Loges & Barge, 2003; Tett, 2001; Tozer, Senese, & Violas, 2006) and negative attitudes (Baum & Swick, 2008; Fisher, 2009; Ranson, Martin, & Vincent, 2004) of school personnel toward parents' involvement. However, those studies do not differentiate between the attitudes of teachers and counselors on this issue.

Research Scope and Objectives

This study is an investigation and comparison of teachers' and counselors' views on: (1) the responsibility of schools to promote parents' involvement; and (2) the strengths and challenges each group senses in interactions with parents. Qualitative methodology, used in previous studies of parents' involvement and family-school relationship (Adams & Christenson, 2000; Huss-Keeler, 1997; Souto-Manning & Swick, 2006), was employed, and Epstein's six-dimensional model of family involvement (Epstein, 2007; 2008) was used as the theoretical basis. Epstein's (2007; 2008) model recognizes the contribution of parents' involvement to children's outcomes, viewing teachers as professional educators entrusted with creating clear communication with parents and developing a variety of goal-linked partnership programs that reach all families.

The researcher constructed a four-question research protocol. Two questions addressed the participant's general attitude toward the school's responsibility to inform parents about issues relating to the school and the children. The two other questions addressed teachers' and counselors' personal experiences with parents, and their perceived strengths and challenges in these experiences.

Method

Participants

The participants, 12 teachers (10 women, two men) and 11 counselors (all women), all worked in elementary schools at the same town in the center of Israel. This is a middle- to upper-middle- class town with a population of approximately 70,000. The vast majority (97.9%) of the town population is Jewish; 15.2% of whom immigrated to Israel after 1990, mainly from the western countries (*Central Bureau of Statistics*, 2008). About 14,500 children attend the educational system in this town, and they are served by 17 elementary schools, seven secondary schools, and eight high schools. The average number of students per school was 586, which is

considered a relatively large school in Israel; the average number of children per class was 29. The teachers, aged 29–53, were middle class with 5–26 years' work experience. All but six participants were born in Israel (two teachers were born in the Former Soviet Union, one counselor in the United States, and two counselors and one teacher were born in South Africa).

The teachers taught in four different elementary public schools; eight (66%) were homeroom teachers, the other four taught specialized subject matter. Each of the 11 counselors worked in a different school; eight held a full-time position at school, and in keeping with Ministry of Education regulations, also served as teachers. Three others worked part-time (3–4 days a week) and acted as counselors only. All the participants in this study had been acquainted with the term "parents' involvement" prior to the study, and in all of these schools, this issue got attention through lectures and teachers' workshops, and was formally described as one of the school priorities.

Sampling Method, Procedure, and Data Collection

After receiving consent from the ethics committee at the college at which she teaches, the researcher applied in writing to school principals, asking for their approval to interview teachers and counselors in their schools. The requests were followed by phone calls, in which further explanation was given regarding the research. Where the principals gave their consent, the researcher attended a pre-scheduled teachers and counselors' meeting, explained the research, asked for participation, and secured their written consent. Next, the researcher scheduled interviews with each of the teachers/counselors who agreed to participate. All but five interviews were personal, conducted in the interviewees' homes, and recorded with their permission. Five participants—four teachers and one counselor—could not be interviewed in person (for technical reasons) and answered the questions on email. Confidentiality was guaranteed before starting the interview and pseudonyms were assigned to maintain anonymity. Participants could elect to withdraw from participation in the study at any time. The interviews were conducted in May–August 2011.

Research Instrument and Data Analysis

The study used the qualitative approach: The research tool was a semi-structured open interview enabling the interviewees to expand their answers, and to give examples and clarification. The interviews were carried out in accordance with the research protocol designed for this study, which included four questions:

- (1) Do you believe that the school should inform the parents, on a regular basis, about school activities and school-related issues (i.e., initiatives and special projects)? Please explain your answer;
- (2) Do you believe school personnel should inform parents, on a regular basis, about issues relating to their child (i.e., academic, social, behavioral, and emotional issues)? Please explain your answer;
- (3) Based on your experience, what are the main challenges in teacher's/counselor's relations with parents?
- (4) Based on your experience, what are the main strengths in teacher/counselor's relations with parents?

The interviews were analyzed according to the Sabar Ben-Yehosua's (1995) protocol for qualitative data analysis. The analysis aimed to derive distinct themes regarding each of the questions. The process began with a search for systematic, repetitive, visible, and direct content. In the next step, the analysis was referred back by frequency of appearance, according to the researcher's interpretation of their significance in the eyes of the interviewees. During the interpretation process, the content was divided into groups and prominent themes identified, each of which was then given a title.

Results

The responses underwent content analysis. For each interview question, the themes are listed in the order in which the questions were asked. Table 1 presents the themes identified in every question by group of participants.

Table 1

Summary of the Research Findings: Themes Derived From Each Research, by Group

| Question | Teachers (N = 12) | | Counselors (N = 11) | |
|--|---|-----------|---|-----------|
| | Themes | Frequency | Themes | Frequency |
| Informing parents on issues relating to school... | Enables parents' volunteering, more help to teachers | 7 | Provides feedback and ideas | 6 |
| | Improves school reputation | 3 | Gives a sense of belongingness and pride | 7 |
| | Shows that not all parents want to be regularly informed | 2 | Builds trust and cooperation | 6 |
| Informing parents on issues relating to the child... | Helps to improve child's outcomes | 8 | Helps to improve child's outcomes | 10 |
| | Indicates that the parent is a natural partner of the teacher | 5 | Indicates that parents are a natural partner of the teacher | 9 |
| | | | Is the parent's right and teacher's responsibility | 8 |
| Challenges | Criticism, lack of appreciation, ungratefulness | 7 | Conflict of loyalty | 6 |
| | Lack of backup | 3 | | |
| | Miscommunication | 6 | | |
| Strength | Appreciation and gratitude | 9 | Appreciation and gratitude | 11 |
| | Trust | 7 | Trust | 8 |

Note. Some of the interviewees suggested more than one theme per question.

Question 1: Do you believe that the school should inform the parents, on a regular basis, about school activities and school-related issues (i.e., initiatives and special projects)? Please explain your answer.

As shown in Table 1, most of the participants claimed that the school personnel should inform parents on its activities on a regular basis. For Question 1, teachers and counselors each identified three main themes. The teachers' themes were: (1) Informing enables volunteering; (2) Informing improves school reputation; and (3) Not all parents are interested. The counselors' themes were: (1) Informing enables feedback and ideas; (2) Informing improves parents' sense of belongingness and pride; and (3) Informing strengthens trust and cooperation.

Teachers' themes. *Informing enables volunteering and more help to teachers (7 out of 12 teachers).* In this theme, the teachers referred to the possible benefits of informing parents', as informed parents can make a greater contribution to the school. Adi, one of the teachers, said:

When parents are kept up to date, they feel that the staff wants them to know what's going on in school. That encourages them to raise ideas and suggestions which might be beneficial.

Another teacher Shani said:

Informing the parents through a monthly information letter, makes some of them respond and remark. This can lead to new initiatives, and the parents who make suggestions can help around in school, by implementing those initiatives.

These answers indicate that teachers see the benefit of updating the parents regularly, as parents can help and move the school forward.

Informing improves the school's reputation (3 out of 12 teachers). Some of the teachers saw the regular informing process as a contribution to the school's reputation. They claim that parents' involvement improves grades and leads to higher achievements, which is important for the school's reputation in a time when schools are being compared to each other.

The teacher Sharon said:

It is important to update parents on a regular basis. When parents are informed they are in a better position to help their children with their learning, either by helping themselves or by getting professional tutoring. That improves grades, and that is good for our reputation.

Like the first theme, this theme also emphasizes the importance of a routine process of informing parents while emphasizing informing on learning issues. However, the perceived benefit here is the enhancement of the school's reputation.

Not all parents want to be regularly informed (2 out of 12 teachers). Alongside the teachers, who acknowledge the importance of informing all parents regularly, a few feel that for some parents the information is unnecessary. They think that information should be transferred only to parents who show interest in the school. Limor, a homeroom teacher, said:

Some of the parents are not interested in general information about school. It is just something they receive and you have no way of knowing if they even read it. Many places ask whether you are interested in receiving their material, and I think that parents should be asked whether they want this information, and it should be sent only to those who do.

Counselors' themes. Feedback and ideas (6 out of 11 counselors). Like the teachers, all counselors perceived the importance of a routine information process. Most of the counselors said that sharing information with parents is crucial, as it elicits parents' response and broadens the opportunities open to school personnel. Sarit, a school counselor, said:

It is important that the schools internalize the idea of routinely transmitting information to parents. The parents are partners, and this way they can be updated in real time about what is going on and while they are at it, they are also invited to respond and come up with ideas. This enriches our work.

Feelings of belongingness and pride (7 of 12 counselors). Most of the counselors mentioned that sharing information with parents strengthens the parents' feeling of belongingness to school and also make them proud of the school to which they send their children.

Galit, one of the counselors, said:

When parents are informed regularly, they feel that they are part of something, that it is theirs. The parents are informed about positive things, sometimes achievements, and this must make them proud that this is the place they are sending their child, and they are happy to be a part of this kind of community. I am sure this feeling gets transferred to the child.

Trust and collaboration (6 out of 11 counselors). The counselors also mentioned that informed parents exhibited feelings of trust toward school. The counselors found that when trust is established, collaboration between teachers and parents is more meaningful. According to Rinat:

When school informs parents regularly, it creates a positive atmosphere of trust. In this way it is easier to cooperate

for the benefit of the child and work together when necessary.

The answers given by most teachers to the first question reflect the advantages of an information-transmitting school policy. The teachers believe that parents who are kept posted will probably volunteer more and will be more aware of the different projects in school that enhance the school's reputation. The counselors also support constant and routine information transmission, yet their reasons are different, and include a link between informing parents and parents' possible contribution in feedback and ideas. The counselors also talk about feelings like trust, pride, and belongingness which have a positive influence on the child's outcomes.

Question 2: Do you believe school personnel should inform parents, on a regular basis, about issues relating to their child (i.e., academic, social, behavioral, and emotional issues)? Please explain your answer.

As shown in Table 1, teachers and counselors alike were convinced that when it relates to the child, parents most certainly have to be informed. The two themes suggested by the teachers and echoed in those suggested by the counselors were: (1) The parent is the teacher's natural partner; and (2) Informing parents helps to improve a child's outcomes. A third theme was suggested only by the counselors' group: Being informed about the child is a parent's basic right and a teacher's responsibility.

Teachers and counselors' themes. *The parent is the teacher's natural partner (5 out of 12 teachers and 9 out of 11 counselors).* The vast majority of teachers and counselors indicated that when intervention is needed, both parent and teacher must be involved. Helen, a homeroom teacher, said:

Updating a parent on his child is basic. Anything unusual must reach the parent. We are both responsible for the child, and it is only natural for us to collaborate.

Dganit, a school counselor, said:

Of course it is important that the school inform the parent, but it has to go both ways. The school being updated by the parents is no less important. School and parents are partners down the road that leads toward their mutual interest in the child.

Informing parents helps to improve a child's outcomes (8 out of 12 teachers and 10 out of 11 counselors). This is clear when Ali, a homeroom teacher, said:

I recently went through a long period of collaboration with parents whose child has a severe learning problem. We spoke on the phone every week for four and a half months. We invested a great deal of energy in maintaining this contact, I guided the parents trying not to leave any stone unturned. The results are wonderful. We did an amazing job with this kid, and his grades have significantly improved.

Rinat, a school counselor, said:

The right way to do things is to inform parents. When you work alone, even if you do the most correct things, it could simply be inefficient. The parents must be included in the equation if you want positive results, and that is true regarding the child's grades, behavior, emotional status, etc..

Teachers and counselors share the view of parents as partners and the perception that parents who are informed about their child are an asset toward achieving progress. The teachers tended to emphasize the child's academic achievements, while the counselors referred to psychological, emotional, and behavioral

aspects as well.

The counselors revealed another angle by suggesting another theme for this question.

Counselors' theme. *Being informed is a parent's basic right and a teacher's responsibility (8 out of 11 counselors).* Accordingly, Galit, a school counselor, said:

It does not really matter if we sense a small or a big issue relating to a child. It is not my place to interpret if it is severe enough for attention. It is a parent's right to know everything unusual about his child, in every aspect, and the school's place to update the parents as soon as possible.

There seems to be a consensus among school counselors that keeping parents informed contributes to parent-school relationships and is important for improving the child's outcomes. The counselors added an ethical angle, as they believed that it was parents' right to be informed about their child, and it was incumbent upon the school to secure that right.

Question 3: Based on your experience, what are the main challenges in teachers'/counselor's relations with parents?

As shown in Table 1, three themes were identified in the teachers' answers to this question, and one in the counselors' answers.

Teachers' themes. The themes suggested by the teachers in response to this question expressed true coping. This was the question that teachers referred to the most, and from which the highest number of themes were defined: (1) criticism, lack of appreciation, and ungratefulness; (2) lack of back up; and (3) miscommunication.

Criticism, lack of appreciation, and ungratefulness (7 of 12 teachers). Most of the teachers interviewed mentioned incidents and interactions with parents which made them deal with unpleasant feelings. Although the teachers claimed that they saw parents' involvement as important and tended to refer to it positively, they all reported the occasional unpleasant interaction with parents, assuming that this probably "goes with the territory".

Hadas, an art teacher, demonstrated this:

I remember when a mother complained that I had not placed her daughter's drawing at the center of the class exhibition I organized. She totally ignored the fact that I organized an exhibition out of my free will, and that I set it up based on my professionalism. I had to calm her down but she was still very loud and dissatisfied.

Lack of backup (3 out of 12 teachers). Another theme that seems to challenge teachers is their feeling that if an unpleasant interaction with parents comes about, they might not get the support they need from their superiors. Sara is a homeroom teacher, and her story stated the case:

Two parents in my class complained that I give too much homework and that they find the quantity unacceptable. We discussed it and then they went to the principal. The principal asked me to cut down on the amount of homework, without even discussing it with me. All that matters to her is that the parents are satisfied... no complaints. They should keep quiet and not go complain to higher echelons.

This was one of several examples. According to the teachers, such situations undermine their authority in the eyes of the parents and the children, and weaken their ability to stand their own ground.

Miscommunication (6 out of 12 teachers). Another challenge mentioned by the teachers was their difficulty to communicate openly and regularly with some parents. Orit, a homeroom teacher, said:

I truly believe that two-way, open communication with parents is essential. I want parents to be as open with me as I am with them, but some parents are not eager to open and share. When I have a problem with a child of such a parents, I am on my own.

Generally, while referring to the challenges questions, teachers expressed unpleasant feelings in relation to the way some parents treated them. Mainly they mentioned criticism, ungratefulness, lack of appreciation, and miscommunication.

Counselors' theme. Of the 11 counselors interviewed, only six suggested a theme relating to challenges in their relations with parents, for the most part reporting good interactions with parents. The theme was different from those suggested by the teachers and was related to ethics and a conflict of loyalty.

Conflict of loyalty (6 out of 11 counselors). Of the 11 counselors interviewed, six mentioned ethical issues. These referred to times when they could not fully respond to parents' wishes (even when they were justified), or to be a significant help to them due to their loyalty to children's confidentiality or their need to side with their colleagues.

Sarit said:

Parents can be very open with me. Sometimes I hear about issues and I think that they are right, things should have been handled differently. But I have to be very careful, gentle, and "wise", and to do things in a way that will not hurt a teacher who is my colleague. If I do not act correctly I will lose her trust. True, this is counseling, but it can be quite complicated sometimes. Another counselor, Galit, referred to parents' rights and to her loyalty to children's privacy after they trusted her and shared private issues with her.

I find myself in uncomfortable situations, when parents want information on their children, it is their right—they are the parents. However, I do not share everything with them. Children have the right to privacy too. Not everything should get to the parents, and at times this creates tension.

In sum, the teachers and the counselors mentioned different challenges relating to their interactions with parents. Teachers referred to unpleasant feelings and difficulties in the way parents addressed them, while the counselors were mostly comfortable with parents, and primarily pointed out ethical-professional issues as challenges.

Question 4: Based on your experience, what are the main strengths in teacher/counselor's relations with parents?

As shown in Table 1, the same two themes were suggested by both groups. The themes suggested by the teachers and the counselors were: (1) appreciation and gratitude; and (2) trust. These themes were suggested by most of the teachers and almost all the counselors.

Teachers and counselors' themes. Appreciation and gratitude (9 out of 12 teachers and 11 out of 11 counselors). Teachers and counselors mentioned being reinforced by parents who were pleased with their child's progress, and who expressed their appreciation toward them.

Dvorah, an English teacher, said:

There are parents who make me feel appreciated. They see me as a professional, consult me about directing their child's English learning at home. They share the progress and the way things happen. They tell me that I am significant to them, and that the way I guide them enables their child's progress. I do it as part of my job, but still, it nice to hear this stuff.

Liat, a school counselor, added:

I really know the feeling of having a good relation with parents. In some cases they give the feeling that I help them. They actually say so. It is nice to know that I am helping and that someone appreciates it.

Feelings of trust (7 out of 12 teachers and 8 out of 11 counselors). Trust was suggested as a reinforcing element in teachers' and counselors' interaction with parents and in their general feeling as professionals. The homeroom teacher, Limor, said:

When I interact with parents, it is not always easy. But it is not always that difficult either. Actually it is difficult with only a few of the parents. With Most of them I have good relations, based on mutual respect and trust. When I know that they trust me, and I feel they know I do what I do out of good will, it strengthens me and gives me confidence to continue.

Dganit, a school counselor, said:

Trust is a very crucial element in my relations with parents. Without it, the work you do has no meaning. No one will open up to me if they do not think I'm reliable and professional. I think that people, including parents, see me this way, and that means a lot to me.

All in all, teachers mentioned more challenges than counselors regarding their relations with parents. However, when referring to those elements in their work that strengthen them, teachers and counselors were found very much alike. The two groups suggested the same themes, relating to the way to strengthen their relations with parents.

Summary of Research Findings

Teachers and counselors agreed that parents' involvement in school is important. They also expressed similar strengthening aspects in their interactions with parents. However, teachers viewed parents' involvement as being helpful to the teachers and contributing to the school's reputation, while counselors highlighted aspects such as trust and parents' sense of belongingness. Regarding challenges, teachers expressed more personal difficulties dealing with some parents, comparing to counselors who referred to challenges mostly from an ethical-professional perspective.

Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that teachers and counselors see the importance of parents' involvement in school. They perceive the parents as the teachers' partners and believe that updating parents on a regular basis, regarding school in general and their child in particular, is beneficial. These findings are compatible with research that highlighted teachers' positive attitudes toward relations with parents (Epstein, 2008; Molland, 2004; Mylonakou & Kekes, 2007; Koutrouba et al., 2009), and the importance of teacher-parent communication for improving children's educational potential and outcomes.

Teachers and counselors spoke about feeling that parents trusted them and were grateful to them; this was especially noted in one-to-one interactions. When such feelings are perceived, school professionals become more confident and their level of attentiveness to children increases, in turn, encouraging them to communicate openly with parents. These findings again are consistent with those in previous studies which also found that collaboration with parents is connected to teachers' positive feelings, such as confidence (Garcia, 2004; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2001), high levels of job satisfaction (Christenson & Cleary, 1990), and acceptance (Ryan & Cooper, 2007).

However, beyond these similarities, teachers and counselors highlighted different aspects of this

partnership. Teachers place more emphasis on the benefits derived from routinely informing parents on school matters, especially the benefits of increased parents' volunteering and improving children's academic achievements; counselors highlighted issues like parents' sense of belongingness to school, trust, and collaboration as ways to strengthen relations between teachers and parents for the benefit of the children. The different emphases and teachers' greater ambivalence toward parents' involvement may result from the working conditions specific to each profession, their training, and the different situations in which they interact with parents.

According to Rich and Shiram (2005), teachers' working conditions include responsibility for large classes. To encourage a meaningful learning process and enable proper lesson management in this environment, they must constantly coordinate the activity and the physical setting in class. Considering this complexity, when teachers identify a pattern in which the routine updates encourage parents to help and volunteer, they might feel the direct benefits. Unlike teachers who meet with the whole class, counselors mostly interact with individuals or small groups and are relieved of the urgent need to handle and direct many events simultaneously. When referring to the possible outcomes of updating parents on school matters, it seems that the counselors can meet this issue with multiple considerations and more developmental perspectives, such as enhancing parent's sense of belongingness to school, improving communication between school and parents, and improving positive bonding. The positive bonding may be sensed by the children and transferred to them, perhaps improving the children's functioning.

In addition to different working conditions, teachers and counselors also undergo different professional training. This may also affect their attitudes and feelings toward working with parents. While both groups believed that informing parents on matters relating to their children is for the benefit of the children's performance, teachers tended to focus mostly on grades, while counselors also tended to emphasize the child's academic achievements, while the counselors referred to psychological, emotional, and behavioral aspects as well-considered behavioral and emotional aspects along with ethical perspectives. They expressed their belief that it is the parents' basic right to be routinely informed regarding their children and the school professionals' duty to see that parents are informed, a view that may reflect their multidimensional approach (Rich & Shiram, 2005). Kuperstein and Kashtacher (2002) referred to teachers' tendency to focus on children's grades, while counselors are more attentive to emotional, social, and behavioral aspects as well. Similarly, Rich and Shiram (2005) also claimed that "Teachers' perceptions of educational concepts are shaped significantly by their focus on students' academic learning and achievement, whereas counselors have more multifaceted conceptions fashioned by an assortment of cognitive, social, emotional, behavioral, and situational factors" (p. 366). Furthermore, counselors' training prepares them for dealing with psychological problems which influence students' behavior and cognitive activity (Tatar & Bekerman, 2009), and addressing the issue of parents' involvement and school-family collaboration. These aspects are not yet part of teacher education, so that the broader and multidimensional counselors' training may also account for the greater comfort they feel with the basic ideology of parent-school collaboration.

Teachers' greater ambivalence toward parents' involvement could also be related to the challenges faced by the Israeli educational system, which is in severe crisis (Kfir & Ariav, 2008). This crisis is manifested in poor grade performance in international assessment tests (*Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development*, 2010) and high levels of school violence (Benbenishty, Zeira, & Astor, 2000); Some Israeli

parents and students disrespect teachers and are dissatisfied with the education system and do not trust it (Fisher, 2009). These, combined with the decline in the social status of the teaching profession, make it difficult to keep high-quality teachers for long periods in the educational system (Friedman & Fisher, 2002; Kfir & Ariav, 2008). All these factors could explain the sensitive and ambivalent relations between the teachers who are in the front line in school and the parents. Parents often perceive teachers to be responsible for all the ills of the system, and the teachers interviewed were offended by the way parents addressed them, perceiving this as criticism, ungratefulness, and lack of appreciation. At times, teachers found it too hard to communicate with some parents, and when conflicts with parents arose, they did not feel that their superiors backed them up sufficiently.

Conversely, counselors probably experienced their relations with parents in a more peaceful way, and therefore, did not express personal emotional difficulty in their interaction with parents. The counselors' difficulties stemmed from their professional position, which, at times, tears them between their professional responsibility to parents and children and the loyalty demanded of them toward the school. Although they deal with significant challenges, parents do not perceive counselors to be directly responsible for problematic situations in school. Moreover, they often interact with parents in their effort to facilitate and solve situations, and as such, it is apparent that their interactions with parents are more pleasant.

Conclusions and Recommendations

These findings lead us to conclude that teachers and counselors experience interaction with parents very differently based on their different working conditions and professional identities. While acknowledging the importance of parents' involvement and its positive relationship with general children's performance, it is important to strengthen relations between school professionals and parents, and to deepen the understanding of the input of parents' involvement, among teachers and counselors as well. In addition, it is important that teacher education programs include the issue of parents' involvement and be mindful of preparing teachers for its challenges. Furthermore, such attention should continue to be part of ongoing in-service programs for teachers and counselors.

Research Limitations

The current research has three main limitations:

First, the sample is not large, and findings should be addressed with caution. It is possible that other participants or a larger sample would suggest additional themes that would have led this research in other directions. Although the findings indicate that counselors are more confident and comfortable than teachers in collaborating with parents, more research is required to reach a deeper and more sensitive insight regarding counselor-parent collaboration.

Second, participants were quite homogeneous demographically and professionally. Future studies with other sectors of the population and with schools which do not actively try to advance parents' involvement will enrich our understanding of the attitudes of different professionals within the school to parents' involvement.

Third, it is possible that there are cultural differences between the training that teachers and counselors receive, so that these distinctions are not similar in other countries. Instead, in some places, teachers may take further education in counseling.

With these limitations taken under advisement, the current study sheds light on teachers' and counselors' attitudes toward parents' involvement in school, and hopefully leads the way to suggest better collaboration for the benefit of the children.

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