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Parental Involvement in Cypriot Primary Schools

by

Alexandra Zaoura

**A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Education**

University of Warwick, Department of Education

March, 2013

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DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis is my own work. To the best of my knowledge, the thesis contains only original material, unless otherwise stated.

I declare that this work has not been submitted for a degree in any other university.

.....

Alexandra Zaoura

.....

Date

ABSTRACT

The study investigated parental involvement in children's learning in Cypriot primary schools. It aimed to describe and analyse processes of policy-making and capture meanings, interpretations and reported practices of major stakeholders through document analysis, survey and interviews with élites, teachers, parents and children. The policy trajectory framework of Bowe *et al.* (1992) identified three interactive contexts influencing the stages of development, interpretation and enactment of policy.

The adoption of this framework as a tool of analysis, contributed to the significant findings of the study. Indeed, investigation of the parental involvement policy-to-practice process provided the opportunity to identify both facilitating factors and obstacles restricting its development. Overall, the study identified the sheer political challenge associated with setting up a new educational system, translating new ideas and conceptions into an agreed text and practical challenges related to lack of professional teacher development in parental involvement, as well as ideological tensions related to relinquishing traditional professional boundaries set by teachers and psychological barriers associated with perceived threats from parental interference.

The study indicated that the Cypriot educational system is in the early stages of developing parental involvement policy. It identified a weak interaction between policy contexts. The absence of mechanisms for transmitting new policies to practitioners, lack of guidance on implementation or monitoring of this process allowed headteachers and teachers to determine the type and extent of parental involvement practised. Even though findings indicated that there was an implicit recognition from teachers, parents and children of Cypriot parents' central role in their children's education and development, there was a lack of explicitly promoted parental involvement practices. The mismatch between policy intention, text and practice allowed the emergence of a dominant parent group whose disproportionate influence through Parent Associations seemed to be derived from the particular social and cultural capital background they occupied.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

British Ability Scales	BAS
British Educational Research Association	BERA
Central Advisory Council for Education	CACE
Department of Education and Science	DES
Department for Education and Skills	DfES
Deputy Head Teacher	DHT
Education for All	EFA
Education Reform Act	ERA
Effective Provision of Pre-school Education	EPPE
Head Teacher	HT
Home-School Knowledge Exchange Project	HSKE
International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement	IEA
Local Educational Authority	LEA
Ministry of Education and Culture	MOEC

National Educational Longitudinal Study	NELS
National Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Children	NSPCC
Office for Economic Co-operation and Development	OECD
Parental Associations	PAs
Parental Involvement	PI
Program of International Student Achievement	PISA
Raising Early Achievements in Literacy	REAL
School Home Support Practitioners	SHSP
Socio-Economical Status	SES
Statistical Package for Social Sciences	SPSS
Strong African American Families Programme	SAAF
Third International Mathematics and Science Study	TIMSS

CHAPTER 1

1.1 Introduction

This study focuses on a growing field of research, policy and practice – parental involvement - that is intended to ‘promote student success, prevent problems or solve those that arise’ (Epstein, 2011, p. 5). It is now widely accepted that children do better at school when teachers and parents share responsibility for the education and development of their children (Epstein, 2011; Epstein, Sanders, Sheldon *et al.*, 2009; Desforges and Abouchaar, 2003). Whilst Epstein has introduced the notion of overlapping spheres of influence of school, family and community framed as different types of involvement, this study explores the way policy-makers, teachers, parents and the students themselves think about, and describe co-operative activities that comprise the home-school relationship. For the purpose of this thesis, the term ‘parental involvement’ will be used to denote this important collaborative relationship. As noted by Desforges and Abouchaar (2003) the term parental involvement encompasses a broad range of activities so specification of what is entailed is essential. A definition is intended to facilitate the investigation of research studies and empirical data collected that consider the nature and extent of involvement, the relationship of home and school in children’s education and the implications for practice in Cyprus, a country with a relatively recent experience of independent educational policy and practice development.

1.2 Background and context to the study

It is difficult to investigate parental involvement without taking account changes in educational policy at the international level over several decades. In the 1950s and 1960s, the study of educational achievement was widely influenced by large-scale studies, for example, of the Plowden Report, Central Advisory Council for Education (CACE, 1967) and Coleman Report (Coleman, 1966) that linked student performance to family background and, in particular, to socio-economic status (SES).

Accordingly, policy-making processes of the time were oriented towards reduction of perceived inequalities associated with SES by adjustments to be made or ‘compensations’ to educational provision. Whilst there has been an increasing recognition that schools could make a difference to educational inequalities, demonstrated by studies in England, for instance, of Rutter *et al.*, 1979; Mortimore *et al.*, 1988; Smith and Tomlinson, 1989), as noted by Bernstein (1972), schools alone could not compensate for society.

Over the same period of time, there has been a parallel interest in comparative studies of achievement, for instance, from an early study of mathematics in twelve countries (Husen, 1975) through to the current Program of International Student Achievement (PISA) Office for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2007, 2009, 2011) in fifty-seven countries. This is still acknowledging SES as an important factor in the explanation of variation in performance between different schools that participated in standard tests of achievement in reading, mathematics and science.

1.3 Changing theoretical perspectives on inequalities of educational achievement

At the same time, recent research and theory has sought more complex accounts of what and how family factors affect patterns of parental involvement in their children's education. Sylva *et al.* (2004), for instance, have used complex multi-level modelling to take account of type of educational and pre-school educational provision and intake differences in terms of significant child, family and home factors, including prior attainments. It has established complex relationships between young children's personal, family SES and home learning environment characteristics and attainment at a given point in time.

In turn, theoretical debates on educational opportunity, whether related to gaining access or in terms of outcomes, have changed and developed over a similar period of time. Early psychological and determinist views about the heritability of intelligence as an explanation for achievement (Jensen, 1969; Herrnstein, 1973) have been matched by traditional sociological and functionalist theories (Parsons, 1959) that have emphasised the role of education as a social institution in maintaining the existing social order.

From this perspective, the role of the school is social reproduction which places limits upon opportunities of individual students through formal schooling. Other writers, for example Jenks (1972), Bowles and Gintis (1976) however have argued that barriers to social mobility might be challenged by better and more effective schooling.

More recently, Bourdieu (1984; 1993; 1998) has argued that cultural rather than economic inequalities of students are reflected in inequalities of access and achievement. By such means, the social reproduction of inequalities of the school takes place through different types of 'habitus', or cultural dispositions and habits, and cultural capital in the form of competence, confidence, income, patterns of work and social connections. Parents and students with high SES or ethnic majority group may have the dominant social capital and habitus valued by school (Ho, 1995). Such parents are able to participate in school and negotiate with teachers for the benefit and hence likely school success of their children.

Overall, recent empirical studies and theorising have employed more complex ideas of social class and SES that stress the significance of a range of variables including gender, ethnicity and religion, parent educational level, housing and employment that create opportunities or constraining factors on parents' participation in their children's education. Strand (2007), for example, in investigating the persistent low achievement of some ethnic minority groups in English schools took account of a wide range of variables in addition to social class, maternal education, family poverty as indicated by free schools meals, home aspiration and family composition. In addition to parental involvement, included were parental educational aspirations for children, pupils' academic self-concept, homework completion, attitudes towards school, educational risk (such as special educational needs, absence, truancy, exclusion or involvement of police and social services), school and neighbourhood characteristics, prior attainment and in-school factors such as teacher expectation. He concluded that social class and social disadvantage of ethnic minority groups were not sufficient

to account for the attainment gap for some groups such as Black Caribbean pupils for whom rates of exclusion, behavioural, emotional and social difficulties were high and thus highlighted the role of pupil behaviour and teacher perception.

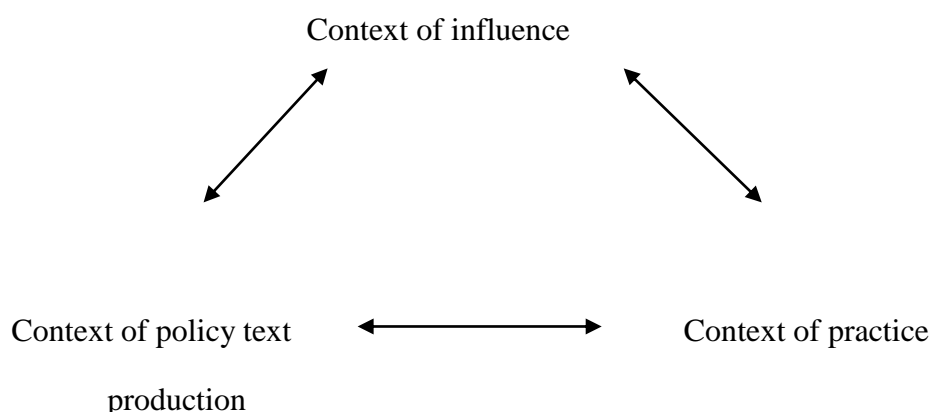
One might conclude from this discussion that with understanding, schools might better appreciate and empower all parents to participate in education for the benefit of their children. This raises wider questions of policy-making however and, moreover, suggests that a study of parent involvement in Cyprus will need a conceptual framework and tool of analysis in order to explore the policy-to-practice context.

1.4 Analytical framework

In an attempt to produce a robust investigation of parental involvement in Cyprus incorporating all aspects that influence policy development and practice, the Bowe, Ball and Gold (1992) trajectory model of policy-making was employed as an analytical tool. This model indicates three policy contexts: the context of influence, where new ideas and concepts are introduced, debated and revised; the context of policy text production, where struggles are resolved and compromises reached to construct an agreed text; and the context of practice, where professionals are faced with the task of reinterpreting policy in order for it to be enacted. It indicates that policy production is not a static moment but a continuous process (Bowe *et al.*, 1992) as the contexts are ‘nested’ into each

other (Mainardes and Marcondes, 2009). The non-linear relationship of the three contexts is illustrated by the figure below.

Figure 1.1 Contexts of policy making (Bowe et al., 1992, 20).



In the context of influence the concepts are formed. A number of interest groups may be involved in this process who attempt to influence the definition and the purpose of education (Ball, 1993). Considering the long debates that occur in the public arena between interest groups such as political parties, committees, representative associations, the policy texts produced may be the result of struggles and compromises. In the present study, 'educational policies' can be defined as policies designed to guide practitioners in order to satisfy the purposes of government, whilst practices refers to the actions introduced by practitioners to address an educational policy. As Ball pointed out in the interview he gave to Mainardes and Marcondes (2009), however, practitioners translate the policies by being influenced by their personal experiences, values and expectations and as a result they interpret them in different ways.

Governments and policy makers cannot predict or entirely control how policies will be enacted in practice or whether the desired outcomes will be achieved. Hence, policy makers must understand educational practitioners' own views, concerns and ideologies, identifying factors that affect their attitudes towards the enactment process. As a result, evaluation and remaking is an important substance of the policy-to-practice model (Bowe *et al.*, 1992).

Adopting the Bowe *et al.* (1992) model, enabled this study to gather data encompassing a range of stakeholder perceptions, understandings and reported activities in the sphere of parental involvement in education. These data in combination with analysis of relevant policy texts, in the context of local and international influences on the educational system of Cyprus, were able to shed light on the policy-to-practice process related to parental involvement.

An overview of the changing educational context of Cyprus in the next section indicates the interconnection between the political situation of the island and the educational system of Cyprus. This facilitates the linking of the macro-level factors influencing the educational policy, contextualising family background and school attainment, with the micro-level factors associated with school and neighbourhood practices, and family attitudes, motivation and behaviours.

1.5 Brief overview of changing educational context for Cyprus

Kyriakides (1994) in the national review of education by UNESCO (1997) evaluating the educational system of Cyprus, emphasised that education is linked with the historical, moral, social and political situation of Cyprus. Hence for the

purpose of this thesis, it is important to have an overview of the prevailing situation of the island as it can provide insights into the way educational issues in general have been handled and parental involvement in particular.

Cyprus, due to its strategic geographical position has attracted many conquerors, Romans, Ottomans and British, (Parhiardis, 2007). Being a small island, it has needed allies to face the hostilities of other nations. Hence, it developed strong links with Greece in many political sectors and especially in the educational sector. Even after the independence of Cyprus from British colonial rule and the signing of the London-Zurich agreements in 1960, expansion of Greek educational ideas was still promoted (Persianis, 1978). The 'educational borrowing' from Greece illustrates the strong relationships that Cyprus has had with Greece (Persianis, 1978). In particular, by 'educational borrowing' Cyprus used the educational policies, curriculum and textbooks of Greece (Kouzis, 1997).

The Turkish invasion in 1974 created large political and financial problems. Thirty-six percent of Cypriot land was occupied by Turkey and is under its control until today. Many families became refugees, losing their homes, jobs as well as having relatives killed. The need for restructure of Cyprus and operation as an independent country was urgent. Cyprus was developing rapidly financially as its financial policy was successful. However, these rapid changes were not paralleled in the education system as well (Persianis, 2006). Significantly, between 1976-1980, the word 'reform' was heard for the first time when the

Ministry of Education highlighted the importance of developing a Cypriot identity through the educational system (Sophianos, 1986).

Until 1988, presidents in Cyprus were elected with a big majority of the population supporting them. Consequently there was no reason to use education in their election manifestos. After 1988, however, the scene changed. Two main parties dominated the political scene in Cyprus. The Progressive Party of Working People (AKEL) believed that improving Turkish-Cypriot and Greek-Cypriot relationships might be the best way to resolve the Cypriot problem of being divided. It tried to distinguish the educational policy from the one of Greece, emphasising the need to promote Cypriot identity. The Democratic Rally (DISI) believed that Cyprus should follow the Greek national educational policy. The competition to be elected between these two parties led them to include educational policy as a means of influence in order to be elected (Persianis, 2010).

In educational policy there was a lack of attention to parental involvement. Indeed the basic roles of parents in education were firstly seen being discussed in the *'Rules of Operation of the Primary School'* in 1997 (Ministerial Council, 1997). However, the integration of Cyprus in the European Union in 2004 created fresh challenges to the educational system, the biggest one being the need to empower individual schools as autonomous units, by reducing the centralisation of education (Persianis, 2010; Pashiardis, 2004). At this point, it is important to say that the Cypriot educational system remains highly centralised as the Ministry of Education and Culture (MOEC) is responsible for the

operation of all the institutions under its jurisdiction (Pashiardis, 2007). The centralisation of the education system has led to the adoption of a top-down approach to policy development in which the people responsible for introducing an innovation or implementing a change were not part of the decision-making process (Pashiardis 2004).

The government had also to deal with challenges of globalization. The term 'global' can be used either to refer to the spread of ideas from one part of the world to other parts of the world or it might mean 'universal' in the sense that actions of education and development are occurring in a similar way in all of the parts of the world. As a result, investigation and understanding about the way education and development takes place in one place, may indicate how it will take place in another part of the world (Fleer *et al.*, 2009). However, the present study emphasises the danger of using these two meanings, as the cultural factors of one country can have a strong impact on people's views about education and development and if these are not considered then potential changes and innovation might not be received or have as important an impact as expected.

One of the most important challenges to the Cypriot education system due to globalisation was the rapid increase of students for whom Greek was not their first language. Hence it was important to make the appropriate changes in order to develop a multicultural society and inclusive educational system.

This created another urgent need of government to have their own educational policy disconnecting it from its political and ideological links with Greece

(Persianis, 2010). For this reason, it was decided to hire a committee of seven educational experts in the field who were to be made responsible to develop necessary educational reform. The proposed educational reform was published in 2004 in which the drawbacks of the current Cypriot educational system were indicated and solutions suggested that aimed at the modernisation of the educational system (Commission for Educational Reform, 2004).

Implementation of the reform began with the biggest change being the development of a new curriculum (MOEC, 2010). For the first time, teachers and parents boards were consulted about the new reform and participated in the planning of the curriculum. The involvement of parents in the educational planning processes can be regarded as the first important step for schools towards helping them to come closer to parents, to listen to their concerns, to give them responsibilities, and encourage them to accept, support and work for the promotion of this reform (Persianis, 2010). In addition, the new curriculum (MOEC, 2010) included for the first time goals about involving parents in schools and improving home-school relationships. However, even though there are the first signs to indicate that the government recognises the importance of involving parents in education, there are not any strong indicators to show that the government is working systematically in this direction. Hence it is a particularly interesting moment in time to carry out a case study of parental involvement in a new nation, Cyprus, at the beginning of its process to involve parents in the education of their children. Accordingly the following research questions were generated.

1.6 Research questions

After providing the justification for a holistic investigation of parental involvement in the policy-to-practice context, the research questions of the study are as follows:

- What is the current policy in Cyprus in primary schools, with regard to the involvement of parents in education?
- How is parental involvement policy interpreted in practice?
- What are policymakers', parents', school personnel's and pupils' aspirations, views and understandings of parental involvement in education?
- What are the current reported practices of school personnel, pupils and parents with regard to parental involvement?

At this point it is important to introduce how the term parental involvement will be used by this study. Epstein's distinction (2011) indicating that parental involvement practices can be initiated either by school or by parents was adopted. In particular parental involvement here is taken to examine:

- a) What parents do to be involved in their children's learning at both home and school locations;
- b) What schools do to involve parents in their children's learning.

The next section will indicate the structure of the thesis describing in brief the chapters of the thesis.

1.7 Structure of the thesis

The thesis seeks to explore parental involvement in Cyprus, using a case study approach. Accordingly, the thesis is divided into eleven chapters. Chapter 1 has introduced the study, its background and context, the research questions and thesis structure. Chapter 2 will present a review of international literature in the field of parental involvement that includes theoretical and empirical perspectives. Chapter 3 will describe in detail the methodology used for the study. Chapter 4 will present interviews with élite figures, education policy-makers and senior researchers who provided their views, understandings of policy and reported educational practices related to parental involvement. Chapter 5 will provide an analysis of relevant policy documents. Chapter 6 will report a survey of educational professionals from twelve schools who offered their views, experiences and practices related to parental involvement from 12 schools and Chapter 7 will report follow-up interviews with practitioners from six of the schools. Chapter 8 will present findings from interviews with parents of children coming from 4th to 6th grade (ages 9 to 12 years old) in the same six schools. Chapter 9 in turn will present results of group interviews with the children themselves. Chapter 10 will provide an analysis of an exemplar school in which the views of parents, teachers and children of the same school are combined in order to examine the issue from different perspectives. Chapter 11 will revisit the research questions and discuss the findings in the light of these. Chapter 12 outlines the limitations of the study and steps taken to address these. It concludes by considering the implications of the study and further research that might be undertaken in the field.

1.8 Conclusions

This chapter has indicated the reasons that led governments to place growing emphasis on the field of parental involvement around the world. Also it presented the context of Cyprus showing that some historical, political and ideological factors influenced the educational policy to a great extent. That is why there was a need to investigate the attitudes and responses of involved people in the recent attempts of the government in modernising the educational system. The involvement of parents in education is promoted nowadays and hence there is a need to conduct a more in-depth investigation employing the trajectory model of policy contexts (Bowe *et al.*, 1992) in order to examine how each context informs, influences and is being influenced from the others.

The next chapter seeks to make a review of the international policy influences and their effects on policy text as well as the impact on context of practice regarding parental involvement.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

The previous chapter considered the reasons that led policy-makers to pay attention to increasing the involvement of parents in education. In a few words, there has been an emphasis of governments on raising educational achievements due to the perceived link between the educational performance with economic development (Mortimore *et al.*, 1988; Rutter *et al.*, 1979; Reynolds, 1976).

The recognition of the impact of family on children's achievements and a growing emphasis on involving parents in education in some countries was also identified. Initially it was thought that there was a crude association between social class (in terms of family income, parents' education and occupation) and parental involvement (Desforbes and Abouchaar, 2003), but gradually this idea changed and became more refined as large-scale studies such as for example of Sylva *et al.* (2004) and Strand (2007) revealed that a wide range of social and cultural factors influenced parental involvement, not just SES, ethnicity and family income but also religion and parenting styles.

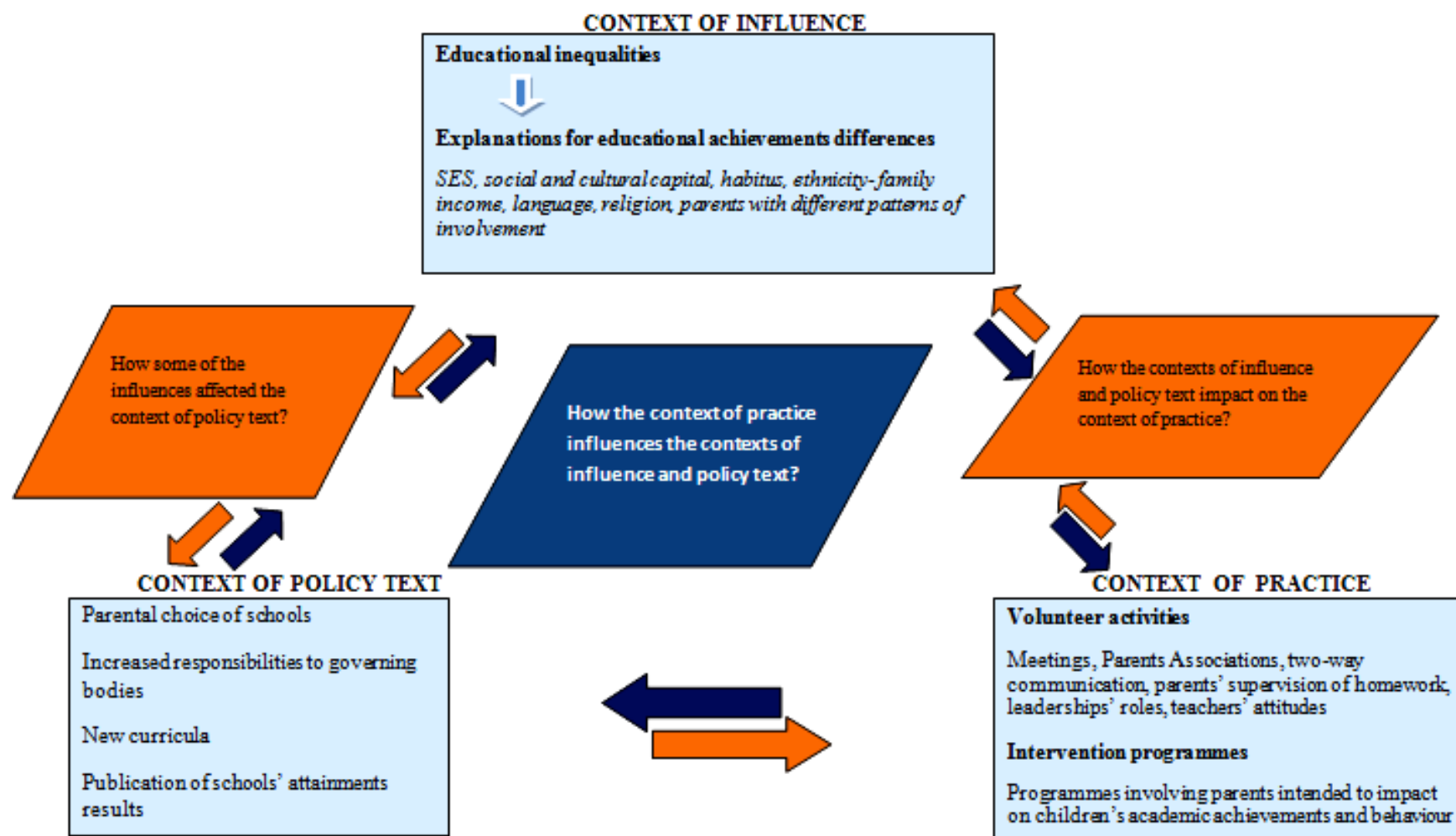
Hence an investigation of macro to micro level factors associated with parental involvement was attempted by the present study by adopting the model of Bowe *et al.* (1992). This model, introduced in the previous chapter, indicated the complex interactions between contexts of policy influence, policy text and practice. Epstein (2011) for instance, even though she rejected the

Bronfenbrenner's ecological system theory (1979) which conceives factors that influence child's development as micro, exo, meso, and macro systems, recognised complex and continuous interactions among these factors influenced parental involvement. In particular, Bronfenbrenner used the term micro-system to refer to family or classroom, while meso-system can be the interaction of two micro systems, the exo-system can be external factors that have an impact in a child's development and the macro-system can be the socio-cultural context that influence development.

As Marsh (1997), cited in Barlett *et al.* (2001) pointed out, educational policy is a result of complex compromises between stakeholders involved in education, as well as interested political parties, in which all of them influence the policy-making. The trajectory model of policy-making (Bowe *et al.*, 1992) took account of these strong influences. In particular, this model rejected the idea of the separation of policy-making and policy interpretation as policy was regarded by them as an interactive process, a dialectic (Bowe *et al.*, 1992, p. 10). Ball in a recent interview, argued that practitioners as well as policy-makers have their own experiences, perceptions and ideologies and they interpret policy differently (Mainandes and Marcondes, 2009). Hence it was important for policy-makers to take these factors in consideration before they produce and promote a policy, in order to avoid risking failure in achieving the intended outcomes (Bowe *et al.*, 1992). The Bowe *et al.* (1992) model was used as a framework in order to illustrate and analyse the policy-making process in parental involvement.

The figure below illustrates the aspects that will be examined in each of the three contexts as well as the linkages between the contexts.

Figure 2.1: Contexts of policy-making – investigation of parental involvement



It is also important to emphasise how the term parental involvement was developed and used by this study provide a brief overview of some typologies regarding parental involvement and explain the reasons for the selection of the specific definition of the term chosen.

Reaching a definition was inevitably difficult due to the potential differences in impact of different kinds of parental involvement practices on achievements, as well as the interactions and influences of many variables (such as ethnicity and SES). Ho (2009) identified that individuals may interpret the term differently, emphasising the need of developing a more comprehensive definition.

Any one definition could incorporate a range of formal parenting practices, such as meetings with teachers, participation in school-classroom activities and serving on school boards as well as taking part in informal activities, such as the establishment of a good home-learning environment, parent-child discussion and communication of parents' aspirations and expectations to children. Hence a range of typologies indicating different types of parental involvement have been constructed.

However, as Zaoura and Aubrey (2011) emphasised, even though constructed typologies refer to different dimensions of parental involvement it is difficult to identify the relative usefulness of different typologies of involvement. Below, three parental involvement typologies (Fullan, 1982; Tomlinson, 1991; Epstein

1997) are presented and then a discussion follows about how the term parental involvement was defined in the present study.

Fullan (1982) for example categorised the parental involvement simply in four forms:

- help at home;
- help at school;
- participation in school governance;
- participation in community service.

Whilst the Tomlinson (1991) typology identified four main types of parental involvement:

- exchange of information;
- involvement in educational matters (e.g homework);
- informal involvement in schools' administration issues (e.g participating in Parental Association);
- formal participation in school governing.

It seems that the above typologies were based mainly on school-based parental activities as well as the provision of help of parents in homework. There was lack of any reference to the involvement of parents in home-learning activities which have been more recently recognised as having an impact on children's

attainments as it was identified recently (Desforges and Abouchaar, 2003; Harris and Goodall, 2007; Alexander, 2010).

Later, Epstein (1997) presented an influential classification. She identified six types of parental involvement:

- i) parenting skills, or assisting parents to understand their children's needs and helping teachers to understand family needs;
- ii) establishment of two-way communication;
- iii) volunteering in schools' activities and events;
- iv) learning at home, or being involved with children's school work;
- v) participation in school decision-making processes;
- vi) collaborating with the community.

Whilst this typology incorporated a more comprehensive range of types of parents' involvement in their children's education and served as a guidance for building home-school-community partnerships, it has received criticism as it was not based on empirical evidence. (Desforges and Abouchaar, 2003).

Comparing it with the Fullan (1982) and Tomlinson typology (1991) above, it may be concluded that Epstein's typology (1997) provided a more comprehensive model as it included types of home involvement that were not

included in some others. In particular, it recognised a more central role for parents and also saw the contribution that the community might make.

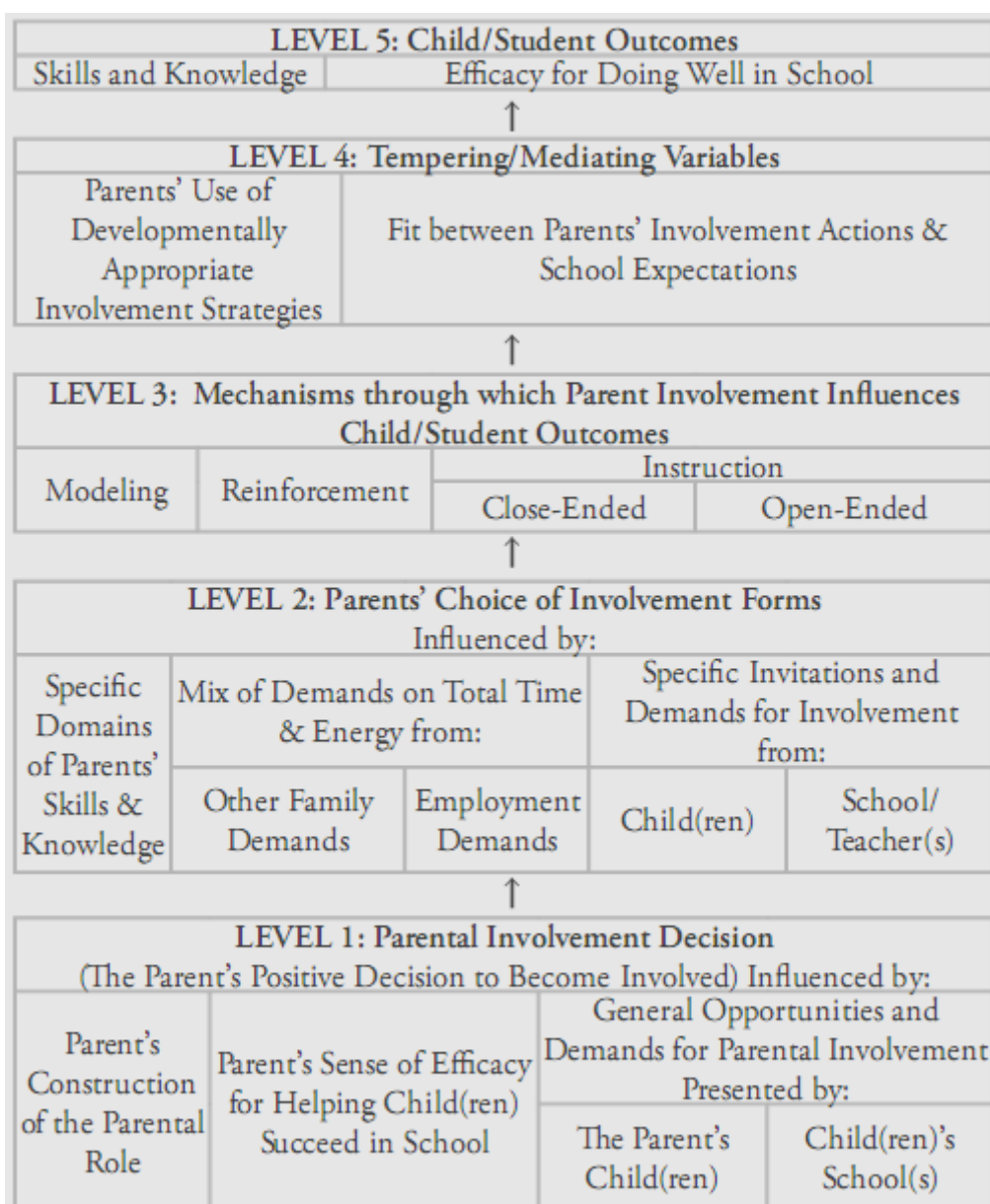
Nevertheless, the emphasis was still placed on closing the distance between home and school. As Alexander (2010) noted however, the relationship between home and school is extremely complex and needs to embrace many factors. Simply bringing the two closer together will not lead automatically to mutual respect and understanding or resolve existing dilemmas and differences.

Another model that has been used extensively in the field and adopted by many parental involvement researchers was the one of Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995; 1997). The Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler model (1995; 1997) has been based on solid developmental work and provided a tool to interpret parental involvement aspects from a psychological perspective. Particularly, the model presented a range of factors that determined the level of the involvement of parents. For example, employment, family demands and invitations to participate by schools, can be some of the factors that influence the participation of parents in their children's learning.

The model also introduced the concept of parents' self-efficacy that influences the decision of parents to get involved. The term of self-efficacy relates to parents' feelings and realization of the fact that their contribution can make a difference, influencing positively their children's attainments. As soon as parents recognise the positive impact of their involvement it seems that they are more likely to shape a positive view about parental involvement and feel disposed to

increase their involvement (Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler, 1995). At the same time, they understand that their participation is a part of their role and responsibility as a parent (level one). Then their degree of involvement will depend upon a range of other demands related to home and school (level two). By reaching level three, they may develop appropriate parenting practices, such as high expectations and continuous motivation that can enhance children's learning (see the figure below).

Figure 2.2: Model of parental involvement (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997)



These parenting practices have a great impact on children as they are becoming more confident learners, as Alexander (2010) emphasised. However, a potential weakness of this psychological model could be the fact that it did not consider the effects of family background characteristics such as the social and cultural capital, ethnicity and religion thus indicating whether this model is working for everyone.

So far the chapter has focused on parents and their role in schooling. Parent-teacher relationships however are likely to be most productive when the roles of each party are agreed and complement one another.

Accordingly, parental involvement in this thesis will be taken to mean:

- a. What **parents** do, think and believe to be involved in their children's learning at both home and school locations;
- b. What **schools** do, think and believe to involve parents in their children's learning (Epstein, 2011).

Having set out a basic definition for the term parental involvement this chapter will aim to consider in more detail:

- the context of policy influence, focusing on macro influences such as family social background factors that may influence children's attainments;

- the context of policy text, illustrating with some educational policies introduced in the UK context since the 1970s intended to enhance parental involvement, through engagement of parents in a more collaborative role in their children's education and in school matters.
- The context of practice, focusing on the empirical investigations concerning what parents do in order to be involved in their children's learning and the activities being suggested by intervention programmes in order to improve children's attainments.

It is also important to emphasise that the majority of the research presented in the chapter focuses on primary schools. However in some cases, some significant research in the field addressed to different age ranges is presented as they can provide good examples that have relevance to primary schools as well.

The majority of the studies examined come from UK or USA context, unless otherwise stated, as these are contexts rich in educational policy regarding parental involvement. In contrast, the Cypriot context is a country with relatively recent experience of independent educational policy-making. However, at the end of each context section there is an overview of relatively recent studies in Cyprus.

2.2 Context of policy influence

This context outlines the ideological factors related to policy-makers' interest toward involving parents, as well as macro-level factors influencing parents' attitudes. The context of policy influence section introduces firstly the prevailing

views about factors influencing educational achievements since the 1970s. Then it attempts to introduce some of the frequent explanations for school achievements and finally, it focuses on aspects related to the involvement of parents.

2.2.1 Changing views of factors influencing educational achievement

During the last two to three decades parents, teachers and politicians have shown a growing awareness of the importance of parental involvement. The relationship between parents and schools is influenced by political, ideological, professional and practical factors.

Policy-makers have turned their attention to a range of factors influencing educational achievement in their attempts to reduce inequalities, prompted by the national and international emphasis on raising standards by making schools more responsive to the needs of the economy and industry. Children's achievements have been assessed and interpreted based on a range of factors by international assessment programmes such as Programme of International Student Assessment (PISA), Office for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2007, 2009, 2011) and Third International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA, 1999; 2003; 2007).

Initially, educational attainments were linked with parental attitude (helping at home), home circumstances (resources), with social class (in terms of family

income, parents' education and occupation) and features of school (organisation and staffing) influenced by the two much-debated, key large-scale research studies of the time in the United States of America (USA), the Coleman Report (Coleman, 1966) and Jencks *et al.* (1972) re-assessment of the effect of family and schooling in USA. These studies however failed to recognize fully that parental attitude was only moderately associated with home educational and social group and material resources.

James Coleman (1966) gathered quantitative data from 645,000 students coming from 4,000 schools. He collected data about the students' achievements, their social and economical backgrounds, their parents' education, the children's expectations for their future and their intentions to continue at school. Also he examined school variables such as the quality of schools' buildings, the technical equipment of schools, the teachers' qualifications, degrees and specialisations, as well as the public spending at each school. The report of James Coleman concluded that the family and the educational background can explain to a great degree the achievements of students. He also found that public expenditure on educational goods alone cannot reduce inequalities.

Christopher Jencks and associates (1972) conducted a re-analysis of the effects of family on schooling elaborating data from a large number of research studies conducted up until 1970 and they also emphasised that increase in public expenditure alone cannot reduce inequalities in children's achievements. It was also concluded by them that in Western countries the social origin of a person can strongly influence his/her educational development.

These two key reports had an international influence as there was a growing emphasis on investigating the factors that influence achievements (Tomlinson, 1991). In fact, the effects of SES (in terms of family income, parents' education and occupation) continued to be examined in the following decades and up until the present time (Mortimore *et al.*, 1988; Tizard *et al.*, 1988; Ho and Willms, 1996; OECD, 2009, 2011).

Some research studies from the 1970s and onwards identified the importance of investigating a broader range of explanations for children's attainments. More precisely, the fact that the two key research studies cited above (Coleman, 1966 and Jencks *et al.*, 1972) indicated only the effects of social class and personal abilities influencing children's attainments, giving the sense that schools themselves make no difference, generated further debate. In 1970s and 1980s, school effectiveness research studies first appeared partly as a reaction to the explanation of achievements being related solely to social background and personal ability. Hence, more studies investigating school variables were conducted, using more complex designs and analysis, and indicating the impact of schools on students' achievements by examining more closely students' learning outcomes (Mortimore *et al.*, 1988; Rutter *et al.*, 1979; Reynolds, 1976).

For instance, Mortimore *et al.* (1988) carried out a study in 50 inner-city primary schools in London with 2,000 student participants aged 8-11 years that examined factors influencing the progress of students. They measured pupil intake characteristics, pupil educational outcomes, as well as the classroom and social environment, through standardised tests in reading and mathematics, as well as

self-report interviews. Mortimore (1991, p. 9) justified the use of these specific measures, arguing that student intake characteristics should be considered, as schools can be regarded as effective when students progress further than they might be expected. The more important outcome to emerge from the Mortimore *et al.* study (1988) was that in some inner-city schools, school factors could explain children's progress to a greater degree than other personal factors, such as social class, sex and age. A similar outcome concerning the importance of schools to children's progress also emerged from the Tizard *et al.* (1988), study conducted in inner-city London schools and involving 300 children aged 5 to 7 years.

Many researchers have continued to conduct such research up until the present time, examining a widening range of school variables (e.g. headteachers' leadership, shared vision, values and goals of schools, monitoring students' and schools' performance), classroom variables (e.g. learning environment, for instance, an orderly and calm atmosphere, being task-oriented) and teaching variables (e.g. teaching and learning, quality of teaching, class management, maximization of learning time, teachers' subject knowledge, curriculum coverage and high expectations for pupils) (Creemers, 1994, 1996; Reynolds *et al.*, 1996; Kyriakides *et al.*, 2000; Creemers and Kyriakides, 2010). However, school effectiveness research, in turn, accepted criticism that it did not consider sufficiently the effects of social class on children's achievements, being focused mainly on the schools' role in academic performance (Campbell *et al.*, 2004).

Apart from the influence of school factors on achievements, other research studies underlined the impact of other factors in students' attainments, such as family background characteristics (class, ethnicity and family income) as well as home environment, home-school interactions and parental involvement.

The present research study focused on school and home aspects related to parental involvement but it is important firstly to introduce other factors that may explain achievements, as many of these factors are inter-related, influencing the attitudes of families towards their contribution to their children's learning. An example of a study of the inter-relationships of factors can be provided from Ho and Willms research (1996). In particular, they drew on data of USA National Educational Longitudinal Study (NELS) (National Center for Education Statistics, 1989), with a large sample of 24,600 participants (14-year-olds) and they identified that achievement can be strongly associated with social class in terms of parents' occupation and education. However, they also found that social class had an impact on the involvement of parents as well, as high SES families tended to be found to be more involved. Taking into account the strong effects of parental involvement and interest in children's attainments in more advantaged families, it was not possible to determine safely, whether high SES or parental interest had the strongest impact on achievements.

To make things even more complex, it is important to state that parental involvement/interest cannot exist independent of what the school does. Hence bearing in mind that factors may either encourage or inhibit influence of parents, it is important to examine which factors influence parents' attitudes. The next

section illustrates the range of factors examined by international research studies in their attempts to identify factors influencing the ways of increasing parental involvement that, in turn, might improve educational achievements.

2.2.2 Explanations for educational achievements

It is important to state that parents cannot be treated as a single category, as they come from heterogeneous groups, that is, a variety of home circumstances and attitudes. In particular, the family background factors (resources, occupation, employment, ethnic origin and parents' education) can affect significantly how parents deal with issues related to the education of their children, as indicated by Desforges and Abouchaar (2003) in a key review of the literature conducted on parental involvement commissioned from the UK government.

Social and cultural capital

Among family background factors, social class (in terms of parental occupational level and education) discussed above (section 2.2.1) was found to be most highly associated with children's achievements. This was also due however to the mediation of the cultural capital of the family that determines family values, aspirations and expectations, as well attitudes towards education, as has been illuminated in the outstanding work of Bourdieu (1986).

More precisely, Bourdieu (1986) distinguished three types of capital: economic capital, social capital and cultural capital. Economic capital consists of income and emphasises material resources and amenities of a family. Social capital refers to the established networks with 'socially prestigious' people. Cultural capital

can be distinguished as three types: a) the *embodied*, that consists of the cultural dispositions and aptitudes, developed and internalised unconsciously through the socialisation processes, such as by the use of formal language; b) the *objectified*, that consists of the familiarity with cultural goods such as books and computers; and c) the *institutionalised*, which consists of the educational qualifications, the degrees, awards and diplomas achieved (Bourdieu 1977).

The effects of social and cultural capital were considered as partly explanatory of differences in educational achievements. In particular, children coming from privileged families were regarded as having entered schools with a developed 'habitus' (Bourdieu, 1986). This term refers to a system of internalised values developed through experiences in different life dimensions (Ho, 2009) and it determines the behaviour of the child in specific circumstances in the school. In other words, children coming from the middle- and upper-middle social classes were familiar with the language and the type of behaviour that was valued by schools, as schools were middle-class institutions promoting the same cultural capital and values (Ho, 1995).

Language

The use of the language of the socially-advantaged person, in schools, also promoted advantage and led to social inequalities. Bernstein's theory (1971) identified the internalised codes developed by people that constituted their social identity. The term code, as defined by Littlejohn (2002), 'refers to a set of organizing principles behind the language employed by members of a social group' (p.278).

Bernstein's theory indicated that language codes were used to assign meanings to things that people discussed. The construct of 'elaborated' and 'restricted' codes provided as an explanation for relatively low performance of working-class children in language-related subjects as compared to middle-class peers. As a result, some studies of the 1970s emphasised that working-class children might have linguistic impoverishment (Bernstein, 1971; Tough, 1976; Bullock Report, Department of Education and Science, 1975), due to '...inadequacies in the way the children were talked to by their parents at home' (Hughes *et al.*, 1994, p. 3). However, research conducted in the 1980s (Wells, 1987; Tizard and Hughes, 1984), investigating the way families used language at home, did not observe differences in frequency and the extensiveness of discussions occurring between the working-class families and in middle-class families.

However, Hart and Risley (1995) did not reach similar results in a study they conducted in the US context, examining the association of pupils' home vocabulary environment with their later school test scores, through long-lasting observations of 42 children and their families. Children from ten-months-old and their families, participated in research which lasted initially for about two and a half years. Some of the children came from professional families, some others from working-class families and some others from welfare-recipient families. The main findings of Hart and Risley (1995) study were that professional families used more rich vocabulary in their everyday interactions than in the working-class and welfare families, and consequently the children of

professional families had wider vocabulary by the age of three as they had more experiences with rich, varied and quality talk.

These differences influenced the language skills of children even at the ages of nine and ten years as vocabulary gaps could not be closed even in the best schools. This study leads to the conclusion that children's future language skills may be determined to a great extent by the home environment. Another important conclusion was the significant role of parents in their children's later learning that is the focus of the present research and will be examined later on.

Ethnicity and family income

Another explanation of achievements examined in the literature has been ethnicity. Research that did not examine the relationship between the variables of ethnicity and family income in educational achievements could not provide an understanding of the contribution of each variable to achievements as both variables were confounded (Patterson *et al.*, 1990). Strand (2010) emphasised that studies that seek to identify the effects of ethnicity should consider the overlap between ethnicity and poverty (crudely defined in terms of students' entitlement to free school meals).

Early research that investigated the relationship of family income and ethnicity indicated that family income had a greater impact on students' achievements than ethnicity (Pengs and Wright, 1994; Patterson *et al.*, 1990; Saturnelli and Repa; 1995).

Saturnelli and Repa (1995) investigated whether ethnicity or economic status of the family had greater impact on children's attainments on science, for 1381 children attending fourth grade in New York schools. Children's attainments were measured by two different kinds of assessments, multiple-choice written tests and by raising-hands tests (in terms of getting an oral response in class), in order to give the opportunity to children to demonstrate their knowledge and skills. Their study concluded that achievements in science were increased based on the better economic situation of the family. However, it was also revealed that the abilities of children in reading influenced their achievements. Hence one might assume that children coming from different ethnic backgrounds might be in a disadvantaged position and that their poor performance might be explained in part by their poor reading abilities.

Also Strand (2010) in his large-scale research with more than 500,000 participants aged 7-to-11 years-old, coming from more than 14,000 primary schools of England used quantitative methods to examine the educational progress of children. The children's achievements were assessed through standard assessment tests at the end of Key Stage 1 (at 7 years old) and Key Stage 2 (at 10-11 years old). Strand (2010) investigated the influence of a range of variables related to achievements such as ethnicity, gender, age, entitlement to free school meal (as an indicator of poverty) and school effects, through descriptive statistics and multilevel multiple regression analysis. He underlined the importance of addressing the interactions of the above factors as they can explain better the children's attainments gaps. For instance, he identified large achievement differences between Black girls and Black boys as well as between

Black African and Black Caribbean students. An important finding of his research was the substantial association between poverty and the age 11 test score, independent of students' ethnicity. In other words, White British students entitled to free school meals, had poor performance. Also, White British girls made poor progress compared to Black Caribbean girls. As a result, Strand concluded that the poverty had a negative impact on White British progress, to a greater extent than the other ethnic groups.

Another important finding was that the Black African made more progress than the White British when comparing the age 7 test scores with the age 11 test scores. This was explained by examining the Black African families' values and attitudes. It was indicated that Black African families had higher levels of educational aspirations as well as more positive attitudes towards school. Similarly, the impact of cultural differences to children's achievements were also obvious. For instance, Black Caribbean boys' poor performance was explained by recognising the pressure they accepted from their peers to adopt an 'urban' subculture promoting unruly and antagonistic behaviour towards teachers rather than trying to improve their achievements.

The above findings can be examples that justify the recognition of a strong impact of the family's and community's environment towards education on students, leading to the need of investigating the social and cultural characteristics of the society concerned. Strand, considering his outcomes, suggested that intervention programmes should be focused on tackling the outside-of-school factors that influence achievements such as poverty, low

aspirations, home-learning environment, rather than being focused on school effectiveness factors. This was because it was observed that by working on improving school effectiveness, there is a possibility to increase the attainments gaps between Black Caribbean and White British rather than limiting the educational inequalities. Hence, Strand recommended attending to the investigation of outside-of-school factors that can have an impact to children's attainments.

Religion

Religion is another factor examined recently, especially in the USA context, that appears to have an impact to children's achievements. Even though Cyprus is not constituted of as many widely-differing religious belief groups as the USA and UK context, it was important to have an overview of the way that the participation of families from different religious groups might influence their children's achievements and behaviour.

Particularly, Glanville *et al.* (2008) examined the influence of the participation of children in religious services and religious group activities on students' outcomes using the data of the National Longitudinal Study of National Health having a sample of more than 14,000 participants (13 to 18 year-olds). When all the other factors between the children were controlled for, they observed that the children who were involved more in religious services had better achievements than the children who did not have religious involvement.

Other research studies comparing the outcomes of different religious groups based on the extent of their involvement, found that Jewish students for instance had better outcomes than students coming from other religious groups (Burstein, 2007; Lehrer, 1999; Cohen, 1974). Lehrer (1999) however found that Jewish students had, on average two more years of education than other religious groups, such as Protestants and Catholics, even after controlling for variables of SES and gender, and using multiple regression analysis.

However, it was important to identify why this religious group had better results than others. This was explained by examining characteristics of Judaism. It seems that this population valued education as it was believed that it was the means that would help children to improve their future life (Lehrer, 2004). Considering the argument of Brown and Grey (cited in Barrett, 2010), emphasising that people through religion socialisation, learn and internalise attitudes, values and behaviours led to the conclusion that Jewish families' positive attitude towards learning is shaped through their involvement in religion services.

Such evidence suggests that values and attitudes which are internalised might have a great influence on family decisions, perceptions, expectations and attitudes, as well as children's personality, behaviour, development and performance.

Moreover, behaviour is an aspect which can be influenced positively and formed through religion as has been identified by a range of research studies (Abar *et al.*,

2009; Bartkowski *et al.*, 2008). In particular, Barkowski *et al.* (2008) using the data from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study with a large number of kindergarten and first-grade child participants (21,600), used survey assessments completed by parents and teachers, to rate children's developmental outcomes based on behavioural, emotional and cognitive developmental criteria. Some independent variables used were the husband's and wife's religious attendance and the family's religious environment. Control variables were the race and gender of the child, the parents' employment status, education and family income. The most important outcome of this research was that the children of parents who had higher attendance to religious services possessed higher home social skills and their children displayed less behaviour problems at school.

It may be assumed that values promoted through religion can determine the parenting practices developed at home that have an impact on children's behaviour and personality. However, it is unwise to generalise and consider this as a norm. Different religions cultivate different values, habits, expectations and attitudes leading to development of different parenting behavior being developed that might influence to a greater or lesser degree children's behaviour and attainments as well.

By examining some of the family background characteristics, an outcome that can be discerned is that individual family characteristics may influence children's attainments but they cannot explain them fully, as other factors, such as parental involvement, establishment of home-learning environment and parenting styles might have a stronger impact. This justifies the importance of examining in this

thesis ways in which parents are involved, their attitudes, aspirations and expectations for their involvement, as well as factors which affect their decision to be involved. The next section introduces the importance of establishing a good home-learning environment.

Home-learning and parenting styles

The present thesis adopted the view that parental involvement can occur in two locations, home and school. Even though the parental involvement in schools has been examined extensively, recent studies have underlined the direct positive effects of home-learning environment (Desforges and Abouchaar, 2003; Harris and Goodall, 2007; Alexander, 2010). Home-learning can be defined as the educational experiences offered to children in the home environment, through the parenting practices that parents introduce.

However, even though researchers agree that parents, independent of their social class are involved in home-learning activities (Hartas, 2011; Melhuish *et al.*, 2001), there is not a consensus of opinions about the effects of home-learning activities in children's attainments. The study of Hartas (2011) was based on the rich data from the Millennium Cohort Study (MCS), which offered large-scale information about the 'New Century's Children' and their families. Hartas' (2011) study sought to investigate '*the relationship between parents' socio-economic status and home-learning and their effects on child language/literacy and social development*' (p. 907). The socio-economic and home-learning measures were based on interviews of parents of children when their children were three and five years old. Also the profiles of students were shaped by

teachers' ratings at the end of the first school year in England. The findings of the study indicated that the involvement of parents in home-learning activities could not reduce inequalities in children's language/literacy and social development. Indeed Hartas found out that the socio-economical circumstances of the families affected the home-learning activities. By contrast the study of Melhuish *et al.* (2001) came out to different results.

Specifically, Melhuish *et al.* (2001) through the Effective Preschool Provision of Education (EPPE) study taking place in England, attempted to identify the factors beginning from pre-school provision that affect children's progress. They examined many aspects, such as the attendance of children in pre-schools, the quality of pre-school provision and the home-learning environment of families.

First of all, the children's performance was assessed at age of three-years-old through to seven-years-old and the researchers linked students' performance with their parents' characteristics, as well as the home-learning environment and pre-school provision. They evaluated whether families introduced some of seven home-learning activities: reading; painting and drawing; visits to the libraries, playing/teaching with numbers; playing/teaching the alphabet; playing/teaching songs; and playing with numbers or letters. Each family had a score from 0-7. The families that scored 7 or near 7 were found to have organised very frequently home-learning activities at home, while children of families who scored 0 or near 0, did not experience such activities frequently.

Children's attainments at the age of three and five years, were assessed using four subscales from the British Ability Scales (BAS) (block-building, picture similarities, verbal comprehension and naming vocabulary) and at the age of seven years children were also assessed through national Key Stage 1 standard tests on reading and mathematics. After assessment, one parent of each child participating in the research was interviewed in order to identify family background characteristics. For the analysis, the researchers used multi-level modelling in order to predict children's achievements, considering a range of factors. The results of this study indicated that 16% of children aged 5 achieved higher than predicted from their background characteristics and 16% achieved lower than expected. A similar picture was observed at the age of seven years as well. Moreover, a very important outcome was that the home-learning environment was only moderately related to SES and parents' educational level, as sometimes families coming from lower SES families (in terms of family income, parents' education and occupation) scored highly and sometimes families coming from upper SES scored poorly on the home-learning environment measures (p. 108). They concluded that what parents do (home-learning activities) is more important than who they are. As a result, it seems that, across the social spectrum there are parents who are interested, engaged and participate in their children's learning.

The above outcomes suggest that some parents even though they might offer rich educational experiences at home, might not wish to participate in their children's education at school and vice versa.

Another important dimension of the establishment of good home-learning environment, is parenting styles that families introduce. Parenting styles can be associated with a number of parenting attitudes and practices that families introduce at home.

The fundamental early work of Baumrind (1971) investigated the impact of parenting styles on children's achievements through observing extensively parents and children's home interactions in 134 middle-class Caucasian families having children at the age of four and five-years-old. She identified three typical styles of parenting that appeared to have a great impact on their children's development, personality, behaviour and achievements. These styles will be introduced in order to illustrate the important role of families as well as the way specific parenting practices and attitudes (e.g parental expectations, communication and dialogue, home discussion), can influence children's learning and development.

In particular, parents were categorized by Baumrind as listed below:

a) *authoritative* parents who are responsive to the needs of children. They are warm and controlling (Baumrind, 1978; Spera, 2005). They also set high demands and expectations for achievements, appropriate to their children's age (Steinberg, 1991);

b) *authoritarian* parents who are demanding but not warm nor responsive. They are strict and they socialise their children through the setting of rules and orders (Baumrind 1978);

c) *permissive* parents, who possess some high and some low responsiveness. They are neither controlling nor demanding (Baumrind, 1978).

Baumrind (1971, 1978) suggested that parenting styles and practices possessed by families, may have a direct or indirect impact on later achievements. Moreover, Baumrind (1967) through a longitudinal research study that she conducted, investigated children's progress from preschool until adolescence. She selected 32 families after prolonged observations of the pre-school children's behaviour and then parents were compared. She concluded that children coming from families who possessed an authoritative parenting style, were more mature, independent and achievement-oriented from pre-school until adolescence.

Similarly Steinberg *et al.* (1989) conducted research to investigate whether the authoritative parenting style was related to children's academic achievements. In the research 120 families aged 11-16 years-old participated. Data about families' parenting styles were collected through school and home-visits. Also data about children's performance were obtained by schools as well as by standardised test scores. The results of the study indicated that children who experienced authoritative parenting style, were more mature and their performance was positively affected.

It is important however to identify which parenting practices introduced in the authoritative parenting style influenced children attainments. Parents' high aspirations were regarded almost as strong a predictor of children's attainments as SES, as was indicated from Catsambis (2001) who analysed the rich data of

National Educational Longitudinal Study (NELS, 1988, 1992), that was gathered by questionnaires to parents, children, teachers, headteachers and administrators. Hill and Tyson (2009) came out with a similar finding, through a meta-analysis of fifty studies that had been carried out. They emphasised that the achievement of middle-school students was associated with their family's aspirations and expectations. So it seems that when the family valued education, this was transmitted to children as well, leading them to try harder to progress (Harris and Goodall, 2008).

A question that might emerge is whether family background factors influence the parenting style adopted by each family. In Dyson's (2008) research and literature review conducted for the National Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC), it was underlined that children who grew up in poverty tended to have strict parents and they were used to being shouted at, punished and criticised by their parents. This might affect children's self-worth, self-confidence as well as learner identity, in turn influencing their achievements. On the other hand, as stated above, Melhuish *et al.* (2001) found out that some families coming from lower SES established very good home-learning environments. Hence, one cannot easily draw conclusions about whether and how poverty and social class, influence parenting style and home-learning environment.

Martines-Gonzales, Symeou *et al.* (2008) identified some other ways that parents supported their children's learning. More precisely, Gonzales, Symeou *et al.* (2008) conducted a comparative research between Spain and Cyprus and they examined the potential of dropping out from compulsory education. 131 Spanish

and Cypriot families of students aged 13-16 years, completed a questionnaire investigating parents' perceptions, concerns, expectations and interactions with teachers. The majority of the parents had a low educational background, finishing school at primary or secondary level. An important outcome related to the establishment of the home environment was that 87.8% of the respondents believed that children were provided with a comfortable environment at home. Also 89.3% of the parents appeared to encourage their children when they faced difficulties with school work. Parents appeared to be interested in being informed about study skills in order to monitor their children's homework effectively. This study investigated other micro factors such as home and school interactions and parents' expectations that will be examined in a later section. At this point, it is important to underline that the outcome of this study was that even though the majority of parents had low educational achievements themselves, they tried to help their children to succeed in a range of ways such as by ensuring a good home environment, by providing children with the appropriate resources that facilitated their study and through their encouragement. However, a weakness of this study was that its outcomes were not based on robust evidence related to the effects of parents' attitudes on their children's educational outcomes but on participants' reported views, indicating the need for more systematic evaluations in Cyprus.

Investigation of family background factors, indicates that explanations for achievement differences are very complex and reflect the inter-relationship of many factors. For instance, it has been revealed that social class cannot entirely account for educational achievements, as parenting styles, values, expectations,

aspirations and attitudes play an important role. It should also be emphasised that each family is an individual entity and generalisation of their attitudes based on group characteristics, is unwise as it can lead to unfounded results. Before turning to policy texts, the context of policy influence in the Cypriot context will be introduced below.

2.2.3 The Cypriot context of influence

It is important to underline that independent national policy of Cyprus was lacking until recently as Cypriot education for many years was overcome by the consequences of the war of 1974, when Turkey invaded Cyprus. After that, as was indicated in Chapter one, there was a period of educational borrowing from the Greek educational system and there was a fear that by promoting independent national educational policy the expansion of Greek educational ideas and identity would be limited and restricted (Persianis, 1978).

However, one of the goals of the government in 1999-2003 was to achieve development, to restructure the economy and increase the competitiveness of the country. It was important to adjust the education to economy's needs, to achieve the restructure of the economy (Persianis, 2010). The international interest in raising school achievements also had an effect on the Cypriot educational system as well. In the 1990s, the government of Cyprus took measures to address the international goals of 'Education for All' (EFA) as the EFA country report indicated (UNESCO, 2000). Cyprus followed the requirements of EFA concerning the goals related to primary education, trying to achieve a universal

access and completion of primary education by 2000 and improvement in learning achievements. The first objective of EFA about giving access to children and increasing the numbers of children who completed the primary education was a major goal of Cyprus (UNESCO, 2000) and it was achieved as 100% children aged from 5-14 years were enrolled in compulsory education by 1990 (Ministry of Education and Culture, MOEC, 2008).

Other measures taken to achieve the EFA goals were: the integration of children with special needs; the in-service training of primary teachers and the introduction of innovations in teaching methodologies by seeking to upgrade teaching and learning effectiveness. Furthermore, there was established some free Greek afternoon lessons to immigrant children and adults offered by the government in public schools in order for them to be better adjusted to society (UNESCO, 2000).

However the problem that Cyprus faced in the implementation of the second EFA measure about the improvement of achievements was the absence of national standards so there was not any way to assess the effectiveness of the measures (Pashiardis, 2004).

As a result, it seems that even though the education of Cyprus was influenced by international attention to educational achievements, the structure of the existing educational system hindered them in promoting more measures to increase achievements. Even though in the international context, there was an emphasis paid to parents involvement at this period of time, promoting educational policies

seeking to increase the roles and responsibilities of parents, Cypriot policy-makers did not address this issue until 2007, as mentioned earlier, when a committee of seven academicians was hired to evaluate the educational system of Cyprus and to suggest ways to modernise it. This committee suggested that more autonomy and authority should be given to schools and that co-operation between home and school should be developed (Commission for Educational Reform, 2004). Some emphasis on schools' autonomy can be observed by the New Curriculum which will be examined in more in depth in the document analysis chapter.

After the introduction of the context of policy influence that led some governments to involve parents in education in their attempts to increase achievements, it is important to examine the impact of the context of policy influence in the context of policy text by drawing on some key policy texts that were promoted in the English context in the next section, by way of illustration.

2.3 Context of policy text

Policy-makers' awareness of the importance of parental involvement, prompted by a wish to raise school attainments and school responsiveness to the economy, has led to change and development in policy-making. For the examination of the context of policy texts, an illustrative case of England will be provided between the period of 1978 to 2007 as there has been a wide-spread concern over poor and failing standards in the education of England (OECD, 2005).

The policy texts that were promoted will be introduced and then each one will be considered, indicating whether the policies that were developed, addressed the macro goal of government, of raising achievements, by drawing upon research evidence in the field.

2.3.1 Policy texts

Family-school relationships were redefined as ideas about parental involvement evolved and participation of parents in education became more formalised after more than forty years in the English context. Plowden report was the first ground-breaking policy text that identified the importance of parents' participation in their children's education, Central Advisory Committee for Education (England) (CACE, 1978). This document promoted for the first time the development of home-school links such as home-school communication, meetings with parents, the creation of parent-teacher associations (PTAs) as well as the open lessons which parents could attend. In the period that the Plowden Report was promoted, it was attempted to build schools to 'compensate for society' through the involvement of parents (Alexander, 2010). Hence, a deficit view of parenting was promoted.

However by the 1980s, the parents were seen as 'consumers' of education rather than partners in line with notions of market ideology. In the *Educational Act* of 1980, Department of Education Science, (DES), parental rights in running of the schools were increased as parents had the opportunity to participate in schools' governing bodies, as well as to choose their children's schools, permitting them

to choose schools they wished their child to attend, subject to certain exceptions (DES, 1980). This policy gave increased responsibilities and duties to the governing bodies (Tomlinson, 1991) who were expected to report back to all parents through the PTA. In practice, parents were able to participate in decision-making processes about important issues such as the budget as well as the staffing of the school (Hughes *et al.*, 1994). However, local authorities were allowed to refuse a parent's choice of school on the grounds of educational efficiency.

However it seems that the increased rights given to parents regarding their participation to governing bodies were also given for political reasons. As Alexander (2010) indicated, the Conservative government tried to limit the role of teachers unions in governing bodies whom it was thought might hold low expectations for pupils' progress.

It seems that such policies did not achieve the desired effects regarding school choice. This emerged from a research project conducted in Scotland on its own legislation, *Scotland Education Act*, (Great Britain, 1981) on school choice that it was similar to the *English Education Act* (DES, 1980). In particular, information was gathered by conducting 616 parent interviews (Adler *et al.*, 1989). They indicated that the majority of the parents who exercised their choice of school were parents with higher SES. As Adler *et al.* (1989) concluded, some schools were neglected due to social and geographical reasons, leading them to a disadvantaged position as they had to operate with fewer resources and consequently they became less effective.

Similarly, in qualitative research conducted by Hughes *et al.* (1994) with 138 families, parents were asked to state the reasons for choosing a school. The most cited criterion was the locality, as parents preferred schools in their neighbourhood in order to be convenient but the second most cited criterion was schools' reputation.

It seems that the families who benefited from this right to choose were the middle-class families, as Ball (2003) indicated, as they had the appropriate social networks and resources to choose the schools which occupied the higher places in schools' rankings. As a result, parents from high SES groups could ensure that their children would enter the best schools. In fact, it can be assumed that school choice extended educational inequalities rather than decreased them (West and Pennell, 1999).

Regarding the opportunity of parents to participate in governance of schools, Golby and Lane (1989) analysed parent-governor membership of primary schools in Exeter and they indicated that fewer parents (most of them well-qualified) were attracted to governing bodies as governor's responsibilities became more demanding, requiring specialised skills. Also Thomas and Martin (1996) indicated that parents coming from lower SES groups were under-represented on such bodies. These factors contributed to a shortage of parent governors that was observed in 1992 (Hughes *et al.*, 1992). Hence the effectiveness of the policy in giving the opportunity to parents to participate in governing bodies can also be challenged.

Parents' rights were strengthened by the *Education Act* (DES, 1986) which reshaped governing bodies. Particularly, it gave equal representation of parents governors with governors of other involved groups in the local authority for which it had responsibility for education under its jurisdiction. Also governors had to prepare an annual report addressed to parents as well as meetings with parents in order to provide them with information about the school's operation, the curriculum, organisation and examination results to help parents make their choice. This Act gave the opportunity to some parents to take part in the decision-making processes, raising their consciousness about educational issues as Sallis (1987) indicated. It seems though that the attention of policies was not yet focused on increasing parental involvement in children's learning.

Then in the *Educational Reform Act* (ERA) (DES, 1988), the National Curriculum was introduced and local management of schools when the rights of parents to send their child to the school of their choice was expanded. The local authority could no longer refuse a parent's choice on the grounds that it would not be in the interests of educational efficiency and economy. The only remaining grounds for refusal were physical capacity of the school that could not be exceeded. In other words, over-crowding of a popular school was a challenge. Moreover, open enrolment, led to greater competition between schools to keep staff as well as children and hence, an increased need to market themselves arose.

In the *Education School Act* (DES, 1992) parents had access to information regarding their schools' effectiveness, as schools' standard assessment test

results at age 11 years were published in the media. The publication of schools' attainment league tables created fiercer competition between schools. Bradley *et al.* (2001) however found that the competition could enhance performance. Some evidence from the US context (Hoxby, 2000; 2003) indicated that competition could improve children's attainments but at the same time it could raise inequalities by creating winners and losers, with popular schools growing larger and unpopular schools in disadvantaged areas becoming 'sink schools'. Furthermore emphasis on high achievement may run the risk of placing additional stress on the children concerned.

Even though this policy might push the schools to work for improvement, at the same time, schools in their attempt to ensure top places in the league tables, turned their attention to the 'worth' of the children. This attitude was emphasised by Kenway and Bullen (2001) who indicated that headteachers believed that the best way to improve a school was to be careful with the 'intake' of the school. The term 'intake' researchers found, was addressed to the value of the children. For instance, it was believed that female students, as well as middle-class students had 'higher value' than the other children as they could contribute to the improvement of the school to a greater extent (Ball and Gewirtz 1997). As a result, it can be concluded that it was the children who served as a means for achieving the schools' targets.

By 1997, when the New Labour government came into office, as Cardini (2006) noted, it continued to favour parent choice as a means to raise standards. However, the long-term costs of social exclusion and the failure to engage more

advantaged parents was recognised. It was realised that parents can contribute in the improvement of children's attainments through their support of children's learning by creating home-school partnerships. Home-school agreements were set out to indicate mutual responsibilities and expectations. It seems that New Labour held a different ideology from the previous government, in some respects. Hence home-school commitments were promoted, defining each party's (home and school) roles and responsibilities in such a way that parents would have common expectations with teachers and work together for achieving them. This was the first time that policy-makers paid special attention to the substantial involvement of parents in children's learning, with initiatives such as Sure Start programmes, focused on parents in disadvantaged areas. In the *Every Child Matters*, Department of Education and Skills (DfES, 2003) agenda, there was an emphasis on promoting strong links between home, school and community and hence extended schools were provided, offering parenting support as well as adult learning.

The most important step forward was achieved through *Every Parent Matters* (DfES, 2007) in which the term 'engagement' replaced the term 'involvement' and local authorities were advised to appoint parenting advisors. Parents meanwhile were to be given a role in shaping such services, thereby recognising their influence on children's attainments (DfES, 2007). Meanwhile, as Desforges and Abouchaar (2003) and Harris and Goodall (2007) indicated, the parental engagement in children's learning can have a great impact on children's attainments. Indeed, there was an attempt to offer support to parents guiding

them on how they can contribute in their children's learning through a range of parenting programmes.

This brief illustration of school choice policy in the English context raises many questions and might well create a greater inequality rather than reduce it. The context of policy influence and text sections serve to illuminate the extent to which parental involvement is embedded in conflicting educational and political ideology. Perhaps what the previous Labour government policy exposed was the powerful and enduring association between poverty, life chances and educational achievement. In the following section the case of the Cypriot context is presented.

2.3.2 Policy text in Cyprus

In Cyprus, there has been a corresponding lack of related educational policies. However, some policy texts indicating the educational policy of Cyprus appeared in the last decade. The most important policy documents were the *Educational Reform Report* (Commission for Educational Reform, 2004) and the *New Curriculum* (Ministry of Education and Culture, Pedagogical Institute, 2010). The Educational Reform Committee suggested that in order to create a humane and a democratic school, the right to participate in school should be the same for everyone, it should eliminate social exclusion, it should respect pluralism and diversity. This report was adopted and followed by the government elected in 2008 and used as a basis for achieving the reform of education (Persianis, 2010).

The attention of the government was to reduce inequalities, giving access to all the children to education. To achieve that, however there was an attempt made to decentralise the educational system (Persianis, 2010) as it was highly centralised (Georgiou, 1997). Comparing the educational policies in England with Cyprus, it seems that English policy-makers for many years paid more attention to enhancing competitiveness and market forces thereby increasing inequality in order to raise achievements, while in the Cypriot case the attention was on how to ensure equality in access to the education.

The *Educational Reform Report* (Commission for Educational Reform, 2004) suggested specific processes seeking to improve school work. For instance, it was emphasised that there was a need to establish indicators of students' success. The *New Curriculum* (MOEC, Pedagogical Institute, 2010) was an important document indicating the educational policy of the government. This was developed following the suggestions of the *Educational Reform Report* (Commission for Educational Reform, 2004). Even though the existence of a national curriculum was a long-term policy in Cyprus, the *New Curriculum* differed significantly from previous ones as it was not focused only on the content of the education but it addressed issues about the learning environment, the teaching methods, the means of teaching and learning, the indicators of success, the methods of assessments, as well as home-school relationships. The *New Curriculum* supported the decentralisation of the education by giving more freedom to teachers and promoting them to co-operate with parents. One of its goals was to increase the involvement of parents. As the *New Curriculum* (MOEC, Pedagogical Institute, 2010) has only recently been introduced in

schools it is difficult yet to have any indication of its impact on involvement of parents.

It seems that even though England is rich in educational policies as well as in the evaluation of these policies, the goals and intentions of policies have changed over the time, restricting the gradual increase of parental involvement in their children's learning.

This has occurred due to the different ideological orientation of the governments influencing the policy development about the role of parents in their children's education. Hence it is important to examine the policy context during the examination of parental involvement in order to identify the intentions, influences, relationships and impact of context of influence, to policy text and practice.

Regarding the Cypriot context, the fact that the Cypriot policy-makers appeared to understand, appreciate and try to use the parents in the *Education Reform* of the educational system as well as the *New Curriculum*, is an important step forward. However there is a need to investigate whether the teachers who would implement the policy shared a similar view. Hence the views of teachers will be examined by the present research.

The next section introduces how the parents were involved in schools in the context of practice.

2.4 Context of practice

After the macro-level investigation of family backgrounds factors and their impact on achievements, as well as the promotion of specific policies to increase parental involvement in education, this section seeks to report research on the context of practice of parental involvement. Bearing in mind the outcomes of research indicating the positive impact of parental involvement in children's academic learning (Henderson and Berla, 1994; Desforges and Abouchaar, 2003; Harris and Goodall, 2007), it is important to examine the evidence related to relationships of home and school as well as schools' attempts to enhance parental involvement by adopting specific programmes. This section will report what parents and schools actually do (spontaneously-occurring parental involvement activities) and what intervention programmes seek to do (induced activities) in order to involve parents in their children's learning (Desforges and Abouchaar, 2003).

2.4.1 Spontaneous parental involvement

This section introduces the 'bottom-up' activities of parental involvement beginning with home activities in the context of practice and finishes with participation in governing bodies. Spontaneous parental involvement research includes common activities organised on an every day basis.

The section is oriented towards addressing the practical ways in which the parents have been reported to be involved in their children's education as well as their perceptions and expectations, rather than evaluating the impact of each

activity on achievements. These were the aspects most pertinent to the present research study.

Good home-parenting

First of all, it is important to examine the role of good parenting at home as it is a factor that can have a direct impact on children's achievements (Alexander, 2010). An outstanding research study that examined this aspect of parent involvement was the EPPE study Sylva *et al.* (1999) that described and analysed the social and academic development of 3000 children aged 3 to 7 years across England. The purpose of the project was to recognise the differential effects of pre-school settings on children, the characteristics of the effective pre-school settings as well as to identify the developmental progress of children coming from different social and cultural backgrounds.

Sylva *et al.* (1999) established developmental profiles for each child, gathering information for the social-emotional, cognitive and language status of the children through standardised child assessments, interviews with pre-school staff, as well as observations. Information about the developmental history of the children and their family background characteristics were gathered through parents' interviews. Using complex multi-level modelling they identified the strong effects of home and pre-school social and educational experiences on the children's development. They also identified that the quality of pre-school education played a vital role in academic and social behavioural outcomes.

After controlling for the parents' occupation and education factors Sylva *et al.* (2004) identified the role of home-learning environment on children's attainments. Even though it was observed that the effects of the home environment on earlier ages (pre-school) were stronger, it was identified that the home continued to influence children's performance in primary school as well. They concluded that the home-learning environment influenced the children's self-perception as it was revealed that the self-image was also strongly linked with their achievements in reading, mathematics as well as self-regulation (Sylva *et al.*, 2004).

As indicated in the context of policy influence as well, parents' modelling of aspirations and expectations had a major impact on children's school outcomes as Desforges and Abouchaar (2003) had found.

Considering the importance of parents to children's achievements, it is essential to illustrate how this 'asset' is exploited by schools, by introducing the current home-school links as these were also pertinent to the current study.

Home-school relationships

Russell and Granville (2005) gathered information about home-school relationships in Scotland through conducting 34 focus group parent interviews. It was identified that the most common home-school relationships were: participation of parents in night meetings at school, through communication and dialogue, and through supporting and monitoring their children's homework.

As far as the participation of parents in meetings was concerned, many parents were not satisfied, as they were not informed in depth about their children's progress. Parents mentioned that some teachers kept saying that 'everything is fine', creating bad feelings in parents who believed that they wasted their time as they were not getting any important information (Russell and Granville, 2005).

This outcome was in line with research of Clarke and Power (1998) who studied the usefulness of school reports to parents and parents' evenings in different secondary schools in England. A questionnaire was completed by 183 schools outlining their schools' characteristics, students' population and aspects related to home-school reporting. Then four schools were selected and participated in case studies. For collecting data about parents' perceptions, 68 parents were interviewed and expressed their views and feelings about the school reports. Clarke and Power (1998) found out that parents were not satisfied about the information they received from school regarding their children's progress. Parents explained that often the information they received was not clear and they could not understand it. As a result, often they avoided reading reports, announcements and notices because they realised that these did not address issues related to students' academic progress.

Parents in the Russell and Granville's research (2005) tended to believe that calling the teacher was a very effective way of communication. On the other hand teachers used the telephone conversations mostly when some problems appeared, such as injury or illness.

Another qualitative study of Crozier (2000) in two secondary schools through both questionnaires and interviews, indicated that some parents were opposed to calling the teachers to discuss school work or even visit the school for academic matters as they believed that this was a kind of interference in their children's lives. Overall, findings from these studies provides a mixed picture of home-school relationships.

Another way which parents can be informed about what their children do at schools, as well as their progress can be through their homework. In the next section there is an introduction of some aspects examined from literature and research regarding the importance of homework.

Homework

Examining the impact of parental involvement in homework, in a review of research from Sharp *et al.* (2001) funded by Ofsted, it was pointed out that no positive contribution between the parental involvement in homework and the children's attainments in schools could be identified. Taking into consideration that parents of lower-attaining students tended to spend more time on their children's homework, as Epstein (1988) and Levin *et al.* (1988) identified, this might explain why the involvement of parents in homework was not considered to be an effective practice in the review of research by Sharp and others. Epstein pointed out that the valuable role of homework was that it connected the home and school, because parents wished to help their children to progress through homework (Epstein *et al.*; 2009; Epstein, 2011). Hence it seems that parents'

supervision of homework might influence indirectly their achievements. The rationale underpinning this assumption will be developed below, introducing first of all beliefs about the value of homework.

Alexander (2010) examined a range of aspects about primary education. For example, he examined ways that primary education will meet the needs of today's society, the learning environment and curriculum that should be provided, the quality of primary education as well as the outcomes of the attempts of government to raise standards. About homework, he found that parent participants in his primary review valued homework, but there were some who expressed their difficulties in helping their children.

Taking account of parents' views about the family's role in supporting children's homework, from the perspective of the psychological theory of Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997) which linked parents' role construction with their involvement, this indicated that parents' perception about their role in education could determine their involvement or non-involvement. It could also lead to the beneficial impact on the supervision of children's homework by confident parents. Parents, through homework help and their children's positive attitude towards this help, can account for its beneficial role and might serve to shape their 'self efficacy' views as was mentioned in the context of influence, leading to an increase in their involvement. The next part of this section will examine parents' involvement in the school context.

Participation in governing bodies

Parents have tended not to value their participation in governing bodies and parents' associations and this can be justified by the lack in the number of parents who were involved on such board: (Golby and Lane, 1989; Thomas and Martin, 1996). The outcomes of the above studies was already emphasised in the context of policy text section and parents' reluctance was explained by considering the increased responsibilities given to these bodies and the requirement of high skills in order that they can be dealt with appropriately. For instance, in research conducted in Slovenia with a sample of 368 parents and 134 lead teachers, who completed a questionnaire, it was indicated that even though parents' readiness to participate in schools' governance board was moderately high, when they became involved they 'remained silent because of their fear that they lacked professional knowledge for a valuable contribution' (Cankar *et al.*, 2009; p. 24). Yet another explanation for the avoidance of parents in becoming members of such boards can be working constraints, as many parents' jobs' requirements can restrict their participation (Alexander, 2010).

It is difficult to refer to the participation of parents in schools' boards without referring to the influence of the SES factors on their decision to become involved. For example, in the Crozier (2000) case study, working-class parents did not know even who the parent school governors were, while some middle-class parents were meeting them in community groups or interacting with them through telephone conversations. It was also indicated that governors correspondingly approached specific groups of parents.

Alexander (2010) also indicated that PAs attracted parents from specific backgrounds and higher SES groups. This can be explained by the social and cultural capital theory of Bourdieu (1986), discussed under the context of influence as well, emphasising that parents from higher social classes may use their established social connections (cultural capital) through the power they enjoy, leading them to become involved with such boards, either by becoming members or by co-operating to these boards.

These outcomes contributed to a position emphasised by Alexander (2010) that PAs were becoming restrictive to less advantaged parents as their experiences, their expectations and networks were not equivalent to the ones promoted by the school.

It is now important to focus on the role of schools in the development of better home-school relationships. For instance, the leadership of the school as well as teachers' attitudes and expectations have been found to have importance.

Leadership role

The leader of the school can play an important role in encouraging the involvement of parents. In the case study conducted by Ho (2009), investigating the influence of educational leadership on parental involvement in an Asian context, it was identified that the form of leadership adopted by each one of three participating principals influenced significantly the level and the effectiveness of home-school relationships. This was because each principal used different

strategies for involving parents. These results were in line with the results of the study of Griffith (2001) who conducted a survey with the parents of 82 elementary schools in the USA and their principals, also indicating that ‘principal behaviour influences parent involvement’ (p.18).

Headteachers’ influence on parental involvement can also be observed through teachers’ attitudes and behaviours (Griffith, 2001; Epstein, 1991) as inevitably teachers are influenced by their leaders’ goals, aspirations and expectations. This indicates the need for an examination of the effects of teachers’ attitudes and expectations towards parental involvement.

Teachers’ attitudes and expectations

In a survey carried out in 55 primary schools with 141 lead teacher participants and 810 parents in the Slovenian context, teachers’ and parents’ expectations were investigated (Cankar, Deutsch and Kolar, 2009). Teachers believed that home-school co-operation was important. However they were not enthusiastic about the potential participation of parents in class lessons, as they felt that there would be ‘additional pressure, increased responsibility and more time needed for planning their instruction’ (p. 10).

Parents’ experiences of home-school relationships can also give insight into teachers’ attitudes towards parents. Crozier (1999) drew on data from a three-year research project examining parents’ relationships with their children’s school. This study was conducted with 58 parents and 15 teachers of a secondary

school but it is important to present as very interesting conclusions emerged about teachers' attitudes and expectations by examining both the teachers' and parents' points of views. The data were collected through in-depth interviews of parents and teachers and Crozier found that many working-class parents believed that teachers were superior and this perception was formed through teachers' stance, as they co-operated with parents by setting their own terms. The teachers of the same study appeared to accuse the working-class parents of not being 'supportive' parents as they did not attend schools' activities, they could not discipline their children and they did not support their children's education. In other words, Crozier concluded that teachers tended to set particular expectations for parents' roles and when they realised that some parents did not live up to their expectations, they were very critical about them, characterising them as 'indifferent' and hostile to the school.

De Cavalho (2001) and Russell and Granville (2005) reached similar conclusions in their studies as they found that teachers appreciated the help of parents in specific areas such as pupils' behaviour and homework. As Crozier (1998) also argued, teachers even though they are likely to involve parents, do not wish to permit any interference from parents that they perceive crosses their professional boundary.

This section has illustrated a small sample of research studies in order to consider a range of spontaneous parental involvement activities. For achieving this, mostly qualitative studies were introduced, examining the impact of practice on children's attainments. The next section will illustrate some parental involvement

intervention programmes that imposed parental involvement activities, in order to achieve governmental goals to involve parents.

2.4.2 Induced activities to promote parental involvement

Policy-makers realising the importance of parents in children's attainments have also promoted parental involvement intervention programmes in schools. After the examination of what parents typically do to be involved in their children's education, this section will examine evidence describing and analysing what school intervention programmes do to involve parents in education.

There have been different kinds of intervention projects, each one promoted to achieve different goals, such as the improvement of home-school interactions, the improvement of children's achievements, the increase of parental involvement, as well as the improvement of children's behaviour. However numerous gaps in the evidence base of intervention programmes can be observed. As Goodall and Vorhaus (2011) concluded in a very recent review of the intervention studies that aimed to improve parental engagement in the education, there is a little robust examination of the impact of these programmes on children's academic and learning outcomes. The term 'robust' is taken to refer to research that provides sound evidence about the impact of parental intervention programmes on children's academic outcomes.

As there have been few robust intervention projects indicating the effects of programmes, this section will focus on the projects that have been evaluated, to provide an understanding about the importance of parenting practices.

Moreover, it is important to note that some projects to be presented below were applied in pre-primary schools even though this age range was not the focus of this research study. They are introduced here as they have had a significant impact on children's outcomes, indicating that they may have implications for use in primary schools as well.

A programme that evaluated the impact of a reading project was implemented in 10 pre-primary schools in England. A group of families from each school participated in the Raising Early Achievements in Literacy (REAL) project (Hannon and Nutbrown, 2001). This programme did not intend to increase children's attainments through direct teaching but through the teachers' and parents' interactions. Some activities were introduced through the teachers' home visits, by the provision of literacy resources, increased communication opportunities, as well as the adults' opportunities for education. The progress of children was measured through a test of early literacy development. The evaluation indicated that the group of children who participated in the programme made more progress in comparison with the control group (Hannon and Nutbrown, 2001). Hence this research indicated the great potential impact of home-school communication to children's attainments.

Redding *et al.* (2004) examined whether the implementation of a set of parental engagement strategies in 129 American schools for two years (Solid Foundation Schools) had an impact on children's outcomes. It compared the participating schools' results with the matched control schools in the State as a whole. Some

of the practices introduced in the participating schools included the participation of parents in decision-making processes, discussion of the expectation of parents, teachers and children, parents' education, discussion of the responsibilities expected from parents about the homework supervision, home visits and family nights. The positive impact of the programme was identified by improvement in test scores of the participating schools in relation to comparison group. The proportion of children in the sample schools that met the State's expectations was increased by 4.5%, while the comparison matched group was increased by 2.5%. Analysing these results Redding *et al.* 2004 concluded that this progress was due to the fact that the students' learning was the combined focus of parents and teachers.

Other programmes have focused on educating parents. For example, family numeracy pilot programmes have been promoted by the Basic Skills Agency (1998), in which more than 500 English families participated. This programme included joint sessions with parents and children and separate sessions for parents and children. Goodall and Vorhaus (2011) referred to the positive impact of these programmes which found that children of families who participated in such programmes had made significant progress on a number scale and mathematical language scale, compared with other children who did not participate. It was also identified that parents increased their involvement in schools. Hence, it seems that such programmes not only influence positively children's attainments but the attitudes of parents towards education as well.

An intervention programme introduced in Turkey with significant results was the Mother-Child Education Program (MOCEP) which was firstly implemented in 1985 and expanded in the following years (Brooks, 2008). This programme lasted for 25 weeks and was addressed to 5-year-old children. It included home visits, weekly group meetings with mothers who were motivated to implement pre-reading and pre-numeracy activities at home with their children. The mothers were kept regularly informed about their children's development. Ninety-two experimental groups participated in the research as well as eighty-five comparisons groups. Children were evaluated when the programme finished and one year afterwards, in the first year in primary school, they were reassessed through literacy and numeracy instruments. The results indicated that the intervention group had higher grades than the comparison group and they were also likely to begin reading at school earlier than the comparison children. Teachers also emphasised that the mothers of the intervention group children were more frequently involved and interested in their children's schooling. The proportion of the intervention group children who participated in this programme who went on to university was 44.7% whilst 30.6% from comparison group did so (Brooks, 2008). Identifying that this programme was well designed, permitting assessment of its effects and having a strong positive impact on children's attainments, the programme was expanded to a still bigger population in the following years, by 2004 reaching over 180,000 mothers.

The role of children in enhancing parental involvement was emphasised from the Home-School Knowledge Exchange Project (HSKE) (Feiler, Greenhough *et al.*, 2006). This project was addressed to children of 5-7 years and 7-11 years,

respectively. This programme lasted for two years in which children participated in home-school exchange of knowledge activities. A range of materials was used such as videos and disposable cameras in order to provide for parents information about school work, but the impact of the project on children's outcomes was not evaluated. However it was observed that children can be used as the agent that can increase the involvement of their parents in learning activities.

Another programme designed to address home-school knowledge exchange was the School Home Support Practitioners (SHSPs) (Rogers, Hallam *et al.*, 2010). The project effectiveness was measured through 60 staff interviews, evaluating the attendance, behaviour and parental involvement. Rogers *et al.* (2010) compared the improvements of children who participated in the study regarding their behaviour, their attendance, the completion of homework, the completion of tasks and problem-solving with the group of children who did not participate in the project. They identified significant progress in the participant children as compared with the control children. Teachers also reported positive views on the impact of the project, identifying improvement in the involvement of parents in their children's learning that was also confirmed by the parents themselves as well. The interesting aspect of the specific programme was that it attracted and was valued by parents as well.

Other programmes have been designed to eliminate behaviour problems. The SAAF (Strong African American Families Programme) programme attempted to eliminate risk behaviours, such as alcohol use and early onset of sexual activity

through improving parent-children communication (Brody, 2004). The programme was addressed to the mothers of 11 year-old children and a control group of parents was used as well. Families who belonged to the intervention groups were involved in more activities enhancing the improvement of communication and dialogue in contrast with the families of the control group. This programme indicated that the intervention group parents changed their communicative parenting. It also revealed that improvement of communication could eliminate the possibilities of possessing risk behaviour in the intervention group (Brody, 2004). As a result, it seems that parental involvement can contribute also to the maintenance of discipline at school.

A programme that has addressed young children's social behaviour was the Triple P Programme. A preliminary evaluation of this programme took place in two locations of Australia involving 138 families, of whom 46 completed the programme (Ralph and Sanders, 2003). The programme included group sessions for parents, providing support and advice about issues such as harsh discipline styles, conflicts and communication with children, and monitoring of children's activities. After the sessions, parents and children were surveyed and then again after a year. A positive impact of the programmes was maintained after a year as parents reported a reduction in their conflicts with their children, an increase in their confidence, as well as improvement in parenting styles.

Having provided an overview of a sample of parents' intervention programmes it can be concluded that programmes that are well designed might be effective. Effective practices, were ones which were seeking to improve home-school

relationships, through guiding and informing parents on how they could support their children's learning. However, as Goodall and Vorhaus (2011) indicated, there is a lack of intervention programmes that have been sufficiently focused in their impact on students' outcomes, as well as demonstrating clearly a relationship between the intervention and the outcome.

Even though there have not been many projects with robust examination of their impact, parents' intervention projects designed and promoted globally have been numerous. This is not the case in Cyprus, where the home-school relationships agenda is not yet so advanced. As a result, the next section will be focused on what parents do to be involved in their children's education rather than on parent intervention programmes' promoted activities.

2.4.3 Context of practice in Cyprus

In Cyprus, the ways in which parents have been involved have been limited. This is because parental involvement has not been one of the government's priorities until recently. However, a lot of similarities with the international context can be observed by examining the empirical research that addresses what parents do to be involved as well as involving stakeholders' aspirations and expectations.

Georgiou (1997) examined parental involvement activities in Cypriot primary schools. He collected his data through 852 parents from 20 schools who participated by completing a questionnaire. The questionnaires were linked with children's academic achievements in language and mathematics with the help of teachers. An average score from these two subjects was used. Georgiou

examined the activities that were introduced at home as well as the parental involvement in children's schools. Through factor analysis Georgiou indicated that different kinds of involvement had a different impact on academic achievements. Particularly he found that the help that parents provided for their children's homework was negatively correlated with children's achievements. However this was explained by parents of low-achieving children spending more time assisting their children.

Moreover, he identified that close contact with school can be positively associated with children's attainments. The activity that had the strongest correlation with achievements was face-to-face parent-teachers' meetings. Other positive correlations found were with participation in schools' activities, participation at events organised by PA, as well as involvement on PA boards. Finally, he did not find such a strong correlation between learning at home factors and achievements. He explained this by referring to the confused roles of parents, as many teachers impressed on parents that they did not have to help their children at home, unless they asked for them to. As a result, parents were afraid of causing problems if they attempted to deal with learning activities at home.

Symeou (2002) focused on the examination of current home-school links in Cyprus through a nation-wide survey of primary schools. Three hundred and forty-eight parents and teachers participated in research coming from one hundred and seventy-three schools. The data were collected through two separate questionnaires, as well as some pilot interviews with a sample of parents and

teachers. Parents and teachers indicated the ways that the home and schools were linked. The participants indicated that the most commonly established practice was the provision of information from teachers to parents about their children's attainments, behaviour, study at home and work at school. Parents were more rarely invited to help in class or attend events. He identified that teachers in Cyprus who taught in lower levels of primary schools developed better communication links with parents than the teachers teaching in upper grades.

Also class size influenced the frequency and the nature of information they sent to the parents. The teachers who had smaller classes were more likely to provide written information, while the teachers who had larger classes provided mostly oral information. In addition, he identified that the parents who were members of PAs were more frequently informed about their children's progress, receiving more written notices about their children and being more frequently invited to attend class and school events. Symeou (2002) concluded that the nature of involvement of parents is determined and controlled by schools and teachers, a conclusion that it is in line with the finding of Georgiou (1996).

The two research studies discussed above, indicate that the majority of the practices seeking to involve parents are focused on presenting the work of school to parents, a conclusion that was supported by Symeou (2007) as well. To be more precise, the most common practices were the parents' meetings, sending of notices to parents to attend events and participate in PAs, developing one-way communication between home and school.

Symeou (2008) described the roles and responsibilities of PAs. This board was elected every year and its main role was to support the school financially. That was why PAs organised a range of activities to raise money. Even though they did not participate in decision-making processes, they were regarded as a powerful group that could influence educational policy, as they had established networks with political parties.

Furthermore Symeou (2008) gave a description of parents' meetings which were organised on a regular basis, once a week in school time. Parents or guardians could visit the school at a specific time to be informed about their children's progress and to discuss with teachers other related issues.

However, it is important to refer to Cypriot parents' attitudes towards their children's education. Phtiaka (1998) referred to the increased interest of parents about their children's education as well as their acceptance of the responsibility towards the supervision of the homework of their children. At the same time, they did not feel that they had any role to play in school-based activities as they believed that it was schools' and teachers' responsibilities.

The study of Symeou (2007) examined whether the social and cultural capital (as defined by Bourdieu, 1986) of the family influenced the home-school relationships, through a case study examining the interactions of home and school in two school sites. Even though it was a small-scale study, it provided important information about Cypriot parents' and teachers' attitudes. He

examined parents' attitudes and views from both higher and lower social-class families who participated in the study. His research concluded that all the families, independent of the family background characteristics, valued the education of their children, believing that it was a shared responsibility between home and school. However he indicated that families with different social and cultural capital supported their children's education in different ways. The parents coming from higher SES used their cultural and educational resources and they supported effectively their children, as expected by the school. These parents appeared to use their power and prestige in order to intervene in the schools' operations, while parents coming from lower SES and cultural groups believed that their children's educational success was dependent on teachers' professional expertise.

Looking at the Cypriot context, it is clear that the involvement opportunities of parents were limited. The context of practice indicated that parents were involved in schools' practices in restricted ways. There were some indications in the international context of some promising parents' intervention programmes that need to be expanded. The involvement of parents in schools is still focused on being involved in the schools' activities. On the other hand, parental intervention programmes indicate the importance of being involved in activities that support those parents who are seeking to enhance children's learning.

2.5 Conclusion

It seems that the intentions of policy-makers are not always reached due to the proliferation of policies and many times policies were overlapping or conflicting with one another. Characteristically Ball (2003, p.27) talked about this issue, stating:

‘Policy is almost always, to some extent, messy, incoherent, and *ad hoc*, as the state responds to different sorts of problems and contradictions and interests, and new policies are sedimented into a history of previous policies which may be superseded but not necessarily expunged’.

For example, the policies in England that promoted school choice and the publication of schools’ leagues in their attempts to raise achievements, also increased educational inequalities in access and achievement, even though the government wished to reduce them.

Moreover, this chapter has indicated that even though there has been an acceptance of the positive impact of parents on their children’s learning, schools’ approaches to parents have been inconsistent and fragmentary and not always focused on improving achievements equitably, as teachers have determined the activities in which parents could be involved. Bearing in mind that the practitioners - in our case, teachers and schools - play a decisive role in the effective enactment of policies, there is a need for systematic evaluation of parenting intervention programme results, in order to identify teachers’ and parents’ attitudes and beliefs, as well to identify effective practices that can inform context of policy influences and, in turn, policy text production.

Collaboration between teachers and parents is not unproblematic as Docking (1990) indicated. As this chapter has shown some problems are associated with ideology-values and traditions about where educational and professional expertise lies. Others are psychological and related to the threat of having professional work opened up to scrutiny. Still others are political and may be related to agendas of particular political parties. Finally, some are professional and related to lack of training and professional development for teachers or practical and simply related to finding time and resources to construct the appropriate strategies.

Concluding, this chapter has revealed the importance of the examination of all the three contexts and their linkages in order to find out what motives may lie behind the government's interest in parental involvement, the policy texts that emerge and, the appropriate interpretation and enactment of policy in practice in order to shape a view about the effectiveness of the policies. That is why the trajectory model of policy contexts of Bowe, Ball and Gold (1992) was adopted as a tool for analysis of this research data. The next chapter will introduce the methodology and how it was shaped for the effective investigation of parental involvement in Cyprus.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, issues related to parental involvement were discussed paying emphasis to the international literature in the field, conceptual and empirical. Chapter 3 deals with the development of the research methodology that guided the data collection process.

The present chapter will give an overview of the study design, introduce the research approach, the sampling strategies and the methods of data gathering. It will also consider a range of issues, such as reliability, validity, trustworthiness and steps taken to reduce bias in the research.

The research questions determined the methodological approach and in turn the methods of data gathering used. The research questions investigated were:

- What is the current policy in Cyprus in primary schools, with regard to the involvement of parents in education?
- How is parental involvement policy interpreted in practice?
- What are policymakers', parents', school personnel's and pupils' aspirations, views and understandings of parental involvement in education?
- What are the current reported practices of school personnel, pupils and parents with regard to parental involvement?

3.2 Overview of the research

The aim underpinning the development of the research questions was to investigate the parental involvement in depth in a range of contexts. Whilst research questions determined the particular research approach and data-gathering methods used in the research, the literature review as well as the presentation of other empirical research in the field gave the opportunity to consider home-school relationships in the light of other international contexts, as well as to identify changes over time.

As mentioned in chapter 1, the whole research design from the stage of development of the research questions to the stage of the selection of the research approach, the methods of data gathering and the analysis was structured by the policy trajectory model that provided an analytical tool aiming to interrogate influences, text and practice (Bowe *et al.*, 1992). This ensured a consistent manner was followed during the planning stage, the field work, as well as the analysis of the research data.

Policies are influenced by many factors like the political agenda, ideologies, governmental goals as well as prevailing social factors. For example, it is logical that the social, political and economic arena of a country, as well as the government party's ideology affect the policies. Moreover, specific purposes and intentions might be 'hidden' in a policy which nevertheless constitute a reflection of the governmental strategy (Bowe *et al.*, 1992). In this case, the attention to the

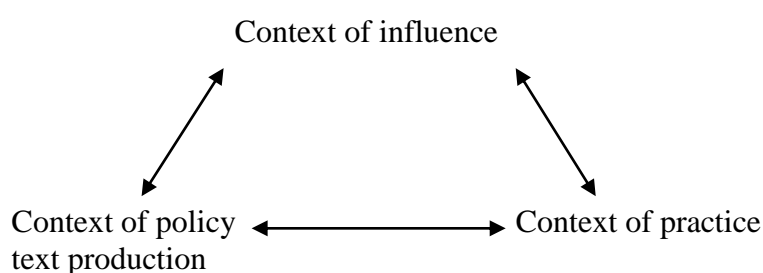
role of parents in the recent years should raise questions about the intentions of government with respect to the role of the home in children's education.

As far as the context of influence is concerned, the final version of a new policy often is a result of struggles and compromises within the political arena of the country (Bowe *et al*, 1992). Consequently, it is crucial to take seriously into consideration the range of factors which may affect the policy development as well as the implementation of policies, during the analysis of the policy texts.

The question that might arise at this point, is how can educational policies, affect the context of practice? Sometimes limited impact of policies might be observed but at other times challenges might be observed in the implementation of a policy, due to the misinterpretation and misunderstanding of the policy texts (Ball, 1994).

The relationship of the three contexts is of paramount importance in the investigation of a political issue, as they are interrelated, each influencing and being influenced by the others, as can be seen from the figure below:

Figure 3.1 Contexts of policy making



The context of policy text for instance has a direct and strong relationship with the context of practice. Undoubtedly educational practitioners have their own beliefs, values, experiences and interests which might affect significantly the way they interpret and understand the policies (Ball, 1987). They might reject some aspects of a policy if it appears to be opposed to their beliefs or they might implement some aspects of the policies in their own way. Furthermore in the stage of implementation of the policy it is common that problems might occur. So an evaluation that ensued might identify dysfunctions in the policy and following that revision and renewal in order to improve it. So the context of practice can provide important information to feedback to the context of influence about the effectiveness of policy.

The texts constitute a compromise between the perceptions and intentions of the constituent views. Or put the other way round, the policy text context is closely related with the context of influence, as a text cannot be interpreted without investigating the time and the prevailing conditions and influences at the specific time of its creation (Bowe *et al.*, 1992).

To sum up, it seems that the policy-making process is very complex and needs evaluation and remaking in order to become more effective (Bowe *et al.*, 1992). The three contexts are closely interrelated in order to give and gain information from each other. Hence the importance of examining and analysing an issue taking into consideration these three levels.

3.3 Interpretive stance

The interpretive paradigm was adopted in order to examine the case of home-school relationships *in its natural context, by interpreting it according to the meanings people bring to it* (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994, p.2). Particularly the interpretive paradigm pays emphasis to individuals as *'...efforts are made to get inside the person and understand from within'* (Cohen *et al.*, 2007, p. 21).

In other words, the investigation of parental involvement was underpinned by social constructionism theory in which reality is being constructed and understood, taking into consideration the cultural context and the existing social relations. Vygotsky (1978) highlighted the effects on development of social interactions from the early years of the child. He believed that the external components, socio-cultural and historical influences significantly the process of internalisation and the formation of concepts in individuals is a result of the prevailing social and cultural influences in the contexts encountered.

Different meanings might be given to actions, in different social settings. Consequently social construction plays a vital role in the way that relationships are developed between humans (Papert, 1980) in this case parents, pupils and teachers who are examined by the present research. Hence the research is grounded in a commitment to represent and understand the meanings that participants give to their actions as well as the actions of the others who share their social world.

In particular, people's actions, behaviour and attitudes are dependent upon their social and cultural experiences and beliefs which, in turn, are determined by the particular context in which they live. The types of home-school relationships and the interactions between parents and teachers established, similarly depend upon their shared experiences. As a result, an investigation of the educational settings in which the research takes place, the experiences and interactions of parents and teachers involved, in order to understand the many factors determining present home-school relationships.

3.4 Case study approach

The overall research approach was a case study of home-school relationships in Cypriot primary schools from policy to practice. The case study design aimed to investigate participants' understandings, views, aspirations, expectations and reported practices in the contexts of influence, policy text and practice. Hence it adopted multiple methods of data gathering such as document analysis, elite interviews, teachers' survey, as well as in-depth investigation of six school sites, through parents', teachers' and children's interviews.

Case study is the empirical representation of a topic (Yin, 1994), in this case, home-school relationships, so that complex phenomena in real-life contexts can be investigated. It also fits well with intentions of the study, as it gives the opportunity to investigate and interpret not only multifaceted issues in a real-life context but taking into consideration the uniqueness of each context (Robson 2002).

By conducting a case study, the influences affecting and determining people's behaviour, perceptions and decisions may be revealed (Stainback and Stainback, 1988). Case study outcomes also represent participants' views, understandings and feelings which are difficult to access by other approaches (Geertz, 1973). Taking into consideration that the present research deals with human social relations and attitudes, these are difficult to investigate as the social and cultural characteristics of the society play a vital role in the meaning people give to the world. Indeed, the case study approach gives the opportunity to examine the situation '*through the eyes of participants*' (Cohen *et al*, 2007; p. 257).

The flexibility of interpretation of the outcomes of case study research constitutes a strong advantage as its results might be not only the anticipated ones but they can lead to new directions of investigation (Yin, 1994). For instance, in the present research, suggestions for further studies may be provided that are based on the current findings.

Additionally it is important to note that the results and findings from case study are accessible to people and especially to teachers who are witnesses of similar situations (Nisbet and Watt, 1984). The examination of home-school relationships is conducted in order to provide important information and advice to the multiple stakeholders involved in the educational system. The case study approach gives the opportunity to readers who share the same experiences to understand the issue being studied and be placed in a self-reflective process leading to an enhanced awareness of the issues in hand.

Despite the strengths of the case study approach, it should be stated that it receives much criticism as it is claimed that the conclusions being drawn cannot be generalised (Yin, 1994). However Stake (1995), disputes the criticisms noting that it is possible to make ‘naturalistic’ generalisation using the case study’s findings. In other words, many readers can share the same experiences with the writer. As a result, a case study’s generalisation explains a phenomenon in a simple way so that is much more understandable. At the same time, Yin (2009) talks about ‘analytic generalisation’ in which the results of the case study are compared and contrasted with the adopted theory and if the results support the theory then the outcome may be replicable.

Another limitation of the case study is that it cannot be cross-checked and there is a danger of producing biased conclusions (Nisbet and Watt, 1984), if systematic procedures are not followed (Yin, 2009). However the triangulation of methods and participant groups can ensure that biased findings are less likely to emerge.

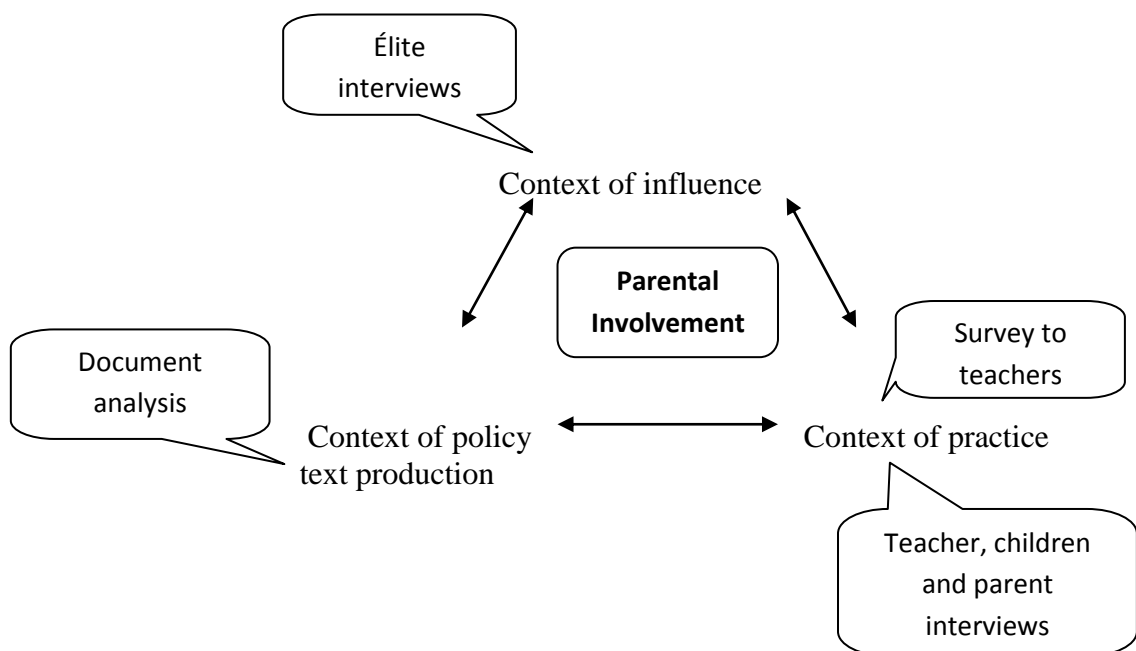
In the present study, systematic procedures were adopted from the planning through implementation to the analysis stage. For instance, the Bowe’s *et al.* model (1992) was used for the construction of the research design as well as for the analysis of the data gathered, as the information to be obtained, addressed the policy influences, policy text and practice, with respect to home-school relationships. Special attention was paid in the analysis of the data. The consistent way the data were treated is presented later on, in this chapter, under the analysis section.

3.5 Methods of data gathering

The interpretive theory and the case study approach determined the methods of data gathering that were required for the completion of the present research.

Moreover, the various methods used, aimed not only to address the research questions but also to provide information about the three different contexts as shown in the figure below:

Figure 3.2 Study design to investigate parental involvement (Based on Bowe *et al.*, 1992)



3.5.1 Document analysis

Documents give the opportunity to researchers to examine an issue from different perspectives and they can provide important information about the context of influences on policy. In particular policy texts are the result of

compromises and negotiations (Ball, 1994). Policy texts determine that certain voices are heard, having specific intentions. Their aim is to highlight political problems and suggest solutions in order to be solved in practice (Ball, 1994). However, many times policies are not designed taking into consideration the specific characteristics of the context in which they will be implemented. So teachers are not often consulted about new policies and as a result some new policies can be ignored or abandoned (Ball, 1994).

Educational policies were investigated by document analysis. It was attempted to examine the intentions of the authors, the goals and values of the documents. Documents allowed cross-checking and triangulating with some of the interview data. A potential disadvantage of the document analysis was the possibility of not achieving reliable results (Robson, 2011). For ensuring high levels of reliability, the Holsti's categories (1969, p. 106) were adopted and used as a framework for analysing documents consistently. The use of these established categories combined with the triangulation of the data, contributed to the reduction of potential bias.

Also through document analysis a researcher cannot assess causal relationships. In particular, Robson (2011, p.356) indicated that documents often are not causes or reflection of the social phenomena are investigated. However, the aim underpinning the selection of documents was to identify the attention of policy-makers towards parental involvement and consider whether that emphasis changed throughout the years.

Specifically, the key official Cypriot documents analysed were:

- Educational Reform Report (Commission for Educational Reform, 2004)
- Strategical Plan for Education (Kleanthous, 2007)
- Rules of Operation of Public Primary Schools (Ministerial Council, 2008)
- New Curriculum (MOEC, Pedagogical Institute, 2010)

It seems that the development and the promotion of policy texts is influenced by social and political factors. Hence the examination of policy texts through document analysis addressed to parental involvement will provide important information about the prevailing contexts of policy influence and text production and the factors affecting the development of such policies.

3.5.2 Survey

Questionnaire is an instrument that provides factual information, attitudes and reported practices as a range of questions can be posed such as ratings, open and closed questions. It is easy to analyse, reliable, and steps can be taken to maximise the response rate (Oppenheim, 1992). Additionally, it is an instrument that provides much information in a little time and without many expenses (Gay, 1987) and outcomes may be generalised (Yin, 1994). This instrument was employed in the present research to provide descriptive data about the teachers' views, aspirations, expectations and reported practices as well as to identify the issues that needed further investigation.

A potential danger of questionnaire use is that many times people do not answer honestly but they may prefer to give the most socially acceptable answers (Naoum, 1998). In the present research, the anonymity of participants was ensured in order to increase the possibility of giving honest answers.

Questionnaires should be carefully designed in order to ensure high levels of reliability and validity. As Balnaves and Caputi (2001) underlined, emphasis should be paid to the administration of the questionnaire by considering issues about the layout and the length of the questionnaire, as well as the types of questions to be used.

Often the alternation of question types like fixed-choice question, ratings and open questions is useful in order to avoid becoming tedious to complete. Closed questions were used in order to make '*comparisons across groups in the sample*' as Oppenheim suggested (1992, 115). Multiple-choice questions, as well as ratings were also used to identify the current practices involving parents, teachers' perceptions and attitudes, bearing in mind that closed-questions can be completed quickly, coded and analysed easily (Cohen *et. al.*, 2007).

It was felt that open-ended questions could also give factual information about the issue (Bailey, 1994). So teachers had the opportunity to give more personal responses in two open questions, without being guided towards preset answers. Teachers also had the opportunity to explain their answers.

The questionnaire was piloted in order to find out whether the length was appropriate and if adjustments were needed to simplify questions asked. The pilot questionnaire results indicated that some questions needed to be rephrased and careful attention was given to the wording of open questions. By confirming that the completion of the questionnaire was anonymous, providing a deadline of one week to return the questionnaire, ensuring, easy-to-read layout and careful wording of the questions, reduced the dangers of a low response (Bell, 1993, Tashakkori and Teddlie, 2003; Robson, 1993).

3.5.3 Semi-structured interviews

Interviews are regarded as a most valid method of data collection because they elicit responses that contribute to investigation of an issue in depth (Cook and Campbell, 1979; Creswell, 2008). Woods (1992) highlighted that interviews are the best way to engage with people in order to examine their perceptions. The focus on individual view-points is vital in the interpretive paradigm and in the present research as well, in which there was a need to involve the participants directly (Yin, 1994). Furthermore an advantage of the interviews is that the interviewees have the flexibility to express their views and extend into issues that they are interested in, thereby giving them the opportunity to re-examine their views, feeling and experiences. In other words, interviewees can concentrate on issues that concern them more (Nias, 1991; Robson, 2002). In contrast this information cannot be accessed so easily by questionnaires using standardised questions (Oppenheim, 1992).

However, there are disadvantages to the use of interview method. The process is time-consuming in collection, analysis, and in gaining access. Combined with this, the establishment of trust is a challenge (Powney and Watts, 1987; Newby, 2010). Apart from that, there is a risk that the interviewees might give the 'expected' answers (the answers assumed to be required). Moreover, any potential bias in the formulation of and thereby response to the questions might lead to wrong interpretations (Yin, 1994). Therefore, in this case study the interview schedules were carefully planned, as well as piloted. Their effectiveness was thus checked and they were revised in cases in which it was thought that there might be ambiguity or lack of clarity and so the desired information would not be obtained.

Having a structure for the interview questions saves time and raises their reliability as well (Robson, 1993). Open-questions were used, giving flexibility to the respondents to expand yet be focused on issues that concerned them more. Moreover, the researcher had the opportunity to probe with additional questions to clarify any misunderstandings or uncertainty in order to get more depth in important issues (Cohen *et al*, 2007; Robson, 1993). The interviews were tape-recorded in Greek, translated into English, transcribed and then analysed.

In the present study, the semi-structured interviews were conducted to investigate a range of participants' views (élites, parents, teachers and children). Élites' interviews investigated the context of influence, policy text and practice. Teachers' interviews provided information about the contexts of home-school

policy text and its interpretation in practice, whilst the parents' and children's interviews were addressed to the context of home-school practices.

Setting the scene was very important. It was considered prior to and during the interviews process. Bearing in mind those participants should trust the researcher in order to express their views, experiences and any issues concerning them (Cohen *et al.*, 2007), the interviewer was prepared to break the ice in the beginning of the interview, posing some general questions and talking about the research study in general. Also participants were encouraged to feel free to express their personal opinions and feelings, and generally there was an attempt to create an environment in which participants felt comfortable.

Élites interviews

There is no doubt that interviewing policy-makers and specialists and experts in the field is a challenge. Hence many factors were considered before conducting élites interviews. Gaining access to élites is in many cases a very difficult task. Hence different strategies were used to approach them, such as sending emails, telephone calling and using personal social networks. Moreover it was more difficult to interview élites as they are powerful figures with very busy lives, requiring the researcher to possess a high degree of professionalism (Robson, 2002). There was a need to pose clear and unambiguous questions in order to be understandable (Patton, 1987). As Cohen and Manion (2007) also suggested, it was better to begin from general questions and then become focused on more specialised questions.

In an attempt of the researcher to develop interviewing skills, a pilot interview was carried out with a colleague, as Peabody *et al.* (1990) suggested, trying to find out how long it was going to take and consider matters of clarity of questions to be asked. Additionally it was attempted to address questions related to the position, the field of knowledge and the experience of each one, as it is lost time if questions asked cannot be answered by specific people or groups. As a result, the researcher was in a position to be honest about how long the interview was going to take (Dexter, 2006) and open to express the goals of the research (McDowell, 1998). The élites determined the date and the time they were able or willing to be interviewed (Zuckerman, 1972).

Pupils' group interviews

The primary-aged children were interviewed in groups. It seemed that by interviewing groups of children, it was easier to obtain a complete record through their discussions, their agreements or disagreements and, in general, the way they interacted. Additionally, it was time-saving as a greater range of responses could be obtained in less time (Arksey and Knight, 1999). The most important reason for conducting a group interview with children was that it encourages pupils to feel comfortable in order to be more confident and consequently they may express themselves more freely (Arksey and Knight, 1999). A discussion could be built, based in ideas and views of other pupils of the group (Lewis, 1992) and this gave the opportunity to silent members to remain quiet or feel more confident and express their beliefs as well. On the other hand, if the silent members were interviewed individually they would be less likely to respond, having correspondingly less time to think.

However, there is a danger of having one person leading the conversation, restricting the possibility of the others to express themselves equally. Another problem occurring in group interviews on some occasions is that students may simply repeat their classmate's views (Lewis, 1992). Hence the researcher may influence who is going to express his/her view first and attention is paid to the silent members of the group, giving them the opportunity to express their views too (Spencer and Flin, 1990).

The interviews were audio-taped and in order to avoid any confusion regarding the recognition of the member who was talking each time, the interviewer made reference to the names of the interviewees when they were talking, as suggested by Lewis (1992).

Finally, emphasis was paid to the phrasing of the questions in order to use vocabulary which was understandable to children. However, as it may be difficult to judge if the language used is appropriate for young children, pilot interviews were conducted. The questions in which children met with difficulties in understanding, were rephrased and simplified.

3.6 Sampling strategy

The present research can be divided into two phases. In the first phase, a survey of teachers in twelve primary schools was conducted and in the next phase, six schools were selected for more in-depth investigation of home-school relationships through interview.

As far as the survey was concerned, it was conducted with a sample of teachers from twelve primary schools in and around two cities of Cyprus. A maximum variation sample was attempted in the selection of the schools (Maykut and Morehouse, 2000), which also depended upon the possibilities of gaining access to those schools.

Maximum variation was attempted to ensure that schools selected, included urban, suburban and rural areas with intakes from different SES and cultural background participating in the survey. The six schools selected for the second phase of the research were also selected from different catchments areas; urban, suburban and rural. These schools however were selected on the basis of their positive attitude towards the research and their willingness to take part in the second phase, indicated in phase one in at the time the survey was conducted.

The following table presents the schools that participated in the second phase of the research as well as their catchment areas.

Table 3.1: Schools' participants

N/N	NAME	CATCHMENT AREA
1.	School 1	Rural 1
2.	School 2	Rural 2
3.	School 3	Urban/City 2
4.	School 4	Suburban 2
5.	School 5	Suburban 1
6.	School 6	Urban/City 1

As was mentioned above, more in-depth investigation of the home-school relationships was achieved by including all the stakeholders: policy decision-makers, parents, teachers and students, as it was believed that each single case is so complex that it can be understandable only by investigating it in depth and by taking into consideration important circumstances of the context (Stake, 1995).

As well as analysis of each stakeholder group separately, data gathered from all of the stakeholders of one exemplar school were analysed. For the selection of the exemplar school, three schools that had the larger number of participants were selected and then one of these schools was randomly selected. As a result school 5 was chosen for more in-depth investigation. Below the processes followed for the selection of participants are presented.

3.6.1 Élites interviews

Élites interviews with Cypriot policy-makers were conducted. The élites were chosen on the basis of policy makers' experience and influence in the education policy-making process as well as their availability to be interviewed. The aim was to select persons from the Ministry of Education, academicians who contributed to the development of the Educational Reform Report (Committee of Educational Reform, 2004), as well as parents belonging to the Organised Association of Parents.

The sample of élites and their special characteristics are presented in the table below:

Table 3.2: Élites participants

NAME	ROLES
Élite 1	<i>Academician and researcher in a Cypriot University. Specialised in parental involvement issues</i>
Élite 2	<i>Member of the Ministry of Education in Cyprus Specialist in primary schools</i>
Élite 3	<i>Academician Member of Educational Reform Committee Responsible for the development and the promotion of the new Cypriot curriculum, as well as the implementation of educational reform proposals</i>
Élite 4	<i>Member of the Pancyprian Parents' Association. Representative of all the schools Parents' Associations</i>
Élite 5	<i>Member of the School of Parents Organisation Organisation, responsible for informing and educating parents about pedagogical aspects as well as aspects related to their children's upbringing and education</i>

3.6.2 Teacher participants

The teachers interviewed as part of the in-depth research of six schools, volunteered after they were informed about the purpose of the research and the methods of data gathering to be used.

The teachers who participated in the interviews are presented below:

Table 3.3: Teachers' participants

N/N	NAME*	SCHOOL	CATCHMENT AREA	POSITION
1.	Mike	School 6	Urban/City 1	Headteacher
2.	Ann	School 6	Urban/City 1	Deputy Headteacher
3.	Christa	School 6	Urban/City 1	Teacher 1
4.	Mary	School 6	Urban/City 1	Teacher 2
5.	Marios	School 1	Rural 1	Headteacher
6.	Alex	School 1	Rural 1	Teacher 1
7.	Helen	School 1	Rural 1	Teacher 2
8.	Paul	School 1	Rural 1	Teacher 3
9.	Theodora	School 5	Suburban 1	Headteacher
10.	Soula	School 5	Suburban 1	Deputy Headteacher
11.	Andrea	School 5	Suburban 1	Teacher 1
12.	Stace	School 5	Suburban 1	Teacher 2
13.	Xara	School 3	Urban/City 2	Headteacher
14.	Evi	School 3	Urban/City 2	Teacher1
15.	Eleni	School 3	Urban/City 2	Teacher2
16.	Marina	School 3	Urban/City 2	Teacher3
17.	John	School 4	Suburban 2	Head teacher
18.	Peter	School 4	Suburban 2	Deputy Headteacher
19.	Andrew	School 4	Suburban 2	Teacher 1
20.	Elisavet	School 4	Suburban 2	Teacher 2
21.	Georgia	School 2	Rural 2	Headteacher
22.	Pan	School 2	Rural 2	Deputy Headteacher
23.	Tina	School 2	Rural 2	Teacher
24.	Niki	School 2	Rural 2	Teacher

3.6.3 Parents' participants

Volunteer parents from the six primary schools were interviewed after they were informed about the aims of the study. The information about the parents who participated in the research is presented in the following table.

Table 3.4 Parents' participants

N/N	NAME	SCHOOL	CATCHMENT AREA	OCCUPATION	EDUCATION	NATIONALITY
1.	Kate	School 1	Rural 1	Business (owner)	High School	Cypriot
2.	Stella	School 1	Rural 1	Accountant	University	Cypriot
3.	Laoura	School 2	Rural 2	Theologian	University	Cypriot
4.	Maria	School 3	Urban 2	Shop Assistant	University (Accountant)	Russian
5.	Vera	School 3	Urban 2	Shop Assistant	University (Biology)	Russian
6.	Constantina	School 4	Suburban 2	Housewife	High School	Cypriot
7.	Sotos	School 4	Suburban 2	Employee in private company/logistics	University (Computers)	Cypriot
8.	Loucas	School 4	Suburban 2	Developer/ self- employed	Technical School	Cypriot
9.	Reveca	School 4	Suburban 2	Housewife	High School	Cypriot
10.	Christalla	School 5	Suburban 1	Waitress in cafe	Primary School	Cypriot
11.	Christopher	School 5	Suburban 1	Electrical Engineering	University	Cypriot
12.	George	School 5	Suburban 1	Work in waterboard	College	Cypriot
13.	Lefteris	School 5	Suburban 1	Policeman	High School	Cypriot
14.	Sophi	School 6	Urban 1	Bank employee (managerial position)	College	Cypriot
15.	Elena	School 6	Urban 1	Real estate agent	University (Biology)	Moldavia
16.	Sotia	School 6	Urban 1	Work in governmental position	University (Economics)	Cypriot

3.6.4 Children's participants

The children's interviews were conducted in three groups from each school, from three different age groups (age, 10 years, age, 11 years, age,12 years). One group of four children from each class was selected to participate in the research. A group was constituted from both males and females students, from students with a range of abilities; high, average, low attainer, as well different nationality, where possible.

Table 3.5 Children's participants

N/N	SCHOOL	AGE	MOTHER JOB	FATHER JOB	PERFORM.	NATIONALITY
1.	School 1	10	Housewife	Builder	Average	Cypriot
2.	School 1	10	Bank employee	Architect	High	Cypriot
3.	School 1	10	Nurse	Developer	Low	Cypriot
4.	School 1	11	Business owner	Business owner	High	Cypriot
5.	School 1	11	Teacher	Fireman	Average	Cypriot
6.	School 1	12	Secretary	Manager	Average	Cypriot
7.	School 1	12	Housewife	Builder	Average	Cypriot
8.	School 1	12	Cleaner	Builder	Low	Cypriot
9.	School 2	10	Sales assistant	Mechanic	Low	Cypriot
10.	School 2	10	Hair Dresser	Builder	Average	Cypriot
11.	School 2	10	Housewife	Car mechanic	Average	Cypriot
12.	School 2	11	Nurse	Doctor	High	Cypriot
13.	School 2	11	Teacher	Bank employee	High	Cypriot
14.	School 2	11	Housewife	Farm owner	Average	Cypriot
15.	School 2	11	Housewife	Builder	Average	Cypriot
16.	School 2	12	Private employee	Policeman	High	Cypriot
17.	School 2	12	Bank employee	Doctor	High	Cypriot
18.	School 2	12	Theologist	Pharmacist	High	Cypriot
19.	School 2	12	Teacher	Teacher	High	Cypriot
20.	School 3	10	Sales Assistant	Builder	Low	Georgian
21.	School 3	10	Secretary	Private company	Average	English
22.	School 3	11	Housewife	Unemployed	Low	Greece
23.	School 3	11	Sales Assistant	Builder	Average	Russian
24.	School 3	12	Hairdresser	Electrician	Average	Cypriot
25.	School 3	12	Bank employee	Bank employee	High	Cypriot
26.	School 3	12	Private company employee	Private company employee	Low	Russian
27.	School 4	10	Housewife	Mechanics	Low	Moldavia
28.	School 4	10	Housewife	Banker	High	Cypriot
29.	School 4	10	Housewife	Builder	Average	Cypriot

30.	School 4	10	Teacher	Gymnastic Teacher	High	Cypriot
31.	School 4	11	Secretary	Manager	Average	Cypriot
32.	School 4	11	Columnist	Employee in private company	Average	Cypriot
33.	School 4	11	Housewife	Unemployed	High	Cypriot
34.	School 4	11	Sales assistant	Policeman	Average	Cypriot
35.	School 4	12	Housewife	Private company	Low	Cypriot
36.	School 4	12	Stewardess	Sales assistant	Low	Cypriot
37.	School 4	12	Teacher	Public organisation	High	Cypriot
38.	School 4	12	Housewife	Builder	Average	Cypriot
39.	School 5	10	Waitress	Post office	Low	Cypriot
40.	School 5	10	Business owner	Business owner	Average	Cypriot
41.	School 5	10	Private company	Policeman	Average	Cypriot
42.	School 5	10	Beautician	Electrical Engineer	Low	Cypriot
43.	School 5	11	Sales assistant	Army	Low	Cypriot
44.	School 5	11	Sales assistant	Waterboard	Average	Cypriot
45.	School 5	11	Secretary	Builder	Average	Cypriot
46.	School 5	11	Housewife	Builder	Low	Greece
47.	School 5	12	Housewife	Garage owner	Low	Cypriot
48.	School 5	12	Teacher	Teacher	High	Cypriot
49.	School 5	12	Housewife	Army	Average	Cypriot
50.	School 5	12	Sales Assistant	Sales Assistant	Low	Cypriot
51.	School 6	10	Teacher	Telephone Public company	Average	Cypriot
52.	School 6	10	Bank employee	Bank employee	Average	Cypriot
53.	School 6	10	Government employee	Government employee	High	English
54.	School 6	10	Real estate company	Fireman	High	Moldavia
55.	School 6	11	Housewife	Builder	Average	Georgia
56.	School 6	11	Teacher	Airport	High	Cypriot
57.	School 6	11	Research office	Policeman	Average	Cypriot
58.	School 6	11	Secretary	Woodcutter	Low	Cypriot
59.	School 6	12	Bank	Bank	Average	Cypriot
60.	School 6	12	Private employee	Private employee	Average	Cypriot
61.	School 6	12	Cleaner	Builder	Low	Cypriot
62.	School 6	12	Bank	Ministry of economics	High	Cypriot

3.7 Data analysis

Quantitative data

The data collected from survey were analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS) programme. The analysis of questionnaire data was conducted generating frequencies and cross tabulations permitting the comparison of teachers' views based on their different characteristics, such as the school's catchment area, or years of working experience.

Qualitative data

Qualitative interview data were analysed by N-Vivo software investigating themes, issues and surprises. A priori categories derived from the research questions, as well as grounded categories derived from the data were constructed in order to reveal common and discrepant themes (Freeman, 1998).

The data were analysed first of all by each participant group separately, finding similarities and differences about the views, aspirations and expectations of parents, teachers and children. Then one illustrative exemplar school was presented in which the data sets from different stakeholders were brought together and conclusions about the climate prevailing within a particular school and the issues that emerged from parents, teachers and children were presented. As a result, a triangulation of the participants was achieved.

It is important to mention that the interview data were analysed in the following way. Three main a priori topics were derived from three key topic areas chosen

for the investigation of home-school relationships in Cyprus: current practices; views and attitudes; aspirations-expectations. Questions used in the questionnaire and interview schedules aimed to cover important aspects related to the main topics of the research. Hence the issues investigated by the questions at the first level were regarded as a priori categories. In addition, at the second level grounded themes arose from the data analysis with the assistance of NVivo software. NVivo helped in the coding of the data but also in the identification of common themes.

At this point, it is important to state that the interviews and questionnaire schedules were designed in English and translated into Greek. Hence the research was conducted in Greek language. Then the transcripts of the interviews were translated into English language by the researcher and the coding procedures and analysis followed. The advantage to the researcher was that she was coming from the country in which the research was conducted, speaking the dominant language and understanding the culture of the participants. This meant that she was able to translate the transcripts in the fairest and most appropriate way. Undoubtedly there is not a single correct translation (Temple and Young, 2004), but a translator might interpret the text based on his/her own understanding of the world, affecting the outcomes of the research. Researchers belonging in the same culture as the participants however are able to take into consideration the local realities, while translating the text (Simon, 1996).

Documents even though they were analysed based on the same strategy described above, the NVivo software was not used this time. Paragraphs or

sentences which addressed home-school relationships were grouped under a priori categories, suggested by Holsti's model (Holsti 1969, cited in Robson 2002).

The categories adopted for the analysis of the documents were the following:

- Subject matter
- Authority: *in whose name are statements made?*
- Values: *what values are revealed?*
- Goals/purposes: *What goals or intentions are revealed?*
- Methods: *what methods are used to achieve these intentions?*
- Actors: *who is represented as carrying out the actions referred to?*
- Organisation of the educational system
- Liaison with parents/other professionals
- Procedures.

Then any similarities or contradictions between the policies documents were identified (Yin, 2009).

As far as élites interviews were concerned, they addressed issues that concerned policy influence and text rather more than practice, and conversely teachers', parents' and children's interviews were focused more on practice.

For instance, the elite interview data were analysed in the following way. The interview transcript was analysed, taking question by question, coding the data and extracting key themes after placing them under a super-ordinate category with the help of NVivo. The process of coding helped in the identification of main themes, issues and surprises.

3.8 Validity, reliability, trustworthiness

The use of both quantitative and qualitative methods of data gathering sought to obtain a deep understanding of the area of parental involvement. Validity and reliability issues were handled carefully in order to reduce potential unreliable or invalid findings.

3.8.1 Validity

Quantitative data

Even though by the use of the questionnaire there was an opportunity to obtain larger amounts of data, there is a danger that the wording of questions many times may not bring the appropriate information that matches with the focus of the study (Oppenheim, 1999). Hence the questionnaire was designed carefully taking into consideration the international literature, as well as recent research in the field. The pilot study that was conducted, helped to avoid the use of misleading questions or even using similar questions that could lead to the same information.

In addition, many times a low return can be a problem as the non-responders might be the ones who hold different views (Oppenheim, 1992). However, in the present study, the anonymity of respondents was assured and the fact that only the researcher had access to the questionnaires, it is hoped, motivated the participants to complete the questionnaires honestly. Moreover attention was paid to the length and intelligibility of the questionnaire as many times people refuse to fill up long or complex questionnaires.

Qualitative data

The validity in the qualitative research can be enhanced by the objectivity of the researcher in conduct, the triangulation of the methods, the honesty of participants and researcher and the rich data which it is obtained in order to address the investigated issue (Winter, 2000), in this case parental involvement.

The research questions posed and the design of the research determined the issues that were the focus to be investigated, as well as the information that needed to be collected. Additionally, the emergent themes were identified on the basis of frequency of their occurrence.

The consistency in the collection of data as well as the accurate use of data analysis is of paramount importance in qualitative research (Bell, 1987). In terms of the interviews, it was important to ensure that participants gave honest answers. So the parents, teachers and children were informed about the aims of the study (Maxwell, 1992) and assured of strict confidentiality. The present research tried to maintain validity at a higher level by giving the opportunity to

the interviewees to view their transcribed responses, confirm their stated views and indicate where something was not clear or inaccurate (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In such a way the researcher attempted to ensure the accurate transformation of the information.

3.8.2 Reliability

In terms of reliability, a reliable research should be capable of drawing similar findings, if were to be repeated in the same context with the same instruments in a specific period of time (Kirk and Miller, 1986).

Quantitative data

In questionnaires, participants are free to express their views, being anonymous, and as a result they may not afraid to be honest (Robson, 1993). However, in questionnaires if the participants misunderstand the questions they cannot ask for further clarification and this could lead to the wrong interpretation of the question. That is why in the present study, a pilot research was conducted in order to ensure that the questions were understandable. The participants who took part in the pilot study had the opportunity to suggest changes or express their views about any question construction that confused them or they found difficulty to understand and adjustments followed.

Qualitative data

In the qualitative research, reliability can be raised by comparing the data the researcher obtained with what was happening in the field (Bogdan and Bilken,

1992). Moreover the researcher tried to avoid being biased, affecting interviewees' answers by asking leading questions or even making comments during the answering of questions. This was achieved by the used of interview schedules which guided the interviewer to conduct the interviews using the same questions, in the same order and thereby achieving consistency of approach.

3.8.3 Trustworthiness

The research tried to meet the four evaluative criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability of measure and confirmability (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Hence some techniques were adopted in order to ensure the trustworthiness of the research.

The present research paid attention to the examination of the home-school relationships from different angles investigating different points of views as well as comparing the results of the survey, the document analysis and the interviews. The use of a range of stakeholder participants and multiple methods of data collection and the existence of different sources of information contributed to the triangulation across methods (Patton, 2001). This is a technique that increases the credibility, the transferability and confirmability of the research. Moreover the credibility was achieved by interpreting the data based on the prevailing conditions of the Cyprus, examining the socio-political conditions of Cyprus first (Wallendorf and Belk, 1989). This is crucial as the context plays a vital role to the understanding of others' reality and their particular insights. The representation of others' views can be achieved only by taking into consideration the social and cultural background of the respondents concerned.

In addition, the fact that the researcher was familiar with the context as the research was conducted in her home country helped her to understand the research population more easily. This can be regarded as prolonged engagement which enhances the credibility of the research (Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

Furthermore the technique of thick description suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985), was adopted by describing the context, the background of the family, as well as by examining people's views and perceptions. As a result, the transferability can be ensured as researchers and readers would be able to recognise the specific characteristics of the context and judge if it was transferable to a different context.

The researcher discussed the present work with academic peers, firstly with her supervisor who she is an experienced academician, but also by presenting papers in conferences as well as publishing her work. So feedback in the form of peer review was gained in different stages of the research and taken seriously into consideration.

3.9 Role of the researcher

The participants were fully informed of the identity of the researcher as well as the purposes of the study. Also the researcher allowed time to establish trust in order that all the participants felt comfortable (Hitchcock and Hughes, 1989).

The role of the researcher is to minimise the potential bias in a study by trying not to influence or misinterpret participants' views. Hence the researcher was careful not to express any viewpoint and affect interviewee responses, in order to increase objectivity. Also high fidelity was achieved, by tape-recording the interviews and feeding back to respondents for verification.

In addition the researcher was responsible for exploring the meanings of the data following a consistent process of analysis and thereby being as objective as possible (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994). The aim of the researcher was to reflect views authentically, as well as acknowledge shortcomings and represent them in a fair and consistent manner. Most of the time the existence of bias begins during the design of a study and it is reflected afterwards in the implementation of the study. That is why so much emphasis was placed on the theories underpinning this research, as well as the related literature, as they provided important guidance about the methods of data gathering that should have been used, as well as the way that the results can be interpreted, based on the context of the study.

3.10 Ethical considerations

The present research dealt very carefully with ethical issues, from the stage of planning as well as during the research implementation, analysis and reporting stages. The present research was adequate to meet internal guidelines of the University of Warwick, the British Psychological Society (2009) and British Educational Research Association (2004). Permission from the Ministry of Education of Cyprus was secured in order to gain access to the schools, as well

as from the head teachers of the schools in which the research was to be conducted.

A situated ethics approach was adopted that has taken account of the whole research process from planning to reporting and ownership of data made explicit. It considered access (to adults and children), strict confidentiality, anonymity, recognition of confidences and feedback on views provided and social responsibility for the well-being of participants, in particular children (Lewis, 2003). The information gained was reported very carefully, using pseudonyms, to ensure that there was not any possibility of being able to recognise any of the schools or the participants of the research. It is important to note that the research was not conducted to judge people or schools but to present and analysis the overall prevailing situation in the Cypriot primary school system (Bell, 1987).

As far as parents were concerned, they were able to choose the places they were going to be interviewed. The majority of the interviews were conducted in their homes. Knowing that the home is a completely private environment and willing to protect this privacy, information gained from the home environment was not included in the research reports, but only information given to the researcher was used (Diener and Crandall, 1978) in order to protect privacy in every way.

As far as the children were concerned, their parents were informed about the research and they expressed their willingness to participate, signing a written consent allowing their children to give interviews. Additionally the researcher was very careful during the interviewing process, making sure that the

experience of interviewing was positive for pupils, and ensuring that there was not any chance of being harmed, such as pushing them to talk about something that they might not really wish to discuss (BERA, 2004).

The way the questions were phrased and the appropriateness of the content of the research questions ensured that children were capable to answer the questions. Hence, children were confident and expressed their views. During the interviews, the researcher tried to give the opportunity to all the members to express their views, avoiding having one member leading the group. However shy members, or silent ones were not pushed to speak more than they were willing, and some small answers composed were regarded as satisfactory (BERA, 2004).

3.11 Conclusion

This chapter has presented the design of the research. It introduced and explained how the interpretive paradigm and policy contexts trajectory model (Bowe *et al*, 1992) determined the selection of the case study approach, as well as the selection of the methods of data collection. The presentation of the research questions, the underpinning theories and the strengths and the weaknesses of each method gave the opportunity to understand why the specific methods of data gathering were the most appropriate ones. Additionally it provided information to the reader about the way the data were analysed and the logic behind this analysis. Finally some ethical issues were addressed in order to avoid harming anyone from the participants.

CHAPTER 4

ÉLITE INTERVIEWS

4.1 Introduction

Bearing in mind the Bowe, Ball and Gold (1992) trajectory model of policy contexts that framed and guided the research, it was of paramount importance to conduct elite interviews in order to gather information about the contexts of influence, policy and practice. The views of the persons who participated either in educational policy-making by developing policy texts, or by participating in the decision-making processes or even by conducting research in the field, could provide important information about the emphasis paid to the home-school relationships in Cyprus. Five elites who participated in the research came from different sectors such as the Ministry of Education, the organised parents associations or participated on the Educational Reform Committee were included in order to find out the views and expectations of a wide range of stakeholders. All of them appeared to have had some influence in educational policy-making processes over the period of study.

4.2 Aims

The main purpose of this chapter is to present the findings of élites interviews which addressed the following research questions:

- What are policymakers' aspirations, views and understandings of parental involvement in education?
- What are the current reported practices of élites with regard to the parental involvement?

4.3 Methods

i. Materials

The investigation of élites perceptions and aspirations was achieved by using pre-structured interview questions aiming to investigate issues related to the context of policy influence, text and practice. Interview questions were prepared and used as a frame for the élites interviews. However, adjustments were made to the interview schedule as each élite had different position and interests. In other words, only questions which were relevant to participants' specialisations were addressed.

ii. Participants

Living in the period in which the educational reform was being implemented, it was important to investigate the views of persons who were associated with the Educational Reform Committee, the Ministry of Education or in the case of one

academician investigation of the practice of the home-school relationships in Cyprus. It was also decided to examine the perceptions of associations of organised parents. Hence five élites interviews were conducted. Key characteristics of each élite are presented:

Table 4.1: Élites' participants characteristics

NAME	ORGANISATION	CHARACTERISTICS
Élite 1	University/ Researcher	He was an academician interested in home-school relationships. He has been involved in a number of research projects investigating parental involvement in Cyprus, before and after the development of educational reform.
Élite 2	Ministry of Education/ Primary Education	He had a high position in the Ministry during the development of educational reform. Before that he was a teacher and inspector.
Élite 3	Member of Educational Reform Committee	He was a well- known academician. He participated in the planning of educational reform but also in the development of new curriculum and its implementation.
Élite 4	Member of Pancyprian Federation of Parents*	He represented the Parents Associations
Élite 5	Member of School of Parents**	He represented the School of Parents

*Association representing all the schools' PAs.

**Organisation that seeks to train parents

From the table above it can be observed that the views of organised parents, academics and educators were examined. Interestingly all the *élites* who participated were males.

iii. Procedures

Élites were approached by sending them an e-mail explaining the aims of the research. Understanding that *élites* have very busy programmes, plenty of time was given to them to determine the day they wished to be interviewed. The first *élite* figure who responded positively, took the initiative and talked about the research to two other *élites* who were members of the organised parents associations.

It was made clear to all of them that their identity was going to remain anonymous and that a tape-recorder was used only to help the researcher to transcribe the interview texts. Also they were informed that if they wished, they could see the transcribed interview texts. One person took up this option and the transcription of the interview was returned and validated. The places in which the interviews were conducted were determined by the participants. Four *élites* interviews were conducted in participants' workplaces, while one interview was conducted in the *élite's* house.

4.4 Analysis

As was indicated in the methodology chapter the data gathered were analysed based on a priori categories derived from the questions used in the interview schedule. Then grounded categories were developed based on common themes emerging from the data. Some of the questions were addressed by all the élités while some others were addressed just by élités 1, 2 and 3 who were more experienced on issues related with the policy context. In the report of the results, it is indicated which élités addressed which question.

4.5 Results

The benefits of involving parents in education

Élités shared their views about the benefits of involving parents in children's education. They were found to be focused on four areas: the effects of parental involvement on children; the provision of help to teachers; the improvement of the parents and children relationships; and the teachers' career development.

Particularly three élités (1, 3 and 4) emphasised that co-operation between home and school is for the best of all children. Élite 1 mentioned that these links might result in: a) improvement in children's performance, especially in the first stages of the education; b) strengthening of children's social behaviour and; c) enhancement of student motivation.

Three élités (1, 2 and 5) focused on the help that parents can provide to teachers by being involved. For example, elite 2 mentioned that parents are partners of

teachers in their attempts to achieve educational goals. He said - *'I always insist that if we cannot bring the family to the school and if we cannot bring the school to the family, then definitely the prospects of achieving our goals for improvement will be limited'*.

Furthermore, élites (2, 3 and 4) emphasised that by involving parents in education you could give them the opportunity to improve their relationships with their children. For instance, élite 5 said - *'Parents do not spend quality time with their children. They try to purchase their role as parents with material goods'*.

Élite 3 expanded his view by saying that schools should try to ensure a harmonious relationship between parents and children at home, by devoting plenty of time together without having to deal with schools' issues, like homework. He believed that giving such responsibilities to parents thus transforming them to co-teachers was a misguided practice. He explained his view stating that parents should be parents and not co-teachers, as it is the schools' responsibility to deal with children's education and their educational difficulties. The same view was expressed by élite 2 who said that parents should stop being 'mini-teachers'.

Finally, élite 1 referred to a different dimension, emphasising that the teachers who were able to engage parents in a 'quality way', developed their career path, being more confident and professionally competent, as they used parents for achieving many of their goals.

Current situation

Élites describing the current situation about the home-school relationships referring to the existence of PAs, the organisation of activities and the roles of parents.

Élites emphasised the fact that some schools are more likely to involve parents than others. Élites 1, 2 and 5 stated that some schools organised activities involving parents that were not only an effective way to improve home-school relationships but also a means to develop the relationships of the parents with their children. Specifically, they talked about the organisation of evening events, inviting parents, establishing weekly parent-meeting periods and the organisation of extra-curricular activities involving parents.

However some of the participants talked about the danger of parents misunderstanding their roles. In particular élite 2 referred to this situation mentioning that some schools did not involve parents to a great extent in case parents misunderstood their roles. Élite 5 who was representing a parent group agreed that many parents intervened in the processes of the school and he emphasised that everyone should know their roles. Also élite 2 had a similar view saying that: *'Parents should have discreet roles, as they should know their limits. We don't want parents to be the nightmares of teachers, being the "small teachers" '*. He also emphasised that parents' role is not to help the school financially, as this is the State's responsibility.

Moreover, everyone referred to the existence of PAs. Élite 4 who belonged to the Pancyprian Federation of Parents, explained that every school had one or two representatives in the District Federation of Parents. In the meetings of federations, parents had the opportunity to discuss and propose solutions to any problem that might have occurred such as, technical problems or anything related with the operation of the schools. However he was not satisfied with the participation of parents, characterising many of them as '*disinterested*'. Also élite 5 mentioned that headteachers and teachers manipulated the PAs and they did not recognise parents' rights to taking some decisions. Élite 2 emphasised the important role of PAs, while élite 1 mentioned that PAs supported the schools by organising a range of activities and events.

Leadership

As far as the participation of parents in the leadership of schools was concerned, élites mentioned that this could not work in Cyprus at the present time. As élite 1 indicated, the structure of the educational system of Cyprus needed reorganisation first. All of the élites agreed that the freedom of teachers and the autonomy of schools should be ensured first and then the participation of parents in leadership could be achieved. Specifically, élite 4 emphasised that if the educational system was similar to other European countries, then more active participation of parents could be ensured. This was because in societies like Cyprus that the 'customer' relationship existed, parents could not take part in the recruitment of teachers, for example (élite 3). However élite 2 mentioned that the absence of 'leaders' in schools affected the way schools worked, by trying not to involve the community in the schools' processes. This was because the basic

criterion by which deputy headteachers were promoted to headteachers was by in-service working experience (élite 2). Moreover as élite 2 indicated, leadership was best between equals. He continued by saying: *'Leaders should have a vision, to be the person who could create the appropriate conditions in order to establish a shared vision in the school'*. He emphasised that the evaluation of teachers in Cyprus should change as teachers used to obtain similar/high evaluations from inspectors, even though some of them were excellent teachers and others of them were lazy. He also pointed out that, on the other hand, parents should be prepared as well. Visionaries were needed in order to build a new educational system in co-operation with teachers and in order that an immediate improvement in schools could be observed. Élite 3 emphasised that at the present time, parents should know everything that happens at school and co-decide responses to a number of issues in which they are specialised. However, he expressed his concerns about the applicability of involving parents in leadership of the school in the Cypriot context.

Co-operation with the community

Élites appeared to believe that the co-operation of schools with the wider community could benefit schools. In particular, they believed that both children and teachers would benefit from the participation of the community in the school, as people in the community could make teachers' work more agreeable. As élite 2 indicated, when he was at school, people loved schools and teachers and they were positive towards schools even though they were not educated. Teachers felt the love of the parents and they were believed to be excellent in

their jobs. Furthermore, élite 3 emphasised the need for cultivating values and culture in Cyprus. He believed that this could be achieved by involving the entire society in a range of activities. He also pointed out that specific subjects such as art, music and theatre can promote these values by involving the community as well. Moreover, élite 1 indicated that the local community influenced the schools indirectly, as the children of each school were coming from the surrounding community. Hence the welfare and the cultural capital of the families affected significantly the school's work. There was a variation that could be observed in different schools in different local communities. Consequently, the school's leadership team should give voice to the local community in order that the school would be able to satisfy all the children's needs.

The élites representing the parents' groups (élite 4 and 5) mentioned that the schools that were able to involve PAs, parents and local community were the most effective ones. However they indicated that this mostly happened in schools in rural and suburban areas, being smaller communities and having just a few schools to serve. Regarding the urban areas, they expressed their concerns about whether this could be achieved.

Educational policies

Three élites (1, 2 and 3) were asked if they knew any policies that existed with regard to the rights and responsibilities of schools and parents and their respective relationships. It was indicated that the role of parents, teachers and schools were defined in the *Rules of Operation of Primary Schools* (Ministerial Council, 2008). Apart from that, there was no other official document, as the

texts referring to parents were mostly announcements, circulars, reports such as the *Educational Reform Report* (Commission for Educational Reform, 2004) and *Strategic Plan* (Kleanthous, 2007) which were not addressing exclusively the involvement of parents. Élite 1 emphasised that these documents mostly expressed intentions, attitudes and advice of different governments but they did not define educational policy.

The rights and the roles of PAs however were legislated. As élite 1 emphasised, even though organised parents knew their rights and responsibilities, at the school level, agreements, laws and legislation could be easily circumvented. As élite 3 also mentioned, even though there was an absence of official documents defining the nature of home-school relationships and each party's duties, there were unwritten rules which were shared by both parents and teachers, determining each one's roles.

Next, élites were asked if any educational policies were developed recently aiming to increase the participation of parents in schools. For this question, élites focused on measures that should be taken rather than discussing policies already promoted as they mentioned that apart from laws developed some decades ago, all the other more recent recommendations were not institutionalised or mandated. Élite 2 emphasised that the school is the institution responsible for creating activities involving parents. He pointed out that if the school is positive towards parents by co-operating with the PAs, the School of Parents and each individual parent, it could be improved significantly. Élite 3 responded differently to the question, saying that he believed that there was no need to

institutionalise home-school relationships, as the key for improving home-school links is the nurturing of a culture in which people will be able to co-operate within the concept of community. He explained that if the parents and teachers do not respect each other and do not recognise the positive effects of establishing good relationships, the improvement of their relationships will not be achieved, either having a legislative framework or not. He gave an example with regard to the evaluation system of teachers. He said that he participated in a meeting with the representatives of the Ministry of Education of Finland and they discussed how they evaluated their teachers. The representatives of Finland did not understand the question. He explained the practice in Cyprus, in which inspectors evaluated teachers and the representatives of Finland were impressed. They said: *‘But this is like you distrust the teachers and their work’*. Then they were asked how they evaluated teachers and they answered: *‘Well, all the teachers who are in the school and all the parents who have children in the school, will not see if something goes wrong?’* This was an example of a tradition in which classroom doors were opened. But it seemed that in the whole society, there was a concept of mutual social control, which was something that was not institutionalised but nevertheless it had strong effects.

Changes promoted from the Educational Reform

Élites were asked if any implementation changes were promoted by the recommendations of the Educational Reform Committee indicating that there was a need to *‘strengthen the contribution of parents as well as the local community at the school level in order that the school could be regarded as the*

centre of the life in the local community'. A grounded category emerging from this question was the autonomy of schools. Specifically all the élites referred to the attempts of the Ministry to give autonomy to schools. They saw a direct relationship between the autonomy of schools and parental and community involvement. They pointed out that the *New Curriculum* (élite 3) and *Educational Reform Report* (élite 1, 2, 4 and 5) attempted to give autonomy to schools and consequently that parental involvement should be increased. Particularly as élite 2 indicated, teachers were trained to accept changes through the *New Curriculum* (Cypriot Ministry of Education and Culture, Pedagogical Institute, 2010), to see positively and accept the ideology of the *Educational Reform Report* (Commission for Educational Reform, 2004). Hence, matters promoted by the *New Curriculum* such as teachers' development of their schools' timetables and teaching from many sources rather than one (book), gave more pedagogical freedom to teachers. This freedom of teachers and schools was the first attempt towards giving more autonomy to schools in order that the *Educational Reform Report* could be implemented more easily (élite 2).

Élite 3 talked about the recent attention paid to parents. The first example of this change was the *New Curriculum*, in which organised parents (Pancyprian Federation of PAs and School of Parents) as well as individual parents participated in the development of the *New Curriculum*. The basic educational principles, upon which the *New Curriculum* was based, were discussed with all the stakeholders. Political parties, educational organisations and parents participated in this open dialogue. The leader of the Committee who was responsible for the planning of the curriculum gave lectures to more than one

hundred and fifty schools in Cyprus in which parents were invited to express their views. As élite 3 pointed out: *'From the first day parents expressed their views about the curriculum, which was the first important step in implementing the Educational Reform Report. Often parents appeared to have negative opinions about teachers, mistrusting them, but we had to take seriously into account these prejudices and concerns as when you introduce something new which it is in contrast with their perceptions, without explaining it to them why you are doing it, then it will fail'*.

From the perspective of parents, élite 5 emphasised that limits should exist and parents cannot co-decide (have equal roles in decision-making) with teachers as they do not have the appropriate skills and knowledge. In particular he said: *'I do not believe that an unspecialised parent can enter the school and have the right to co-decide'*. Moreover the PAs' role was highlighted, describing that they were already co-operating with the local municipality and local authorities, organising events and activities addressed to parents.

About the implementation of Educational Reform élite 4 said: *'The Educational Reform Report will not be implemented in one day. It should become a way of life. It should be some routine practice. You will not do it today and forget it tomorrow'*.

Factors that inhibit the development/change of parental involvement policies

Élite 3 gave an interesting response emphasising the existence of nepotism in Cyprus, in which political parties intervened in all the sectors of life. Explaining this view, he mentioned that PAs represented political parties' views and as a result a large number of parents underestimated the PAs' role. This was because PAs were not operating to serve the parents' and children's needs, as PAs' members were mostly holding the views of the political parties they represented. He continued, saying that in Cyprus, the political parties operated in a very different way in relation to the European parties. Politicians in Cyprus did not appear to express views on the ideology and the aims of the curriculum, for example, but they dealt with details, such as the teaching hours of each subject. In Germany, the political party did not take a decision on issues related with the teaching. The role of the party was to decide how the school was organised. He also explained that this situation was occurring in Cyprus because the people who had high positions were not people who necessarily had the appropriate competences and qualifications, but people who took positions used their networks through their political parties. This was a classical example of the effects of nepotism.

On the other hand, élite 1 referred to the teaching trade unions in which they faced the issue of parental involvement more technically than critically. For example, they were focused on provisions related to the delineating of regulations, working frameworks without making an agreement first of what kind of involvement they wanted from parents for the best of the education of the

children and the school's success. He continued: '*After agreeing the nature of their roles and our vision, we can delineate each stakeholder's roles as well*'.

Furthermore, élite 2 indicated that the negative attitudes of parents and their actions might be an important factor affecting teachers' perception and, as a result, they tried to avoid discussing and promoting the further involvement of parents. The mistrust that parents showed to teachers and the prevailing social critique towards teachers, as they took high salaries for working a few hours, pushed the teachers to try to guard their profession by avoiding giving parents further opportunities for involvement.

Strategic Plan for Education (Kleanthous, 2007)

All the élites shared the same views about the *Strategic Plan for Education* (Kleanthous, 2007) which indicated that there was a need for an increase of the active involvement of parents in schools processes. Élites (1, 2 and 3) appeared to be critical about this plan. Élite 1 emphasised that the provisions outlined in the *Strategic Plan* were not ones that were going to lead to a humane and a democratic school. Also élite 3 pointed out that in order to promote a change, the social and cultural conditions of the country should be taken seriously into consideration. He said that an imitation of Finland's case was intended during the development of this document. However Finland was one of the most developed countries in the world. Finland managed to be the world leader in mathematics, sciences and languages after carrying out reform. However Cyprus was a very different context and the cultural characteristics of each country should be taken into consideration before developing such plans.

Moreover élite 2 added: *‘By giving more attention to organised parents and enhancing their involvement, giving them financial support and co-operating with them to develop some educational programmes that aim to attract more parents, the present situation would not change. You continue to exclude some parents. This is not the way you will hear the problems and the needs of the families and make them understand that schools care about them and persuade them that their involvement affects significantly children’s performance’.*

On the other hand, the élites representing parents’ groups disagreed with the other élites believing that it was an important step forward, as the *Strategic Plan for Education* (Kleanthous, 2007) was aiming to give more rights to federations of parents, helping them to have offices, in order to be more organised and attract more parents.

Finally, élites (1, 2 and 3) appeared to be happy as the *Strategic Plan for Education* (Kleanthous, 2007) document had been buried when the government changed, as it did not appear to offer anything.

Immigrant families

Élites were asked whether schools faced any challenges in welcoming and involving immigrant parents in the education of their children. The two members of parents’ communities pointed out that these parents were not as approachable as Cypriot parents. Élite 5 said: *‘A small number of immigrant parents are approachable but the majority, possess an aggressive, offensive attitude’.* Élite 4

mentioned that they tried to involve them in PA, organising tactical meetings, trying to create a friendly environment and while at the beginning, some groups were involved, later they did not attend PA meetings. Élite 5 assumed that: *'...The immigrant people of Cyprus are not coming from societies who are interested in their children'*.

Furthermore, the other three élites (1, 2 and 3) reported that immigrant parents were not involved in schools' practices. Élite 1 mentioned that the Ministry sent circulars to schools indicating how to approach these parents. Also élite 2 emphasised that schools having many immigrant parents were able to hire interpreters. It was indicated that the instructions given to teachers about how to handle immigrant parents and children might have not been effective enough, as an overall positive philosophical approach would be more useful and, in combination with in-service training, teachers would be able to develop specific practical ways of approaching these parents and children (élite 1 and 3). In other words, they believed that teachers by being trained would be able to decide how they should act in different school contexts and in different cases, as each immigrant should be treated as an individual case.

Mechanisms monitoring the implementation of new policies

All the élites were asked whether there was any mean of monitoring the implementation of educational policies. Élite 1 and 3 mentioned that there was not such a mechanism established in Cyprus. Élite 3 believed that independent services should have been hired to assess the implementation of the *Educational Reform*, beginning with the implementation of the *New Curriculum*. Élite 2 and

4 talked about the existence of the Pedagogical Institute which was responsible for conducting a range of research about the educational system and promoting innovations. However even though some research was conducted, the Ministry was informed about the results without any further action. He added: *'As a Ministry, we did not regard the research findings as a means, to find the weaknesses of our educational system, to go back to teachers and give them feedback and then evaluate it again to discover if we had solved the problems'*.

In addition, it was indicated that the Institute of Research and Evaluation could be responsible for monitoring the implementation of the *Educational Reform* (élite 2 and 4). Élite 3 expressed his concerns about the reliability of the establishment of such a mechanism taking into account the society of Cyprus that it was characterized by nepotism.

Élites (4 and 5) stated that the *Educational Reform* could not be achieved in one day and that such a mechanism will exist to evaluate the implementation of the curriculum. Solutions should be suggested for the improvement of any weakness in the system that might be observed. In other words, they emphasised the need of having such a mechanism that would watch, reinforce and improve whatever related to *Educational Reform* to ensure its effectiveness.

Practices involving parents

Élites were asked to express their views about the practices introduced by teachers and schools to involve parents. Everyone indicated that it depended on individual teachers whether they were going to involve parents. Élite 1

mentioned that even though there were some good examples in which educators were trying to co-operate with parents effectively, these examples were limited, depending on the personal initiative of teachers and positive attitudes of their schools towards parents. However élite 1 and 3 indicated that some other attempts of teachers could be positioned in the notion of ‘exploitation’ of parents, and as élite 1 indicated, this was similar to the rhetoric of *Strategic Plan for Education* (Kleanthous, 2007), in which parents appeared to be invited to participate in activities and events, without offering anything to them. Consequently it was noticed that these attempts were not addressed to the mass of parents but to the small group of parents who were familiar with such practices as they were coming from higher SES groups and they were possibly members of PAs.

Ways of improving home-school relationships

Élites suggested ways of improving home-school relationships by seeing the issue from different angles. In particular, élite 1 talked about different perspectives on the issues. First of all he indicated that teachers in order to accept such a change would need to be convinced that it was worth trying to implement it. They should see the benefits for themselves. Specifically he said: *‘If teachers do not see their own benefits, then they will not do anything and they will resist’*. He believed that teachers could be motivated in many ways, such as by reducing their working hours. Also he emphasised that the mass of parents cannot be approached if the schools are not ready to establish two-way communication in which the teachers would be always available to hear their needs, make them feel that they cared for them and they did not want just to make demands of them

such as to give money to schools or help with homework. He appeared to criticise many schools and teachers in Cyprus saying: *'Nowadays the schools just ask things of families. For example, they have the following attitude. If parents cannot help their children with homework, schools say—sorry, your child will fail. If you cannot come into the school at the specific hour—sorry, I cannot do anything else. If you cannot speak the language we use —sorry, you are in the Cypriot educational system'*.

Moreover, élite 3 mentioned that in order to increase the involvement of parents the education system should be decentralised, by giving more freedom to teachers and autonomy to schools. All the political parties and educational stakeholders were supporting this view. However, as élite 3 indicated, in practice they were not ready to increase schools' autonomy. For instance, it was attempted in the first place to give the opportunity to teachers to develop their school's timetable, collaborating with the headteacher and the inspector and following some guidelines. Teachers appeared to be strongly against this. He said: *'Every attempt we made to give autonomy to schools was rejected by both Organised Parents and Teachers' Organisations'*. He explained that parents were opposed to autonomy saying that this is against social justice, believing that some schools having better teaching staff, would be in better position than schools with lazy teachers. About the teachers he said that teachers resisted changes, regarding simple things as very complicated.

He continued saying that, first of all, a culture should be inculcated beginning with the children which they will transmit to their families, in which each party

would be respected and their roles appreciated. The sense of collegiality, of caring about the school, offering and volunteering should be cultivated in order that the operation of the schools could become a shared responsibility. Teachers in their turn should open their classroom doors to their colleagues and parents.

Also élite 2 emphasised that teachers needed training in order to understand that: *'...being prepared for my job means that I'm prepared not only for teaching methods and teaching subjects but also to be able to handle children, parents and the differences in each one, taking into account that each one has a different personality'*. He gave an example saying that teachers appeared to criticise the parents who might not visit the school or might not help with homework, characterising them as irresponsible, without thinking that at home the child might be the witness of dramatic situations, such as to experience of domestic violence. Hence, teachers should insist on communicating with parents and not give up if the parents did not respond. The school was the institution responsible to find out any problematic situations and co-operate with the social services of the community, in order to find solution together.

Finally élites 4 and 5 agreed that the communication between teachers and parents was the key to success. Élite 5 mentioned: *'If the teachers could understand this, communicate frequently and co-operate with parents, then their results would be impressive'*. Also élite 4 believed that there was not any parent who was not interested in his/her child and if the teacher asked for their help, then it would be easier to persuade parents to go closer to school. Both élites appeared to believe that it would be easier for teachers to approach parents,

rather than the PAs, as the PAs asked for the help of parents not for their own child only but for all the children.

Autonomy

This category was a grounded category that emerged from the data. It can be observed that there was frequent reference to the autonomy of schools. Particularly the élites (1, 2 and 3) referred to the need for giving autonomy to schools, in trying to answer the question about how the home-school relationships could be improved and talking about the changes that should be promoted in order that *Educational Reform* intentions would be achieved, thus strengthening the parents and community contribution at the school level. Élite 1 indicated that parental involvement in the format that parents will be equal partners participating in decision-making processes cannot be achieved if the autonomy of schools will not be ensured. He said: *'In the case that schools become autonomous to a sufficient degree, the schools would see that some other groups can help their operation and this will only be achieved by giving them more rights'*. Élite 2 mentioned that the appropriate people should be in the right positions in order that the schools would become more independent. More precisely, he believed that headteachers should have vision in trying to improve their schools. Moreover, élite 3 emphasised that the 'pedagogical freedom' of teachers should be ensured first, meaning that they should be able to follow the philosophy of the curriculum and achieve their goals using any means they wished. He also concluded: *'The hypocrisy was that everyone asked to give*

autonomy to the schools, while none of the institutions appeared to agree when we tried to introduce it in practice’.

Parents as co-teachers

Another grounded category revealed from the data concerned the help that parents were giving to their children. Particularly, élite 1, 2 and 3 emphasised the fact that the homework of children was regarded as parents’ responsibility was wrong, as this was the schools’ job. They stated that parents should not be either co-educators or mini-teachers. Élite 1 and 3 indicated that the parents should have harmonious relationships with their children at home, spending their time in activities appropriate for parents and children rather than feeling that they were responsible to supplement the education of their children. Furthermore, élite 2 mentioned that the Ministry did not want parents as mini-teachers dealing with teachers’ work, but to be partners of schools, by communicating with teachers, by being informed about schools’ work and by helping the teachers with issues related to the education and upbringing of their children.

Participation of parents in PAs

The final grounded category revealed was the avoidance of participation of the majority of parents in PAs (élites 1 and 3). Particularly élite 1 mentioned that the majority of parents did not feel that PAs represented them. The members of PAs were mostly individuals who wished to take part in other elections, like municipal and parliamentary elections. He said that the parents did not want to be engaged in PAs as they did not want to be slaves of anyone, remembering them only when they wanted their help for the organisation of an activity, or to give

money to schools. He continued saying: *‘Most of the parents think in the following way: since they did not satisfy my needs, they did not hear me when I had a problem, why should I come to help them, even though I feel that my child was not fairly handled?’* Moreover élite 3 mentioned that through his contacts he had with parents he found out that many parents tried to keep their distances from PAs. He observed that the views of parents were not expressed by PAs. He added: *‘That is why we met many parents who were unhappy and dissatisfied with the PAs’. I’ve seen many parents who said to me that I don’t go there as I cannot actually participate as they would not hear me’.* Both élites concluded that PAs represented political parties’ views rather than parents’ needs and concerns.

4.6 Discussion

Élites’ interviews indicated that the parental involvement can be directly related with the recent attempts of the government to give autonomy at the school level, trying to decentralise the educational system of Cyprus. Élites gave important information for the contexts of influence, policy and practice.

4.6.1 Context of influence

The participants emphasised the negative effects of the educational system’s structure to the establishment of good home–school relationships. As was discussed in the chapter 1 as well, the Cypriot educational system is a highly centralised system in which all important aspects were dealt with by the Ministry of Education and Culture.

This structure prevented headteachers from setting visions, as they did not have the opportunity to do a lot of things in their own individual schools. Taking into account élites' views that the most important criterion that determined teachers' promotions was the years of in-service working experience, as all of them received similar evaluations, this raises important questions about the effectiveness of the evaluation measures of teachers. For instance, if a teacher who is interested, being creative, introducing innovative activities receives a similar evaluation as a teacher who might be 'lazy', this leads to the conclusion that there is a lack of rewards for enhancing good practices.

Moreover, it seems that the political parties of Cyprus had a central role in educational issues. As the élite 3 emphasised, they had views about each issue, causing debates and delays in the promotion of changes. They appeared to use education to attract votes and win elections. As a result, often changes were abandoned when the government changed. One classical example of this was the case of the *Strategic Plan for Education* (Kleanthous, 2007), which was promoted for one year and then it was buried, as interviewers mentioned. These attitudes of the government prevented the educational system of Cyprus from being modernised.

In addition, organised parents (parents belonging to boards) in Cyprus influenced the educational policy. The élites views were in line with Symeou's (2008) outcomes reported in chapter 2. They indicated that PAs members were mostly representatives of political parties, using their participation in PAs for personal gains, in order to develop the appropriate networks that would help them in their

personal developments, for instance to be elected in municipal or in parliamentary elections. Hence élites (1,2,3) pointed out that PAs many times did not reflect the perceptions and concerns of the majority of the parents. Examining the two élites from the federations of Parents Associations and the School of Parents views, one can conclude that they were focused on the consolidation of their rights and roles rather than issues related to the low numbers of parents being involved and finding new ways of approaching them. This leads to the conclusion that in reality, parents did not have a voice, as their concerns, beliefs and feelings were not transmitted by PAs.

4.6.2 Context of policy text

Élites indicated that apart from the *Rules of Operation of Primary Schools* (Ministerial Council, 2008), until recently there was not any educational policy that exclusively addressed the rights and responsibilities of parents, schools and teachers. The élites mentioned that the importance of involving parents was reported in some parts of recent policy-making tests such as the *Educational Reform Report* (Commission for Educational Reform, 2004) and *New Curriculum* (Cypriot Ministry of Education and Culture, Pedagogical Institute, 2010).

However, through interviewees' opinions it can be concluded that they did not value the importance of the existence of written legislation. They indicated that even if you have written policy documents, these can be easily abandoned if they are not accepted and believed by involved stakeholders and especially teachers. An example of this resistance was expressed by an élite who mentioned that

teachers were opposed, in practice, to any attempts to give to teachers more pedagogical freedom and responsibilities in order to increase their autonomy.

However, the strong power effects of the unwritten rules shared by teachers and parents were emphasised. Élités' opinion that these rules might have stronger impact than written legislation can raise questions about how these implicit rules were developed, accepted and transmitted. A characteristic example, as stated by élités, was that parents believed that it was their responsibility to check the homework of their children as well as to help them when they faced any difficulties, even though it was not written anywhere.

4.6.3 Context of practice

Élités recognised that parents were not involved enough because they did not have many of opportunities to be involved. This might be a result of the general perception of teachers that parents should not intervene in order to avoid becoming co-educators and mini-teachers, as élités stated. The two parents' representatives accepted the fact that their boards' roles were mostly financial, leading to the outcome that they accepted their limited responsibilities. In addition, their opinions about the 'disinterested' parents who were not involved in schools' practices, could lead to the conclusion that they were not trying to approach these parents, but they were critical of them. This should alert us to investigate which parents are being represented and are the majority of parents' voices, concerns, beliefs and feelings are being heard through these boards?

Considering this finding in the light of those of Symeou (2002) and Georgiou (1997) indicating that parents who were member of PAs were more frequently invited to attend in events, activities, lessons and it can be concluded that the teachers behaved differently towards different families. As a result, it seems that the status and the power of the family could possibly influence the teachers' attitudes. Interestingly, Symeou (2008) in research in the Cypriot context, found that this group of parents had established networks with political parties, indicating the extent of their social capital. This also leads to an indication of potential existence of social networks, in which the children of the families who had the best developed social networks enjoyed advantages.

4.7 Conclusion

From this chapter one can conclude that the education in Cyprus is strongly affected by political influences, not only in educational policy but also in the operation of the schools. The effects of political parties could be seen not only during the development of the policy but also through the activities of organised parents.

As a result, even though the policy-makers and academic researcher valued parental involvement, believing that schools should approach the parents who felt neglected, this attitude was not observed from the members of parents' boards. As a result it can be concluded that PAs in Cyprus are mainly exclusive associations, becoming restrictive to the involvement of the mass of the parents.

Hence policy-maker élites expressed their doubts about the representation of the views of the mass of the parents by these associations.

Furthermore, from élites opinions it can be concluded that the existence of written policy texts, cannot determine the enactment of policies or their potential effectiveness. They paid more attention to existing practice rather than legislation. Considering this shared belief, one might assume that this can explain the lack of policy-texts with regard to the involvement of parents but also for a range of other educational issues.

An important step forward, in addressing policies to the mass of the parents was observed to be the case of the *New Curriculum* development. Policy-makers invited the mass of parents to participate in dialogue about educational purposes and goals, to be able to be informed and to express their own concerns and perceptions. Considering that Cypriot parents were used to working hard for the achievement of their ‘unwritten’ responsibilities in the past, their participation in this process could transmit to them increased responsibilities. In other words, participation in the dialogue gives them the sense that they are responsible for the effectiveness of this innovation as well, encouraging them to work towards its success. In such a way, the right messages are transmitted to parents directly and not through other parents or teachers.

However, the important role of teachers in the potential attempts of government to increase the involvement of parents, cannot be ignored. In particular, élites appeared to believe that teachers needed motivation first to participate in such an

attempt in order to realise the importance and benefits they will enjoy by involving parents in education. At the same time, teachers must believe in the importance of a policy in order to support its enactment otherwise there is a possibility they will abandon it. The unequal evaluation of teachers' performance though, can be seen as a restricting factor influencing their attitudes towards innovations.

Finally, after the overview of élite perceptions of key policy influence texts and practice, it is important to investigate in more depth the context of these policy texts. In the next chapter the analysis of educational policy texts is presented.

CHAPTER 5

DOCUMENT ANALYSIS OF POLICY TEXTS

5.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter elite interviews were introduced giving important information about the contexts of influence, policy text production and context of practice (Bowe *et al.*, 1992). The further examination of policy texts could illuminate both the context of influence and context of practice.

As mentioned in previous chapters the association of the Cypriot educational system with the Greek educational system, restricted the development of national educational policies (Persianis, 2010). Hence, not much emphasis had been paid to the development of policies and as a result, the existing policy documents dealt with a range of aspects concerning education. In other words, there was not a single policy document concentrating exclusively on home-school relationships.

That is why for the purpose of this thesis, recent relevant policy documents were selected that even though they were not addressed to parents exclusively, they made some references to parental involvement. The documents that were analysed are listed below:

- a) *Rules for Schools' Operation* (Ministerial Council, 2008);
- b) *Educational Reform Report* (Commission for Educational Reform, 2004);
- c) *Strategical Plan for Education* (Kleanthous, 2007); and
- d) *New Curriculum* (MOEC, Pedagogical Institute, 2010).

5.2 Aims

The present chapter thus aims to examine key policy documents developed in Cyprus. As noted, these documents were not addressed exclusively to parental involvement but to a range of educational issues, including some aspects of home-school relationships as well.

The following research question was addressed:

What is the current policy in Cyprus in primary schools, with regard to the involvement of parents in education?

5.3 Methods

5.3.1 Materials

The four documents that were selected to be analysed were key reports influencing and guiding the current educational policy of Cyprus and three of them are in effect until the present. Only the *Strategical Plan for Education* (Kleanthous, 2007) was abandoned as basically it duplicated aspects that were already covered by the *Educational Reform Report* (Commission for Educational Reform, 2004).

This document was abandoned as the government changed after a year in 2008 and the new government set as its priority implementation of the *Educational Reform Report* (Commission for Educational Reform, 2004). However it was

important to examine this document as well since it suggested specific measures that should be taken in order to increase parental involvement.

Furthermore another key document analysed was the *Rules for Schools' Operation* (Ministerial Council, 2008) that determined the roles of schools, teachers, deputy teachers and headteachers. For the purpose of the study the *Revised Rules of Operation of 2008* were examined as the first original paper was published in 1997 and then it was accepted with some minor changes.

Furthermore, the *Educational Reform Report* (Commission for Educational Reform, 2004) was analysed as it was a key report evaluating and identifying the weaknesses of the educational system. It also made recommendations about a range of issues that needed improvement. Hence the current government attempted to reconstruct and improve the educational system of Cyprus based on the *Educational Reform Report* recommendations.

Finally, the *New Curriculum* (MOEC, Pedagogical Institute, 2010) was analysed as it reflected the educational policy of the current government, being a political and sociological text, reflecting the socio-economical and historical context of a country (Apple, 1993; Koutselini, 1997) as well as the prevailing ideologies (Pinar and Bowers, 1992). The *New Curriculum* (MOEC, Pedagogical Institute, 2010) comprised the first attempt to implement and promote the *Educational Reform Report* (Commission for Educational Reform, 2004) recommendations.

5.3.2 Procedures

The documents selected for deep analysis were read from the beginning to the end to identify their general scope and aims but most importantly, to identify references to home-school relationships. The relevant passages were analysed in the light of a priori categories, in order to examine the emphasis each document placed on parents.

5.3.3 Analysis

The Holsti's categories which provided a framework for analysing policy documents, were adopted as a basis for the text analysis (Holsti, 1969, cited in Robson, 2002). A priori categories used by the Holsti's model that were relevant to the study were used.

The categories chosen for investigation were:

- Subject matter
- Authority: *in whose name are statements made?*
- Values: *what values are revealed?*
- Goals/purposes: *what goals or intentions are revealed?*
- Methods: *what methods are used to achieve these intentions?*
- Actors: *who is represented as carrying out the actions referred to?*
- Organisation of educational system
- Liaison with parents/other professionals
- Procedures.

5.4 Results

5.4.1 *Rules of Operation of Primary Schools* (Ministerial Council, 2008)

Subject matter: This text is a statutory framework as it contained the rules that were written by the Ministry of Education that are voted each year from the House of Representatives, after including small changes suggested by the Ministry and influenced by the prevailing social conditions. For instance, a change promoted concerned the right of students to choose whether they would like to participate in the religious education subject.

Authority: This document was prepared by the Ministry of Education, aiming to set the laws that the schools, headteachers, deputy headteachers, teachers and parents should follow in the course of the schools' operation.

Actors: The roles of headteachers, teachers and parents are determined in this document. In particular, the document mentions parents several times, as presented below.

- Each school should develop a 'Code of Good Behaviour' each year. This is discussed with teachers but it is provided also to parents and it constitutes the basis for the evaluation of the behaviour of the child (14.3.b). Also, one of the disciplinary actions taken when a child misbehaves is reprehension in the presence of parents.
- The teaching staff can organise common meetings with the PA (21.8.e).

- A duty of headteachers is to have frequent communication with parents aiming to develop collaboration between home and school in order to co-operate for solving problems that arise in schools but also for the development of the personality as well as the socialisation of children (22.14). *(This paragraph did not exist in the Rules of Operation of Primary Schools, 1997).*
- In the duties and responsibilities of teachers, it is stated that they should organise meetings with parents after informing the headteachers, in which they will discuss issues of education, discipline and progress of children (24.14b).
- The parents are responsible to be interested in their children and watch, supervise and check their regular study in school. They are also responsible for the discipline and the ethos of their children. When a strange behaviour is observed then parents should mention it to the headteacher in order to achieve a good home-school co-operation aiming to improve the behaviour of the children. They should visit school when the headteacher invites them. Also they have to keep a close relationship with the school in order to be informed about the behaviour of their children as well as their progress and they have to attend special parents' meetings organised by headteacher (25.2 a,b,c,d).

Liaison with parents/other professionals: The document determines the relationships between school and home. Particularly the following statements were included in the text:

- When the children are missing from the school, parents should present a justification indicating the reason for the absence (16).
- Teaching staff in school are responsible for the frequent information of parents about the achievements and the behaviour of children (21.8.c)
- Parents are allowed to visit the school only at a preset time or after informing the headteacher (36.1.b).

5.4.2 Educational Reform Report: Democratic and Human Education, in the Euro-Cypriot State Prospects of reconstruction and modernisation
(Commission for Educational Reform, 2004).

Subject matter: This document provides guidance to the Ministry of Education about the areas of the educational system of Cyprus that need improvement. It has been adopted by the current government.

Authority: The policy text was directed mainly to the Ministry of Education of Cyprus but during the development of the *Educational Reform Report* the committee had meetings with all the involved stakeholders, such as the organised parents, some representatives of teachers, students, Ministry and political parties.

Goals, introductions and descriptions: The main goal of educational reform was the promotion of democratic and humane education in the Euro-Cypriot state.

The aim of the Committee was to investigate many educational issues. Included were:

- the goals and the orientation of the educational system of Cyprus;
- the institutional frame of governing, the exercise of power and monitoring of the local bodies of administration, the school unit and the society of citizens;
- the structure of the educational system;
- content of education (curriculum and pedagogy);
- teachers' professional development;
- evaluation of teachers.

It also proposed that more responsibilities should be given to the individual school in order that the active involvement of each stakeholder would be facilitated (p. 271).

Values: It was suggested that the philosophy and the orientation of education should change, placing emphasis on the participating democracy and humane education. It was suggested that European values should be adopted such as

democracy, respect of personal and social rights, solidarity, and equality in education.

The term of ‘shared ownership’ was introduced as education needs partners (p.271).

Actors: A Committee of seven academics was hired by the Minister, Pefkios Georgiadis, who were responsible to make suggestions on how to improve and restructure the educational system of Cyprus. The suggestions of the Committee aimed to transform the school to a democratic school of citizens promoting the social inclusion of all children, in which the teacher would be recognised as a professional educator who would participate in decision-making processes (Ministry of Education, 2004).

Politicians’ view: The President, Tassos Papadopoulos, (2004) in his governmental programme, emphasised the importance of developing a holistic educational reform, in order to achieve the quality upgrade and modernisation of the educational system in order to produce people with critical thinking and modern perceptions (p. 94).

Organisation of educational system: The *Educational Reform Report* (Commission for Educational Reform, 2004) proposed the decentralisation of the educational system. It was recognised that the participation of the local community, the schools themselves and the teachers was almost not-existent. Also proposed were some measures related to the local community and parents in

order to promote the decentralisation of the educational system. The suggested measures are listed below are to:

- increase the participation of the local educational community in the planning and organisation of aspects of learning, leadership and pedagogy, in order to take into consideration some local special differences;
- participation in curriculum development;
- connecting of individual schools with the local community, creating ‘local educational committees’ in which representatives of teachers, parents, students and local authorities would participate (p. 98).

Liaison with parents/other professionals: The centralisation of the educational system restricted the involvement of all the related stakeholders such as teachers, parents and students (p.71).The *Educational Reform Report* proposed that the range of problems existing in the school can be addressed by the community/local participation.

The policy document pointed out that one of the goals of teachers should be the development of good relationships with parents and community, regarding them as important partners in the educational process (p. 114).

It was emphasised that there was a need to expand schools into afternoon time in order to activate the participation of parents and local authorities so that the school would be in the centre of the lives of all the local communities (p. 195).

Procedures: Long-term plans should be developed aiming for decentralisation, democratisation and shared ownership (p. 271). Introduction of internal evaluation of schools in which mainly teachers, but also parents and children, would be responsible for improving the services provided, was proposed and aiming for the continuous improvement of the quality of the education (p. 271).

5.4.3 *Strategic Plan for Education* (Kleanthous, 2007)

Subject matter: This was simply a consultation document (not in effect today, as abandoned when the government changed in 2008)

Authority: It was framed by the Minister of Education, Akis Kleanthous.

Goals, introductions and descriptions:

It stated that the goal of educational reform was to promote a more humane and democratic school (p. 25) by:

- Upgrading the quality of education using all the stakeholders involved;
- Giving administrative and educational autonomy to individual schools.

Actors: it was estimated that only 10% of parents (mostly parents of high-achievers) are close to the individual school and provide help for its operation (p. 25).

Organisation of educational system: Decentralisation of the educational system was to be achieved by giving more responsibilities to the district offices and district inspectors.

Change of schools' climate was recommended by co-operating and communicating with headteachers, parents, teachers, children and other educational authorities in order to use human resources to a greater extent (p. 26).

Liaison with parents/other professionals: In order to achieve the administrative and educational autonomy of school it was suggested to involve parents. For the expansion of the involvement of parents in individual schools it was suggested to display the work of the School of Parents in order to attract more parents, to reinforce the role of parents through advertising, and the issue of an informative booklet from the School of Parents in order to sensitise parents about their role in educating children and their relationship with school (p. 25).

5.4.4 *New Curriculum* (MOEC, Pedagogical Institute, 2010)

Subject matter: This text constitutes the current statutory framework as the missions and the goals of education are defined. Also it refers to all the dimension of the educational system like the content of education, the programme of study of each grade, the teaching methods, the means of teaching and learning, the learning environment, the ways of evaluation, the home-school relationships, the additional activities which are required for the success of the mission of schools (p. 11).

Goals: It refers to the Educational Reform as the Reform of Curriculum (p. 8). Some of the goals of the *New Curriculum* are to create persons who can understand, interpret and change the social and the physical environment, for the

good of society, as well as to be able to communicate with their fellowmen and shape their lives based on human achievements, to contribute to the development of human knowledge and to be capable of exercising successfully a profession (p. 12-13).

Methods: The *New Curriculum* exempted the family from the anxiety of teaching at home as homework does not mean teaching at home. This was a mechanism of failure for the children who did not have help at home (p. 17).

A means of teaching ‘environmental education and sustainable growth’ as well as ‘health education’ subjects is to be through the exploitation of the expertise of the local communities, by involving parents.

For the development of good relationships between school and community the programme of studies for music proposes to organise projects co-operating with cultural institutions and community, and to present the work of children outside of the school.

Authority: It was prepared for the Ministry of Education, in order to keep the promise of President Demetris Christophias during his election programme, stating that the Educational Reform will be implemented (Board of Education, 2008)

Actors: The curriculum reform was regarded as a ‘public project’ in which all organisations, institutions, and persons involved in educational processes or even the persons who were interested in education, participated in this attempt. No

citizens of Cyprus were excluded from the development of the New Curriculum activities as it was believed that the decisions taken could affect all the children of Cyprus (p. 10).

The role of school as was defined by the programme of study of ‘environmental education and sustainable growth’ was to be a place of creative interaction for all of the educational stakeholders, as well as the community’s institutions in which they will co-operate for the sustainable development of the schools (p. 282). It was emphasised that schools should develop functional and essential relationships with the community in order to cultivate in children the sense of belonging to the specific community (p.282)

Organisation of educational system: In the subject ‘environmental education and sustainable growth’ schools are responsible to choose the environmental issues that concern the specific community and try to find solutions with the co-operation of parents, children and local authorities (p. 282)

Liaison with parents/other professionals: Home-school relationships were promoted in the *New Curriculum*.

In the introduction to the lesson of ‘environmental education and sustainable growth’ it was indicated that it aimed to examine the environmental problems of the community (p. 283). Also a goal of the lesson was to understand that the solution of such problems needed the co-operation of the local community. In the examination of any issue chosen by the school, parents and the community should be involved. The participation of children, parents, community’s

representatives and teachers in the decision-making processes was promoted for improving the school, the environmental and social conditions of the community (p. 289).

In the programme of study for 'music' subject the co-operation between school and community was emphasised recognising the important influences of such kinds of experiences on students (p. 364).

The programme of study on health education suggested that schools should co-operate with parents and community for the improvement of the school's climate (p. 417).

5.5 Discussion

The document analysis revealed that the emphasis paid to the improvement of home-school relationships has recently increased. On the other hand, the positive effect of parents in their children's school performance was not mentioned at all in the policy texts, in contrast with the international educational policy. It seems though, that the attention paid to parents occurred in order to establish more independent individual schools, giving them more autonomy in order to achieve the decentralisation of the educational system of Cyprus. In other words, parental involvement seemed to be used as a bridge for achieving the autonomy of schools.

The *Rules of Operation of Elementary Education* text (Ministerial Council, 2008) gave limited responsibilities to parents and their involvement was basically restricted, as home-school links were teacher-led (Zaoura and Aubrey, 2010). Obviously, this document that is in effect until now, needs revision in order to be consistent with the values and the philosophy that were promoted by the *New Curriculum* (MOEC, Pedagogical Institute, 2010). More precisely, it is unacceptable to try to transform the schools as democratic and humane schools of the 21st century whilst at the same time parents should get permission before they visit the school. Additionally, even though these rules did not welcome parents in schools to a great extent, they appeared to accept and believe that parents were responsible for their children's behaviour.

Interestingly, the *Rules of Operation of School* text (Ministerial Council, 2008) determined that it is teachers' obligation to maintain good communication links with parents. However the avoidance of determining the ways in which this can be achieved, might lead to wrong interpretations, suggesting that setting parents' meetings once a week during school time, can ensure good communication between home and school.

Both in *Educational Reform Report* (Commission for Educational Reform, 2004) and *New Curriculum* (MOEC, Pedagogical Institute, 2010) documents, the tendency that urges for parental involvement was obvious. The reference to parents was sporadic in both documents. The fact that only some subjects of the curriculum such as the environmental education and sustainable growth, the health education and music, identified the importance of involving parents and

community by setting goals and prompting teachers and schools to work towards this direction, can raise concerns. The question that can be asked at this point is: ‘Why do the other subjects not refer to the parental involvement, even though the improvement of home-school relationships was emphasised by the *New Curriculum*?’

The *Strategic Plan for Education* (Kleanthous, 2007) appeared to repeat some areas that were examined in *Educational Reform Report* (Commission for Educational Reform, 2004). This document had a section addressed to parents, emphasising the need of increasing their involvement. However, the suggestions made about increasing the advertising and promoting of the work and the importance of the School of Parents cannot attract the parent, because a change of teachers’ attitude towards parents is required. The *Strategic Plan for Education* is addressed to parents without touching on the role of teachers in this effort. The level of attention of this text to parents is consistent with teachers’ attitudes, on whom it appears will be placed the onus of improving home-school relationships (Zaoura and Aubrey, 2010).

The *Educational Reform Report* and the *New Curriculum* involved parents and teachers during the planning stage (Persianis, 2010). This attempt was groundbreaking for Cypriot education, as until recently teachers were called to implement changes without having the opportunity to express any views about them (Pashiardis, 2004). By involving teachers in such projects, it can be ensured that they will be supportive of the change. In such a way, the Ministry did not keep teachers in the dark about the innovation being promoted, making

them suspicious and creating a climate of mistrust, as happened in previous changes (Persianis, 2010).

The political parties seemed to have a central role in education, as they used educational innovations to satisfy political expedience. This seems to affect education negatively, as some political parties in Cyprus react unfavourably when innovations are introduced. The changes in governments has played a vital role in educational policy in Cyprus, so there is a risk that promoted changes might be abandoned when a different political party wins the presidential elections. Particularly, bearing in mind Persianis' (2010) view, that the *Educational Reform Report* was developed for political reasons rather than educational reasons, someone might wonder - 'Who can ensure that this gigantic attempt would not be abandoned if a different party wins in the next presidential elections of 2013?'

5.6 Conclusion

Even though a turn towards parents can be observed in recent policy documents, it seems that there is not any policy and guidance determining the ways that schools should approach parents. A strategy is needed, as an arbitrary call to parents can not ensure that parental involvement will be increased. The decentralisation of the education system can be achieved by involving parents and community but this should not be the only incentive for involving parents. International literature and research emphasise the important effects of parents in their children's performance (Harris, Power and Goodall, 2009; Fan & Chen 2001; Epstein, Sanders, Sheldon *et al.* 2009). In addition, recent literature

indicates that the development of specific parenting practices, such as spending time with children and setting high expectations can affect children's achievement to a greater extent than participating in school-based activities (Desforges and Abouchaar, 2003; Harris and Goodall, 2007; Alexander, 2010). Overall, the Cypriot policy documents were not clear enough about the ways in which parents should be involved and what their expectations from schools should be.

Parents can be a very important component in the decentralisation of education, but more responsibilities and roles could be given to them. Particularly, they might help in school-based activities and lessons, helping in the operation of the school, the decision-making and leadership. In addition they could be involved in their children's learning through home-based activities such as reading, singing, painting and offering opportunities for socialisation such as visits to friends and excursions.

Furthermore, it seems that there is a lot of room for improvement in educational policy in Cyprus. The context of influence affects directly the educational policy, and many delays can be observed in the development of policy documents. In addition, the fact that for many years teachers were not informed about the changes being promoted, led many innovations to failure. The recent involvement of all the educational stakeholders in the development of policy documents is a very promising step forward. In the same way teachers should be prepared and trained to involve parents and community in the implementation of the change, in order to build together the new democratic and humane school.

The prevailing climate should be examined in order to find out if the teachers, parents and children are ready to work together and transform their schools as independent schools units. It is also important to examine the teachers' views, aspirations and expectations as they are the ones who would be called to work for the autonomy of the school and the involvement of parents. Hence, the following chapter presents the results of the survey conducted with teachers indicating their perceptions, concerns and their readiness for this attempt.

CHAPTER 6

TEACHERS' QUESTIONNAIRE

6.1 Introduction

The previous chapter introduced the *élites'* views, experiences and understandings with regard to home-school relationships. Information about the context of influence as well as the contexts of policy and practice, were provided in Chapter 5. The present chapter presents the outcomes of the survey conducted with the teachers of primary schools in the context of practice.

6.2 Aims

This chapter attempts to provide a general review of teachers' perceptions, beliefs and attitudes towards parental involvement. It will also present the findings about the prevailing home-school relationships and practices as well as teachers' aspirations and expectations, as reported from teachers themselves. The main purpose of this chapter was to collect information about the research questions listed below:

- What are teachers' aspirations, views and understandings of parental involvement in education?
- What are the current reported practices of teachers with regard to the parental involvement?

6.3 Methods

i. Materials

The questionnaire contained a total of seventeen questions. Fifteen of them were closed questions (rating and multiple choice) and two of them were open questions. The questionnaire was piloted in one primary school in which eight teachers completed it and provided feedback. Then necessary adjustments were made, for example in an open question it was found that it was not understandable to some participants. The questionnaire covered the following areas: demographical characteristics of the teachers, the practices they introduced to involve parents, the teachers' views and perceptions of this and the teachers' aspirations and expectations. The copy of the questionnaire can be found in the appendix (appendix 1)

ii. Participants

The questionnaire was distributed among 200 teachers coming from twelve primary schools of urban, suburban and rural areas of two Cypriot cities. 122 of them returned the questionnaire, giving a response rate of 61%, which can be characterised as a satisfactory return rate (Robson, 2002).

iii. Procedures

The questionnaires were distributed to the headteachers of each school. The nature and the aims of the research were explained by meeting in person with the headteachers. Also the researcher let them know that they had one week's time to

complete the questionnaires. Then the headteacher of each school distributed the questionnaires to the teachers and after one week the researcher collected them.

6.4 Analysis

The data collected from questionnaires were inserted to the SPSS 17.0 software which was used for analysis of quantitative data. For the purpose of this study, mainly descriptive statistics were used, as well as cross-tabulations and chi-square tests. Findings from the survey analysis were intended to reveal the general trends about the reported practices amongst the teachers as well as their perceptions and aspirations. These general findings aimed to guide the more in-depth investigation that followed by conducting semi-structured interviews.

6.5 Results

6.5.1 Practices

It seems that the majority of the teachers in Cyprus use the parents meetings in order to inform the parents about their children's progress (101 of 122) and their learning needs (116 of 122). Moreover it should be highlighted that 119 teachers of the sample (97,6 %) discussed with parents issues about the behaviour of their child. The percentage of teachers using the time they have in parents' meetings to learn information about the home environment frequently (often or very often) was decreased to 74,3 % (91 teachers). Interestingly, 107 teachers required the parents to check their children's homework often or very often (87,7%).

Next it was very important to examine if teachers were available to meet parents at different times from the specified morning parents' meetings that were more suitable to parents. The answers to this question were categorised as following: a) the teachers who were organising meetings at flexible hours, often or very often, b) the teachers who organised meetings sometimes, and c) the teachers who were against seeing parents at different times and who did not organise such events. It can be observed that 50 teachers belonged to the first group (41%), while 38 noted that they sometimes organise such meetings (31%). However 34 teachers of the sample (28%) belonged to the teachers who were accepting parents only in the preset hours.

Teachers were also asked if they communicated with parents either by telephone or by sending letters to invite them to visit the school. 75 teachers (61,5%) adopted these practices often or very often, 30 teachers (24,6 %) sometimes and 15 (12,3%) almost never or never.

As far as the organisation of extra-curricular activities was concerned the scene was a contrast. Just below 6% (7 teachers) answered that they organised extra-curricular activities involving parents often or very often, about 30% (36 teachers) mentioned that sometimes they organised such events, while two thirds of the sample just below 65% (79 teachers) answered that they almost never or never organised extra-curricular activities involving parents. A similar pattern was observed to a question about whether they invited parents to help voluntarily in class. More than 65% (82 teachers) answered almost never or never, 27% (33

teachers) reported sometimes while only 5,7% (7 teachers) answered that they invited parents in class often or very often.

Furthermore, the ways parents were involved in schools, were examined by an open question giving teachers the opportunity to answer without limiting them to preset answers. However there was not a wide range of answers obtained. Parents seemed to be involved by attending parents meetings, by communicating with the school, by checking their children's homework and by attending some activities organised by the school, like fairs or celebration events and festivals. Some other answers were mentioned were: providing help in lessons, providing funding, whenever it was possible, and attending events organised by the PA. The answers gathered can be observed in the next table.

Table 6.1: Practices of home-school relationships

Visiting Schools	Communi- cation	Attend in schools' activities	Help in lesson	Providing funds	Help with homework	Attend in events organised by PA
93	84	54	11	21	75	41

More analytically, the majority of teachers, 93 out of 122 mentioned that parents are involved by visiting schools mostly in the parents' meetings. Also 84 teachers highlighted that they communicated with the parents frequently. They also appeared to recognise that parents helped their children with homework (75). Less than half of the teachers noted that parents participated in schools' activities (54), while just a third of teachers (41) mentioned that parents attended events organised by the PA like fairs, seminars, or events organised for charity

purposes. A small number of teachers mentioned that parents provided funds for the school (21). Finally, only 11 teachers stated that parents helped in lessons, occasionally or whenever it was necessary.

Additionally, it was examined whether teachers were meeting parents at flexible times, in order to be easier for the working parents to visit them. The following table presents the answers of the teachers based on the years of working experience.

Table 6.2: Organise parents' visits in suitable hours * Years of Working experience Crosstabulation

		Years of Working experience				Total
		1-5	6-10	11-15	more than 15	
Organise parents visits in suitable hours	Never	1	1	1	1	4
	Almost never	4	11	7	8	30
	Sometimes	6	17	4	11	38
	Often	1	5	7	12	25
	Very often	8	7	4	6	25
Total		20	41	23	38	122

Generally, it can be observed that 34 teachers were not able to meet parents in hours different from the specified ones, whilst 38 teachers organised such meetings sometimes. Furthermore, 50 teachers appeared to be positive towards meeting parents at more suitable hours often or very often. Taking into

consideration the years of working experiences of teachers, it seems that the same attitudes can be observed in various age groups.

Moreover the following table presents the result of cross-tabulation indicating the frequency of the organisation of extracurricular activities based on teachers' working experience.

Table 6.3: I organise extracurricular activities in which parents could take part* Years of Working experience

Count

		Years of Working experience				Total
		1-5	6-10	11-15	more than 15	
<i>I organise extracurricular activities in which parents could take part</i>	Never	7	12	6	5	30
	Almost never	8	18	9	14	49
	Sometimes	5	10	8	13	36
	Often	0	1	0	5	6
	Very often	0	0	0	1	1
Total		20	41	23	38	122

In this table, it is clear that most of the answers belonged to the categories of never, almost never and sometimes. Particularly 79 teachers mentioned that never or almost never did they organise extracurricular activities involving parents. Only seven teachers organised such activities, from which six of them had working experience of more than fifteen years.

Next it was examined whether teachers invited parents to help in class. A small number of teachers invited parents into the class (7 teachers) who were adopting

this practice often or very often. 82 out of 122 teachers stated that never or almost never did they invite parents into class. In other words, more than the half of the sample did not adopt this practice.

6.5.2 Teachers' perceptions

The second part of the questionnaire examined the perceptions of teachers about home-school relationships as well as the importance of involving parents in education.

In the table presented below the score for the perceptions of teachers can be observed, in which the positive or negative attitude of teachers towards parents can be seen. This score was calculated by three statements: 1. Parents cause serious problems at schools. 2. Parents care about their children's academic achievements. 3. Parents give sufficient support to their children. Each statement was transformed in a way that the rating 1 is equivalent to 5 (positive view).

The table below presents the score of the views of teachers. It can be observed that the maximum score which can be obtained is 15 indicated completely positive views.

Table 6.4 Score of the views of teachers

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	6	2	1,6	1,6	1,6
	7	2	1,6	1,6	3,3
	8	10	8,2	8,2	11,5
	9	29	23,8	23,8	35,2
	10	37	30,3	30,3	65,6
	11	28	23,0	23,0	88,5
	12	11	9,0	9,0	97,5
	13	2	1,6	1,6	99,2
	14	1	,8	,8	100,0
	Total	122	100,0	100,0	

In the above table it can be observed that 14 out of 122 (11, 4%) had positive views about parents and their support, having score 12-14. The majority of the sample, 94 teachers (77, 1%), was in the middle reflecting a mixed response to attitude having a score 9-11. It seems that they might agree with some of the statements and disagree with others. Interestingly 14 out of 122 teachers (11, 4%) had negative views about the support and the care parents provide to their children with a score of 6-8.

The next table provides the views of teachers based on the school area.

Table 6.5: Score of the views of teachers * School area

Count

		School area						Total
		Urban 1	Suburban 1	Rural 1	Urban 2	Suburban 2	Rural 2	
Score of the views of teachers	6	1	0	0	0	0	1	2
	7	0	1	1	0	0	0	2
	8	4	2	0	0	1	3	10
	9	4	9	2	5	7	2	29
	10	7	14	4	7	2	3	37
	11	12	1	3	6	1	5	28
	12	6	0	2	0	0	3	11
	13	1	0	1	0	0	0	2
	14	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
Total		35	27	14	18	11	17	122

Table 6.6: Association between school area and score of teachers' views (Chi square test)

	Value	Df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	62,129 ^a	40	,014
Likelihood Ratio	65,565	40	,007
Linear-by-Linear Association	,891	1	,345
N of Valid Cases	122		

a. 46 cells (85,2%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is ,09.

The majority of teachers' scores were in the middle, with score 9-11 independent of the school area. However, an important observation is that there are schools in which none of the teachers obtained a positive score as in suburban area of city 1 and 2, and in urban area of city 2 as well. The teachers who expressed positive views were coming from the rural area near city 1 (about 28% positive), the urban area of city 1 (20% positive), and the rural area near city 2 (about 17% positive).

Additionally it is important to highlight that the chi-square test, indicated that the association between the school area and the score of the views of teachers is significantly important (0,014), as its value is smaller than the 0, 05.

In terms of the minority group parents, teachers were asked if they provided the same support to their children as the Cypriot parents.

Table 6.7: The minority groups' parents provide the same support

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Yes	48	39,3	39,3	39,3
No	56	45,9	45,9	85,2
I don't know	18	14,8	14,8	100,0
Total	122	100,0	100,0	

The teachers' views about the support that the minority groups parents' provided to children were divided. 48 teachers (39,3%) said that Cypriot parents and minority group parents were provided with the same support to their children,

while 56 teachers (45.9%) disagreed. Also 18 teachers (14,8%) preferred not to give an answer choosing the answer 'I don't know'.

The differences in the answers of the teachers may be explained by a question examining whether teachers face any problems in the communication with parents whose their first language is not Greek. The next table presents teachers' answers.

Table 6.8: Challenges teachers face with parents whose their first language are not Greek

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid <i>Yes, They can't speak well Greek</i>	20	16,4	16,4	16,4
<i>Excellent communication with some, but with some others no</i>	47	38,5	38,5	54,9
<i>No understanding of the Cypriot educational system</i>	10	8,2	8,2	63,1
<i>Feel unwelcome</i>	3	2,5	2,5	65,6
<i>No problem</i>	42	34,4	34,4	100,0
Total	122	100,0	100,0	

The fact that about a third of the sample have not faced any communication problems whilst 47 teachers (38,5%) stated that they faced problems in communication with some parents, some others not so, may explain why teachers have different views about the support of the minority parents. It seems that the main challenge teachers faced in their attempt to establish good relationships

with parents is the language. Twenty teachers (16,4%) stated that parents cannot speak Greek well. Just 10 teachers (8,2%) believed that the reason for not having good relationships with these parents was because they cannot understand how the Cypriot educational system works. Furthermore there is not any suspicion that minority groups' parents might feel unwelcome to visit the school as only 3 out of 122 teachers (2,5 %) stated that this might be a reason for making difficult the establishment of a closer relationship.

The following table presents a cross-tabulation between the teachers' views about the previous relationships they had with minority groups' parents based on the schools' area.

Table 6.9: School area * Challenges with parents whose their first language are not Greek

		Challenges with parents whose their first language are not Greek					Total
		Yes, they can't speak well Greek	Excellent communication with some, but with some other no	No understanding of the Cypriot educational system	Feel unwelcomed	No problem	
School area	Urban 1	7	16	1	2	9	35
	Suburban 1	4	6	7	0	10	27
	Rural 1	2	3	0	0	9	14
	Urban 2	1	9	2	0	6	18
	Suburban 2	2	6	0	0	3	11
	Rural 2	4	7	0	1	5	17
Total		20	47	10	3	42	122

It seems that teachers have similar views regardless their schools' area. An interesting outcome can be observed is that in the rural area near the city 1, 9 out of 14 teachers stated that they do not face any problem, and so it might be assumed that in this area there is a possibility that there is a limited number of minority groups' students. However, this case is not the same in the rural area near city 2 as only 5 out of 17 teachers stated that they do not face any problem.

Another important outcome is that 7 out of the 10 teachers coming from the suburban area of city 1 stated that the reason that they cannot establish a good relationship with minority group parents is because they cannot understand the educational system of Cyprus.

In the next table, the views of teachers about the contribution of parents to the decision-making processes were examined. Particularly teachers were asked if they believed that parents' contribution to the schools' decision-making processes could benefit students' performance.

Table 6.10: Contribution of parents in decision making can benefit students' performance

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Yes	51	41,8	41,8	41,8
No	49	40,2	40,2	82,0
I don't know	22	18,0	18,0	100,0
Total	122	100,0	100,0	

It can be observed that the views of teachers are divided, with 51 stating yes, and 49 stating no.

In the following table the views of teachers based on their working experience will be presented.

Table 6.11 Contribution of parents in decision making can benefit students performance * Years of teachers' working experience–crosstabulation

	Years of Working experience				Total
	1-5	6-10	11-15	more than 15	
<i>Contribution of parents in decision making can benefit students performance</i> Yes	9	14	10	18	51
No	6	23	6	14	49
I don't know	5	4	7	6	22
Total	20	41	23	38	122

It is important to note that more than the half teachers who had working experience between 6 to 10 years disagreed with the statement, while in the other three groups it can be observed that the number of the teachers who agreed that parents' participation in the decision-making could be beneficial is bigger than the number of teachers who disagreed.

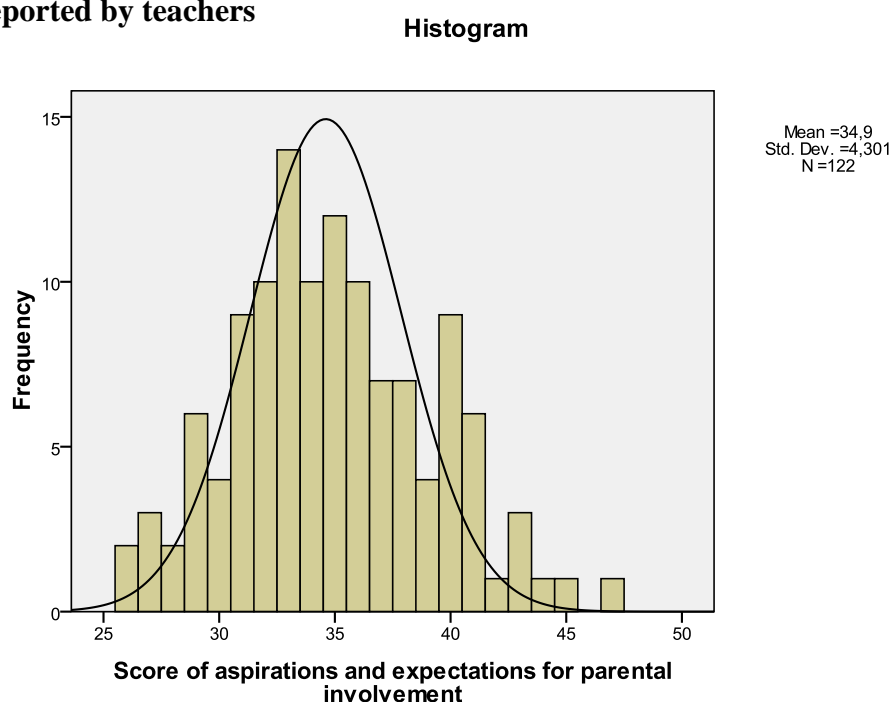
Also teachers took a position about whether they believed that parents coming from low SES groups believed that education is the schools' job only. Teachers had different views with one-third agreeing, one-third disagreeing and the one-third neither agreeing nor disagreeing.

Finally teachers appeared to share the view that parents of children who do not face any academic or behaviour problems visit the school more often than the parents of children who face serious problems. Interestingly 104 participants out of 122 teachers appeared to agree with that statement.

6.5.3 Aspirations–expectations

The next figure provides the aspirations and expectation of teachers with regard to home-school relationships in the future. The tendencies of Cypriot teachers wishing to change the prevailing situation were examined. A composite score was calculated by adding the teachers' rating for some statements examining their aspirations and expectations. The statements examined were whether parents should participate in the governance of the schools, whether the co-operation with the family is beneficial for students' progress, whether parents meetings should be scheduled on parents' availability, and whether more extracurricular activities should be adopted (Questions: 17a to j).

Figure 6.1: Aspirations and expectations of parental involvement as reported by teachers



The vast majority of teachers (87 out of 122) appeared to belong in the middle category scoring 30–39, which might mean that they believed that future co-operation could be beneficial but mostly in some fields, or they might withhold an answer on some occasions, avoiding to take a position. The avoidance to take a position might or might not be a reflection of negative feelings they might have for some statements.

In addition it seems that there was unanimity in teachers' views as the mean is 34.9 and the standard deviation was 4.3. Twenty-two teachers appeared to be positive towards offering more opportunities to get involved, scoring from 40 to 50 (50 was the maximum grade). However 10% of the sample had a negative attitude, not wishing to bring parents closer to the school.

The following table provides the main themes that emerged from the answers stated by the teachers to an open question asking how parents should contribute in their children's education.

Table 6.12: Teachers' aspirations - expectations

	Persuade students to love learning and respect teachers	Check their children's homework	Organise children's time	Provide motivation/rewards	Have frequent communication	Follow teachers' instructions
Sum	36	95	25	34	68	17
	Support the school	Attend schools' activities	Teach and share their experiences in the class	Participate in the leadership of school	Offer home educational activities and experiences (e.g. visit museum)	Cooperate with the teachers
Sum	54	35	15	3	52	46

It is clear that the majority of teachers believed that the most important role of parents is to check their children's' homework and help them to overcome any difficulties. The next most frequent answer was that parents should communicate frequently with the teacher in order to exchange information about the progress of the student, the behaviour, difficulties as well as the family environment. Fifty-four teachers believed also that the parents should support the school as well as the teachers by providing some materials which might make the lesson more interesting, by providing funds and by respecting the teachers' role. Along the same lines, 46 teachers emphasised the importance of co-operating with parents, without causing any problems. Some teachers (52) believed that parents should be able to offer to children educational experiences but outside the school. For instance, teachers emphasised the need that children should socialise, read literature, visit museums and watch a movie in the cinema. They believed that the home follows the school and the multifaceted education of children should continue in the home. As a result, 25 teachers stated that parents are responsible for organising effectively their children's time.

Additionally 36 teachers mentioned that it is important that the home will teach children to love education, give value to learning and respect for teachers. Some other answers related to the importance of the provision of motivation and rewards to their children in order to encourage them to try hard to progress. A small number of teachers believed that parents should participate in school's activities but most of them were focused on celebration events and parents' meetings. Seventeen teachers believed that parents should get instructions from the teacher in order to be able to help their children at home, not only to

overcome difficulties but also for training purposes. Just fifteen teachers mentioned that parents should help in class, by sharing their life experiences or even by teaching the children, whenever it was possible. Finally, only 3 teachers out of 122 believed that the participation of parents in the leadership of the school could be beneficial.

Furthermore, as far as the availability of teachers to organise extra-curricular activities is concerned, half of them appeared to be positive, while 20% disagreed. 30% of teacher neither agreed nor disagreed. The same picture was observed when it was examined whether teachers wished to organise meetings at a more convenient time. Just below 50% appeared to be positive, while 20% disagreed and 32,8 % neither agreed or disagreed.

6.6 Discussion

Questionnaire data indicated that according to teachers' report parents were not involved in the education of their children in a consistent way. Home-school relationships were limited to parents' meetings and communication. Interestingly, the teachers who appeared to encourage the involvement of parents in classroom activities and school events were a minority.

The fact that the majority of teachers shared the same views on the majority of the topics investigated might lead to the conclusion that the schools' influence in Cyprus might not play an important role in the determination of teachers'

perceptions. This might be due to the centralised educational system of Cyprus (Pashiardis, 2004).

Some differences in teachers' views were observed but only around issues related with minority group parents in which some schools might have had more experience than others due to their schools' catchment areas and, consequently, the registration of bigger numbers of minority children.

It seems that teachers recognised the important role of parents in children's achievements and behaviour. Hence they appeared to recognise the importance of keeping good communication channels open with parents as they tried to inform them about important matters revealed in school by written notices or by calling them. However, a further examination of the reasons leading the teachers to contact parents is called for.

As far as minority-group families are concerned, teachers understood that a reason for not having very good relationships with some parents was due to language constraints. However, they believed that the schools and teachers made them feel welcomed in Cypriot schools, which can be questionable as there were not any indications as to how they achieved the establishment of such a positive climate. Furthermore, half of the sample appeared to believe that minority group families did not support their children at the same level as Cypriot parents. However, it should be emphasised that if parents do not often attend to schools' activities, meetings or events, and they do not communicate with teachers to the degree that is expected, this may not mean that these parents are not involved in

their children's education. As chapter 2 indicated, parenting styles can influence the children's attainments. Melhuish *et al.* (2001) found that many families coming from a lower SES background provided a good home-learning environment, leading to the conclusion that parents across the social spectrum might place emphasis on the education of their children through the provision of support at home.

Moreover, examining the teachers' expectations about how they imagined the effective involvement of parents to be, it was revealed that the most repeated area was the supervision of children's homework, indicating the existence of an unwritten expectation between Cypriot teachers, in which parents are regarded as responsible for the supervision of their children's homework.

Interestingly, some areas were repeated when teachers expressed their aspirations and expectations, such as persuading students to love learning and respect teachers, providing motivation, support, offering home educational activities and experiences. This can lead to the conclusion that teachers were more in favour of developing home-based activities and parenting styles in order to promote students' school learning rather than parents participating in school-based activities.

In the open question examining teachers' expectations about home-school relationships, just three teachers mentioned the participation of parents in the leadership of the school. These indications might cause one to assume that teachers try to keep a safe distance from parents, seeing their role at home and

placing emphasis on the engagement of parents in students' learning (Harris and Goodall, 2007). However, as Desforges and Abouchaar (2003) indicated, good parenting through the existence of high expectations and the promotion of positive values towards learning, might impact on children's attainment to a bigger degree than the direct involvement of parents in the schools' practices. But the expression of these views from teachers about the importance of good parenting might also raise concerns about whether they really cared about the role of parents in students' learning, or whether they just attempted to keep them away from schools.

6.7 Conclusion

From survey data, it can be concluded that home-school relationships in Cyprus have not been developed significantly, as similar practices introduced by schools to involve parents have been reported in earlier research as well (Georgiou, 1997; Symeou, 2002).

Even though Cyprus tries to implement educational reform, promoting a different attitude towards education, in which schools and teachers are more autonomus, recommended to use the community and parents for the successful operation of the school, teachers did not appear to be well prepared for the implementation stage (Committee of Educational Reform, 2004). It seems that teachers' attitudes and beliefs, as well as the factors affecting the formation of such perceptions deserve further investigation.

Moreover it can be assumed that even though teachers emphasised the parenting styles they believed that parents should develop, this cannot be achieved without establishing strong channels of communication. At this point, it should be emphasised that effective communication is two-way communication in which both family and school exchange information about the child.

Teachers appeared to recognise that some parents kept their distance from their school, but it can be doubted whether teachers tried to approach them and find out the reasons that parents did not visit the school, bearing in mind that the existing relationships were limited. School should be an institution responsible to help families and inform them about issues related to the upbringing of the child, as well as parenting practices and values to be developed in order to foster a positive learning environment at home. Hence teachers could find ways to approach parents and bring them nearer to the school.

The further in-depth investigation of teachers' views was a means to give insight into their views and feelings. Factors affecting their views will provide a more holistic picture of the current home-school relationships, as well as teachers' perceptions about parental involvement. Hence, semi-structured interviews were conducted with teachers in order to investigate in more in depth the current situation as presented by teachers.

CHAPTER 7

INTERVIEWS WITH TEACHERS

7.1 Introduction

After the presentation of the results of the survey conducted with teachers, more in-depth investigation of teachers' views, aspirations and expectations followed. This was achieved by conducting individual interviews. This chapter will report teachers' feelings and views about the current home-school relationships, the reported challenges they faced as well as an indication of their willingness or otherwise to involve parents further in the future.

7.2 Aims

The present chapter aims to present current home-school relationships as described by teachers, their perceptions, their current reported practice and their aspirations and expectations. The research questions investigated in this chapter are:

- What are teachers' aspirations, views and understandings of parental involvement in education?
- What are the current reported practices of teachers with regard to the parental involvement?
- How is parental involvement policy interpreted in practice?

The chapter aims to investigate whether different views were expressed by individual teachers, as well as to uncover the factors influencing their attitudes

towards parents. It will also examine whether teachers are informed about the prevailing policies with regard to home-school relationships, their views and their attitudes towards implementation of such policies.

7.3 Methods

i. Materials

As mentioned in Chapter 3, the more in-depth investigation of teachers' views was achieved using semi-structured interviews. Interview schedules were prepared, based on the research questions and informed by international literature, aiming to help the researcher to gain the appropriate information. Each interview was audio-taped in Greek, then transcribed by the researcher and translated into English.

ii. Participants

Teacher participants were coming from a maximum variation sample of six primary schools with varied pupil intakes from urban, suburban areas and rural areas. There were four teachers from each school, including the head. In particular, four headteachers, four deputy headteachers and fourteen teachers participated in the research giving interview. (For details see table 3.3, page 101).

iii. Procedures

After agreeing with the head teachers to conduct interviews representing the second phase of the research in their schools, they were informed about the following processes. Each head teacher was to be responsible for informing the

teachers of the school about the aims of the study; to ask them whether they were willing to participate by giving an interview; to assist the researcher in finding children and parents from their classes who would be willing to participate in the research.

The aim was to undertake interviews with the headteacher of the school as well as three teachers who were teaching in different grades (for ages 10 to 12 years). The focus was on older children (10 to 12) as they were more mature students and they could contribute their wide school experiences in the research through their participation in group interviews, to be reported in Chapter 9. In all of the cases, there were teachers who expressed their interest in participating in the research. The interviews with teachers were conducted in schools' time when the teachers had free time, in an empty office, in a library or in empty classes. The headteachers helped to find places where potential disruptions could be avoided.

7.4 Analysis

The analysis of data was framed around three main topics: views, current practices, aspirations-expectations that arose from the research questions. These areas were reflected in groups of questions that were included in the interview schedule, in order to investigate in depth the three main topic areas. For instance, in the examination of aspirations-expectations, questions investigated issues such as: introduction of extra-curricular activities, participation of parents in open lessons, participation of parents in decision-making processes. These constituted the three main a priori categories. However through the analysis, emergent categories were also revealed from the data, indicating new issues and surprises.

These constituted the grounded categories. N-Vivo software was used for coding purposes but also as a tool for identification of common themes and concepts revealed from the interactions with teachers.

7.5 Results

7.5.1 Practices

Current situation

Teachers were asked to describe the prevailing situation with regard to the home-school relationships. Particularly they were asked to describe how parents and teachers typically worked together. Teachers described the three practices introduced in Cypriot schools: parents' meetings, participation in PA and organisation of activities/events.

Parents' meetings

All the teachers referred to the existence of schools' preset period of time in which parents could visit the school every week and be informed by the teacher about children's progress. Two of them, Theodora (HT) and Stace, teachers from the same school, used this time productively, by setting appointments for parents, letting them know the date and the time the teacher expected them at school. Stace said that she set the appointment at the beginning of the year in order to be able to see each parent at least four times. She believed that this was a very effective strategy to bring parents into schools as parents always presented at their appointments. In cases where something happened, she was able to change the appointment and meet them at a different time rather than the time preset.

Everyone else stated that in these meetings they were dealing with matters to do with the children's academic performance as well as their behaviour in the school. Additionally, there were three teachers who expressed their disappointment with regard to the interest the parents showed about their children's performance. For instance, Eleni mentioned that: *'There is a possibility that you invite parents and they ignore you and refuse to come'*. Also, seven teachers shared the view that the parents of children who did not face problems were more likely to visit schools either to attend in activities and events or to meet the teacher (Zaoura and Aubrey, 2010).

Parents' associations

Ten teachers made reference to the existence of PAs which co-operated with schools. In their attempt to describe the role of the PA, teachers mentioned that they:

- a) organised activities involving parents;
- b) helped the school financially;
- c) organised lectures addressed to parents;
- d) helped in the achievement of goals for educational programmes that schools were involved in.

Particularly, five teachers mentioned that PAs organised activities in which teachers, children and parents were invited to participate. A very common activity organised in Cypriot primary schools was the fairs in which children could take part in traditional games, singing and dancing. Also, handicrafts or old toys and games were sold to raise money for the school. Sometimes money was used to help people with special needs.

Often, parents organised activities to raise money and support financially the school. Hence, four teachers emphasised the important role of PAs for the operation of schools as they were seen as a source of funding.

In addition, PAs appeared to organise lectures inviting those specialised in particular fields to talk and educate parents about issues concerning them (John, Theodora, Andrew).

Moreover, PAs appeared to offer important help to the schools, in the organisation of activities, in order to achieve the goals of educational programmes that the schools participated in. These activities were organised in order to assist in achievement of the goals of the programmes (Georgia, Elisavet, Theodora, Andrea).

Activities/events

Parents in all of the schools participating in the research were reported to be allowed to be present at celebration events organised by schools. In addition, five teachers referred to different kinds of activities organised in order to approach parents. Particularly Soula (D HT) said: *'I organise extra activities involving parents but the parents who attend are only the ones coming often into parents' meetings as well'*. Mary organised an open day, in which she invited parents to watch a lesson and to participate in games. Elisavet also invited parents into an open lesson, in which parents were co-educators. Additionally, Pan (D HT)

talked about an activity organised by the school in which parents from different nationalities attended when they talked about the customs of their country.

Eleni appeared to be disappointed in parents' response saying: *'We organised many meetings from the beginning of the year. Parents of each class had a meeting with the teacher and the head teacher in the evening time. But, we cannot force anyone to come to the school'.*

Interestingly, three headteachers (Xara, Georgia, Theodora), made references to a series of organised activities which involved parents in order to satisfy the goals of European programmes, or programmes promoted by the Ministry of Education, in which their schools participated, such as the programme of 'Promotion of Health' and the 'Ecological Programme'. Other activities organized to involve parents were: painting, planting trees, distributing informative leaflets about the environment in the neighbourhood, walking in and around the village, preparation of a healthy breakfast, providing free vegetables in a school's break.

Communication

Furthermore teachers were asked to describe their current communication with the parents over a typical year and the main topics they discussed in their communication.

The majority of them appeared to use the parents' meeting as a mean for communicating with parents. Seven of them were available to meet parents at different times from the preset appointments (Paul, Stace, Evi Mary, Niki, Theodora, Tina). Tina stated that she met parents very often in the afternoon as she lived in the same village as the school and they might talk about children's performance and behaviour. Also, Mary presented a positive attitude towards meeting parents when it was convenient for them, saying: *'I'm always available to see them whenever they want. I know that they are working and that they might prefer to see me at a different time than the preset time. I sacrifice often my breaks to see parents'*. Furthermore there were three teachers who stated that they exchanged information with parents once or twice in a year at evening parents' meetings that were organised either by the PA or the school (Georgia, Tina, Paul).

Also the headteacher Georgia added that the teachers of her school were free to invite all the parents of the class to discuss any issue that might be revealed during the school year when it was convenient. Characteristically, two out of the three teachers interviewed from her school stated, as mentioned above, that they were able to meet parents at an extra time rather than the preset time (Tina, Niki). Niki also gave the following response: *'This year we have a class with naughty students and students who do not study enough. We invited all the parents of the class in the school to hear the difficulties the teacher faced and to discuss all together how we will address the problem'*.

Also teachers used telephone conversations to communicate with parents when disciplinary problems appeared. Ten teachers emphasised that they called the parents mostly when their children misbehaved. For instance, Alex said: *'I call parents when a child needs help or he/she does not behave appropriately'*. Also, Ann (D HT) added that she called parents when disciplinary problems were revealed. Only Elisavet appeared to call parents frequently. Interestingly, Christa was strongly against calling the parents saying: *'It is against my inclination to call a parent and tell him/her to come to meet me. They should be interested. Only if I have a student with too many difficulties that may affect the child seriously, then yes, I will call the parent and ask to meet him/her'*.

In addition, eight teachers sent written notices to communicate with the family and inform them about their children's behaviour, incidents and the goals that were achieved. Particularly, Andrew mentioned that he made comments about the work of the students and his expectation for them over the week. Alex also sent written information on a weekly basis about the goals that were covered during the week, either of an educational nature or related to the behaviour. Two teachers used an exercise book calling it *'Communicating with parents'*, in which they kept in touch with parents, writing comments about their children's performance and behaviour. Also parents, in turn, were allowed to write something to teachers.

Minority children

The existence of minority groups, for instance, from Russian, nations of former Soviet Republic and Arab countries in a school is a new phenomenon in Cyprus. The vast majority of the teachers (eighteen out of twenty-four) participating in the research mentioned that they had children whose first language was not Greek, in their classes. However, the majority of immigrant families preferred to live in urban areas as they could find jobs there more easily. That was why schools in rural areas appeared not to have many minority-group children.

Teachers were asked to describe whether they faced any challenges in order to establish a good relationship with the minority parents. Fifteen teachers emphasised that the language was the biggest challenge as they could not communicate with parents to the degree they wished. However, schools and teachers tried to overcome this obstacle by using some children from the same origin who knew Greek, as translators. School 3, which was an urban school, had many immigrants' students. That was why a translator was hired, and he presented when immigrant parents were meeting with teachers. This school also sent written announcements in different languages, in order to communicate with the minority parents.

In addition, there were some teachers who stated that the different culture of minority groups' families was a big challenge that teachers faced (Andrew, Eleni, Niki, Mary, Xara). Particularly they emphasised that their parents had different social and cultural experiences and it was difficult to adjust in Cyprus.

For instance, Eleni said: *'I have five immigrant children in my class. We have a*

translator and we can talk with their parents, but you cannot say a lot with them as they are coming from a very different culture. How are you going to explain to them about co-operative learning? They come from a very different environment, from war conditions. We have to face difficult situations. We have had children living in the war hearing the bombs and seeing people be killed. I cannot make the same demands of these parents'. Also Niki stated that parents refused to come not only because they did not know the language well but because they could not understand the Cypriot educational system.

Xara (HT) emphasised that when a group of minority children were registered at her school for the first time, they might not be feeling comfortable as they were in a place where they did not know the language and they did not know how others were going to behave towards them. However, their children entered reception class to learn Greek and many cultural obstacles were overcome. The fact that a translator was hired, improved significantly the communication between schools and these families. This school invited immigrant parents into frequent meetings and explained to them the way the school worked and what they were doing for their children, whose first language was not Greek.

Also, some teachers stated that parents of minority group children visited school rarely (Andrew, Ann, Helen, Niki, Pan). However, they explained that the reason that led them not to visit the school often, was the fact that they had to work hard in order to improve their financial situation (Pan, Helen, Niki).

On the other hand, six teachers appeared to be satisfied with the minority group parents (Christa, Elisavet, Mike, Soula, Stace, Theodora). Particularly Christa mentioned that *'They are interested and they are coming to school. It is not the best to talk in English, but I am satisfied as they respect me to take care of their children'*. Also Elisavet said: *'These parents need special attention and support from the school, especially in their first months in Cyprus. We have very good relationships with these parents as they come often into school and we exchange our views about their children's progress'*. Also Stace indicated that if the teachers regarded parents as supporters and wanted them on their sides, they could find ways to overcome any barriers that might appear. Particularly she said: *'I have a minority child and I communicated with his parents by talking to their boss. They don't know Greek or English, so I'm calling their boss and she explains to the child's parents what they have to do. Now we have begun communicating with the child, as he has improved his Greek'*.

7.5.2 Views

Teachers expressed their views about the way they understood the term 'parental involvement'. They talked about the responsibilities of parents and their influences on their children's achievements and behaviour. They also expressed their views about the impact of home-school relationships on children's achievements. Finally, they took a stance on whether or not they believed that education is a school or home job, or both and they characterised the parents' attitudes.

Parental involvement

Teachers were asked to describe how they understood the term ‘parental involvement’. Teachers’ answers had three main strands: a) co-operation with the school, aiming to improve children’s achievements and behaviour; b) interest parents possessed to be informed of children’s behaviour and learning as well as by participating in activities; c) contribution of parents to children’s learning.

The majority of the teachers in their attempt to explain how they understood the term ‘parental involvement’ made references to the contribution of parents to the progress of their children. Particularly, Alex mentioned that *‘It is related either to the academic progress of the children or with issues related to the behaviour of the child. The parents are involved directly or indirectly to help their children to be improved’*. Ann, Peter, Soula, John, Marios, Mary, Georgia, Elisavet and Evi defined it as co-operation between home and school for the progress of the children. Particularly Evi stated: *‘The teacher alone could not achieve anything without the parents. I believe that the co-operation of teacher, parent and headteacher plays a vital role in the progress of the child as well as his/her behaviour’*. Christa, Andrew, Niki, Mike, Pan, Marina, Tina and Eleni said that parents should be interested to be informed about their children’s progress and behaviour, trying to overcome any difficulties as well as to participate in parents’ meetings and events. However, Pan (D HT) and Mike (HT) emphasised that parents should be interested not only about what happens to their children but also about what happen in schools as well.

Stace highlighted that parental involvement is a process in which parents should be interested to be informed about teacher's work and to exchange information about children's behaviour and learning in both school and home environment.

Interestingly, three teachers emphasised the contribution of the parents to the learning of the children. Particularly Xara (HT) explained both sides of the coin saying: *'I can see two sides. The first one is related to the learning of the student at home and the second one is the involvement of parents in schools, without exceeding the limits, by being interested and participating in events organised by school. Regarding the learning at home, parents should provide an environment so that learning can be easier, and they should be close to the children in order to discuss any problems that might arise'*. Also Andrea and Paul added that the experiences parents provided for their children affected positively children's learning and development.

Contribution of parental involvement in students' performance

The teachers' views about the impact of co-operation of home and school in children's progress were examined.

All of them agreed that children's outcomes can be improved when parents are involved in their children's education. For instance, Christa mentioned that when students feel that parents would come frequently to school then they try to provide an excellent impression in the class, participating in the lesson. Helen and Marios (HT) also emphasised the contribution of parents in learning processes, saying that many times parents use the same techniques as teachers to

help their children and push them to make progress. Also the importance of the involvement of parents in the home environment was expressed by two teachers. Soula (D HT) emphasised the importance of the home environment in the child's learning development saying that: *'When the parents read newspapers and books, are being informed about everything, they have rich communication skills and this is reflected to the way children are expressing themselves, writing and behaving in the school'*. Evi also recognised the important role of parents as she said that a gap is created when the teacher motivates and guides the children, whilst the parents do not care. She continued that the job of the parent is to persuade their children to study at home.

Even though everyone understood the contribution of home-school relationships in children's performance, three teachers appeared to want to place barriers on the types of parental involvement (Xara, Marios, Eleni). Particularly Eleni stated: *'Co-operation can improve children's achievements, if the parents do not try to take the role of teachers but they are supporters of teachers'*. Xara (HT) also agreed that limits should exist in order that co-operation would be beneficial.

Contribution of parents in children's behaviour

Teachers appeared to recognise the importance of the home environment in the discipline of their children (Zaoura & Aubrey, 2010). Fourteen teachers talked about the existence and reflection of values, guidance, rules and discipline at home in children's behaviour. Interestingly Niki said that *'Children's behaviour is affected more by the guidance of parents to their children in all the areas of*

their lives'. Also Andrew said: *'Of course bad behaviours are an extension of what happens at home. Children need interest and to be cared for. On some occasions in which there is a lack of interest at home, this is reflected in behaviour at school'*.

Also eleven teachers stated that the personality and the discipline of the child begin at home (Zaoura & Aubrey, 2010). They emphasised that the climate of the home and the way children grow up are reflected in the way that the children behave. Alex gave an example: *'When a child is naughty and when you tell him that you will tell it to his parents and he doesn't care, it means that at the home there is not any cultivation of discipline'*. Mary, Theodora, Elisavet, Niki and Mike also believed that parents continued the job of school at home with regard to the development of correct behaviour. Mike (HT) emphasised that the home and school should develop a common line to follow in solving any disciplinary problems might arise.

Finally, three teachers appeared to make use of parents' influence when they wanted to improve the discipline in class. Particularly Peter (D HT), Stace and John (HT) tried to establish good relationships with parents, in order to be on their side and co-operate to solve disciplinary problems.

Education: school's job or family job?

Teachers were asked whether they saw responsibility for the education of children in terms of home and/or school. All of the teachers believed that education was a shared responsibility of home and school. The majority of them believed that home and school were equally responsible for the education of children (seventeen out of twenty-four teachers).

However, seven teachers believed that schools had the main responsibility from the time that the child enters the school but parents had some responsibilities too because: *'...parents are educating their children as well in the afternoon by providing them with experiences and cultivating their values' (Mike HT)*. Particularly these teachers emphasised that the main role of the education of pupils belongs to schools but everyone emphasised that the parents' contribution was important as well. Theodora (HT) stated: *'Education is mainly the job of school but the parents contributed also just by their positive attitude. The children should know that their parents would be by their side, ready to support, whenever they needed them'*.

Parents' characteristics

Teachers were asked how schools and teachers typically characterised parents. There were two main categories of answers revealed. A group of teachers (7) characterised parents as partners, and a group of teachers (8) talked about the existence of two categories of parents: some who were supporters and interested in the school, and some others who were problems or 'disinterested'. The

remaining nine teachers declined to give an answer saying that they could not characterise them.

Teachers who appeared to see parents as partners expressed the views that parents had the same goals as the teachers and helped the school financially as well. Mike (HT) also mentioned that parents protected the school, as many times he accepted telephone calls informing them about problems that might arise in the school in the afternoon. For example, once there were some students who were destroying the school and the parents of the neighbourhood informed the head teacher. An interesting concern was expressed by Elisavet, saying *'I see them as partners, but unfortunately the education of Cyprus doesn't see the parents as partners'*.

The other group of teachers believed that there were two types of parents: the interested and the disinterested and they gave examples of them. Particularly Andrea said: *'Every parent behaves differently towards us. There are parents who help us and make our job easier and there are parents who do not understand what we are telling them. They don't accept our views and they create problems'*. Marios (HT) also recognised the existence of parents who created problems but he emphasised that: *'...there are parents who stand by teachers, respect them and they are ready to make the work of teachers easier'*. Moreover, Niki gave an example of a disinterested parent saying: *'Previously a parent came to school and he was trying to find the teacher, without knowing the class of his child or the name of the teacher. And this makes you wonder if this parent is interested at all for his child'*. Also, Paul emphasised that even though

there were parents who could be characterised as partners, there were parents who might be problems, as they interfered in the school with ‘absurd behaviour and whims’.

Parents’ responsibilities

Teachers were asked to express their views about the responsibilities of parents. Ten teachers appeared to expect parents to check their children’s homework. They did not expect though, that parents were responsible to explain to their children their lessons. For instance, Marina mentioned: *‘Basically, I ask parents to check if their children have done the homework. If they can help their children in their difficulties, this is good. But the next day I begin the lesson considering that no-one helped the children because I don’t want to transmit the work of class to parents’*. Also seven teachers emphasised the importance of the existence of a good home environment. They mentioned that parents were responsible to maintain a happy environment at home, giving children love and care, and satisfying the basic needs of children such as food and sleep, and to prepare them for school.

Moreover, six teachers emphasised that parents were responsible to be both interested and informed about their children’s behaviour and learning. Stace stated that parents should check children’s exercise books to see teachers’ comments, in order to discuss with their children the school work. Also Andrew added that parents should get informed about what was happening in school and how the programmes were developed.

7.5.3 Aspirations – expectations

Teachers expressed their aspirations and expectations about desired home-school relationships. Teachers talked about how they felt about an increase in the extra-curricular activities involving parents, the participation of parents in class as well as the participation of parents in the decision-making processes and the leadership of the school.

Extra-curricular activities

The majority of the teachers (15 out of 24) expressed positive views about giving more opportunities to parents to be involved by creating more extra-curricular activities. Helen identified the beneficial effects of such activities mentioning that when parents co-operated with their children they could see how their children learned and developed the appropriate skills in order to be able to help them. Marios (HT) also emphasised that extra-curricular activities should be carefully organised in order to avoid bringing parents to schools for unimportant activities. Schools should offer quality activities in order to persuade parents to participate in them. Moreover, a very interesting view was expressed by Elisavet who stated: *'The majority of the difficulties you face when you try to adopt these kinds of activities come from school. You have to persuade the headteacher and your colleagues that you are doing something beneficial ...There are teachers who don't like to see parents in school often, so you have to be strong and sure in what you are doing. In Cyprus, you are not free to do whatever you want in your class.'*

On the other hand, five teachers strongly disagreed with that, being afraid that teachers would pay the cost of the organisation of these activities. Andrea emphasised that teachers had their own personal lives and Niki stated that parents could spend quality time with their children at home. Christa, linked the extra-curricular activities with activities created by PA, such as the fairs and she doubted the importance of such activities. Particularly she noted that: *'If we consider that the goal of the fair is to raise fund, as an educator I don't think it is essential'*. Also the other remaining four teachers appeared to believe that firstly attendance of parents to the existing activities should be increased before considering increasing them further.

Participation in the class

Teachers felt that parents could help in specific lessons, and they were not referring to having parents to help in class voluntarily, assisting teachers. Fifteen teachers appeared to be positive about inviting parents into class but they set conditions. For instance, they warned that these lessons should be carefully organised and controlled by teachers, while some other teachers mentioned that parents should participate in subjects in which they were specialised so that they could share their experiences.

Four teachers were against the participation of parents in the class, emphasising that the same parents who were interested and attended in activities throughout the year would attend such open lessons (Niki). Also Christa believed that the children would not concentrate in such lessons and they would change their behaviour.

Finally, the rest of the responses were neutral or mixed. Georgia (HT) expressed a different perspective warning that these lessons might harm some children, as her school was in a village which was a closed community and she appeared to be afraid that if parents attended lessons there was a risk of creating gossip among people of the village about the children of the class. Also Evi believed that the majority of the children could benefit from them having parents in the class but, on the other hand, it might harm the shy children.

Participation in decision-making processes and leadership

The vast majority of teachers (eighteen out of twenty- four) were negative about the possibility of giving parents more opportunities to participate in the leadership of the school. Two grounded categories arose from the reported responses to this question. A group of teachers referred to interference in the schools' operation, whilst some others talked about parental involvement being professionally threatening.

Particularly eleven teachers stated that if parents participated in the leadership of the school, they would misunderstand their role and they would intervene in the schools' processes. They appeared to be suspicious, emphasising that limits should exist in parental involvement practices, to ensure that parents would not create problems in the operation of the school.

Also Alex, Ann (D HT) and Peter (D HT) emphasised that each party had its own roles and responsibilities, avoiding intervening in the jobs of others. He

continued: *'...You need their presence, their help but you can't have both parties managing the school'*. Also Ann (D HT) added: *'They will invade a place which does not belong to them. They will intervene in our job, as they will have the power and they will not be supporters of teachers anymore'*. In addition Eleni said: *'...limits are needed. If they can be helpful and positive and know where their role ends, their involvement could be beneficial. But it is difficult to understand it as our culture has made people selfish ...There are many parents who are negative people'*.

In addition six teachers expressed their concerns about further involvement of parents. They appeared to be afraid that participation of parents in the leadership and decision-making processes might mean that their profession would be threatened. Characteristically they made statements like *'they should not try to steal the job of teachers'* (Ann, D HT), *'it's not parents' business to shout at a child in the class. It's my job'* (Evi), *'they should not intercept in the teacher's job'* (Pan, D HT). These responses might lead to the conclusion that teachers try to maintain their professional separation.

Also five teachers emphasised that parents were not specialised enough to be able to take decisions about educational matters. Teachers said that parents did not have the knowledge, the skills or the experience to deal with educational issues (Georgia, Marina, Marios, Niki, Stace). For example Marios (HT) said: *'...If it is something very important, we can ask their view, but not to participate and vote in subjects related to school. This is our job. Parents are not equipped enough to take educational decisions without thinking about their own gains'*.

On the other hand, four teachers gave neutral answers believing that the participation of parents in decision-making processes was not wrong, but parents should know their limits and democracy's values and not cause problems in the operation of the school (Mary). Also John appeared to believe that parental involvement in some issues could be beneficial, such as the development and the implementation of the goals of schools. However he believed that they should not be involved in issues related to the school's operation like the selection and grouping of the children in the classes.

Finally only two teachers appeared to be in favour of giving parents more opportunities to be involved in the leadership of the school as they believed that parents would become real partners and they would help schools and teachers.

Policy texts

Generally teachers were not informed about the existence of policies regarding parental involvement. Only headteacher, John highlighted the ways parents involvement could be identified in the rules of the operation of primary schools.

All of the teachers stated that they were informed about existing educational policies mostly by school circulars and by the headteacher in the staff meetings. Fewer teachers referred to the use of internet (four), seminars (five) or instruction from an inspector (six).

However teachers appeared to have concerns about the implementation stage. Stace mentioned: *'They inform us about the theory but they don't tell us how to implement it'*. Also Mary emphasised: *'When the government introduces new policies, it is of paramount importance to prepare the environment well enough before implementing it'*.

Furthermore, teachers were asked if there was any mechanism responsible for assessment of new educational policies. At this point, the majority of teachers expressed their concerns about the existence of an assessment mechanism. Fourteen teachers said that there was no evaluation of new policies or that they did not know if changes introduced were evaluated. Interestingly, Andrew stated: *'A big problem is that even if there is any evaluation it never reaches to the teachers and the schools. So we don't know if what we are doing is right or wrong. The issue is not whether policies are evaluated by a scientific group but whether the teachers are informed about this evaluation'*. Also Paul explained that the lack of assessment of the enactment of educational policies, is one of the biggest problem of the educational system, believing that this is the reason that educational reform fails. He also said: *'There is no feedback to the schools and the teachers, and so the government loses money promoting reforms, without achieving its goals. How are you going to know if the change was successful or not, why it was successful or not. What matters should get improved, but if you don't evaluate it?'*

However some other teachers believed that a mechanism of evaluation of new educational policies existed in the Ministry. However, this mechanism did not

reach teachers, but only headteachers. Eleni and Evi stated that teachers made comment about the implementation of the policies in staff meetings and the headteacher in his/her turn transmitted teachers' actions and views in the Ministry.

However John (HT), talked about the evaluation of the policies at schools level during the staff meetings but he added he did not know if there was any evaluation at the national level. He continued: *'I haven't been asked for anything but I'm sure that they watch what's happening in schools'*. Also another headteacher, Mike suspected that the new goals and programmes were evaluated by inspectors. Moreover Xara (HT) mentioned that the Ministry watched the schools with the help of the inspectors but they did not suggest ways to improve the schools. She also added: *'the evaluation of schools is not a continuous process, so they do not offer anything for the improvement of policies and programmes. Now they might see this issue more seriously as they can see that the results of the education are far away from our expectations'*.

In addition it was considered whether teachers were aware of the recommendation of the Educational Reform Committee stating that one of the goals of teachers should be: *'the development of good relationships with parents, in order for them to be regarded as important partners effectively involved in the educational process'*.

Six teachers and one headteacher said that it was the first time that they had heard of this recommendation (Alex, Christa, Elisavet, Georgia HT, Niki, Stace,

Tina). Most of them said that the reason they did not know was because they did not read the educational reform. Another group of teachers said that they knew it and this was not something new for them, as they knew that they had to approach the parents. For instance, Andrew stated *'I believe that this recommendation is not something new. This co-operation has existed from the 1960s when Cyprus became an independent country, but it was institutionalised later. The attempt to co-operate with parents has existed for many years. It tells us something that we know very well. We don't need the recommendation to tell us to approach parents'*. Also Mike (HT), Evi and Soula (D HT) agreed that it was always one of the goals of education. Interestingly, Xara (HT) doubted that parental involvement could be increased easily saying: *'For many years the Ministry has tried to involve parents in educational processes. This should challenge us and make us think why for so many years has nothing happens? Something is going wrong. If the educational reform can bring the parents closer that would be very beneficial, but I believe that there are many difficulties in the implementation of such a policy'*.

Furthermore, teachers expressed their views about this recommendation. Andrea and Paul talked about the distance between theory and practice. Andrea said: *'Theoretically it is very good but in practice I don't think so'*. Also Alex added that parents could help the teacher in the afternoon at home, rather than replacing the teacher at school. Eleni, Peter, Marios, Niki and Marina even though they appeared to agree with the importance of the recommendation, warned that limits should exist. Niki emphasised that it needed much work in order to be effective

as the Ministry was giving some increased rights to parents in influencing teachers' jobs.

Helen, Mike (HT), Pan (D HT) and John (HT) appeared to believe that the implementation of this recommendation would be beneficial for the schools and they appeared to be ready to work for it.

Georgia (HT) emphasised that the effective implementation of this policy depended on the headteacher as she was the one who would have to promote the positive attitudes towards parents, organising activities involving parents. She continued that: *The school should be full of life and this lies in the hands of the headteacher. If the headteacher deals only with the administrative work, she has lost the game. This is not our job. Our job is to organise the operations of the school by co-operating with the PA and the community*'.

Theodora (HT) warned that the educational reform should be implemented totally in order that the parental involvement could be promoted. She believed that the curriculum should change first, as well as the teaching methods.

7.6 Discussion

Teachers in Cyprus defined parental involvement as the co-operation of parents and teachers, mainly by exchanging information about both learning and behaviour of the children. Less teachers appeared to recognise the broader role of parents in children's learning in both home and school environment considering the development of parenting practices as significantly important. The majority

of teachers linked the term parental involvement with school-based activities and home-school interactions. The multi-dimensional character of parental involvement, indicated by Epstein's typology (1997) as well as Desforges and Abouchaar (2003) review of literature was not recognised by teachers.

In addition, they also emphasised the importance of keeping in touch with the teachers and being interested in being informed about the performance and behaviour of their children. However, the onus was on parents to approach teachers (Zaoura and Aubrey, 2010).

Interestingly, many teachers even though they believed that parents should not be involved in issues related to the education of the children in schools, they highlighted the responsibility of parents to deal with discipline issues as well as with the supervision of homework. This was also identified in previous research in Cyprus (Phtiaka, 1998).

Of course there were some exceptions in which teachers believed that parents could use homework to support children's learning and maintain a good relationship with their children, showing them that they care and support them. Similar beneficial outcomes of homework were emphasised as noted by Epstein (2011), who pointed out that homework can link home and school.

Élites' views presented in chapter 4, about the existence of some very powerful unwritten rules affecting parents' attitudes and feelings that they are responsible to supervise their children's homework can be explained by investigating

teachers' views, as it seems that they are the ones that transmit the responsibility of children's homework and behaviour to parents.

Moreover, the fact that teachers were reluctant to give more rights to parents, allowing them to be involved in the decision-making processes and leadership of the school, reflected negative perceptions and attitudes of teachers towards parents. In particular, they believed that the increased rights might lead them to encroach on what was called 'teachers' professionalism'. Possibly they might have shaped this view as a result of some previous negative experiences they had had with some parents and that was why they emphasised that parents were not ready to accept these roles without causing other problems in the operation of the schools.

The teachers' negative attitude can also be explained by examining headteachers' roles. Considering the outcomes of the literature review chapter concerning the important role of leadership towards the involvement of parents (Ho, 2009; Griffith, 2001) the lack of vision in headteachers can be used as an explanation of the current situation in Cyprus. The analysis of the data did not reveal much emphasis on parental involvement particularly by head teachers as there was not any mention of the existence of vision, the achievement of goals about involving parents and consequently the improvement of schools by such means. In other words, parental involvement was not one of the priorities of leaders and this was reflected in teachers' attitudes as well.

In terms of involving parents in school-based activities, it can be concluded that teachers were not in favour of promoting activities that might fail. They were in favour of the organization of activities with an educational character in which parents would understand their value. In such a way, parents would be able to participate in the learning of their children without being just observers and they would realise their beneficial role. Consequently, there is a possibility of increasing the parental involvement through increasing parents' self-efficacy (Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler, 1997).

As far as the knowledge of teachers with respect to educational policies was concerned, it seems that not all teachers were fully aware of the existence of such policies. Also teachers noted that the feedback about evaluation of previous innovations had never reached the teachers. So it seems that even if a mechanism of evaluating new practices existed, this was not effective enough. Many teachers challenged the recent attention of the government, in trying to improve home-school relationships as they believed that this idea had existed for many years, but the implementation of this was not an easy task. They also warned that this might not work as it had not worked in the past. Hence teachers recommended that the factors leading this practice to failure in the past should be considered in order to help the schools and the teachers to implement it more effectively.

7.7 Conclusion

Concluding, teachers supported some kind of parental involvement, in order to maintain their professionalism. In particular, they promoted involvement in areas that they realised that they had personal gains to make by the involvement of

parents, such as in the discipline of the class and in the supervision of the homework. However taking into consideration that they were opposed to giving parents the opportunity to participate in the leadership of the school, this could lead to the result that teachers viewed parents as both valuable and problematic.

In addition, the fact that teachers recognised the beneficial effects of parents in the learning of children may lead to the conclusion that teachers can be convinced easily that parental involvement can affect students' achievements and contribute to the school's improvement efforts. A view held by some teachers that the risk of likely failure of the schools to implement successfully any new educational policy was increased, due to lack of evaluation and feedback, influenced their attitudes towards changes. It seems that teachers were aware that the prevailing conditions and the climate of schools were not taken seriously into consideration by policy-makers and as a result they doubted whether the changes, innovations and recommendations could be implemented in practice.

As a result, teachers need to follow a shared school vision seeking to involve parents, being guided in how they can achieve that and evaluating the effectiveness of their actions.

In the next chapter the parents' views and experiences will be examined as well, in order to find out how the parents described current home-school relationships and to identify their perceptions about parental involvement. Finally, it will be considered whether parents believe that the home-school relationships need improvement.

CHAPTER 8

INTERVIEWS WITH PARENTS

8.1 Introduction

The central role of parents in their children education and social behaviour was recognised by the majority of stakeholders (teachers, parents, élites) involved in the educational processes. Undoubtedly parents can contribute significantly not only to their children's learning and development but also to school improvement efforts. The examination of parents' perspectives provided important information about the way they feel about existing home-school relationships and whether they wish to increase their involvement in the education of their children through schooling.

8.2 Aims

The present chapter aims to present current home-school relationships as described by parents. Parents shared their experiences and concerns, as well as their aspirations and expectations. The research question investigated in this chapter are:

- What are parents' aspirations, views and understandings of parental involvement in education?
- What are the current reported practices of parents with regard to the parental involvement?

8.3 Methods

i. Materials

As mentioned in Chapter 3, the investigation of parents' views was achieved using semi-structured interviews. Interview questions were prepared in order to address the research questions and drew upon the international literature. Each interview was conducted in Greek and audio-taped then transcribed and translated by the researcher.

ii. Participants

Sixteen parents from the same sample of six primary schools participated. There were five men and eleven women, representing a range of occupational and educational levels. Also only three from the sixteen parents did not have Cypriot nationality (For details, see table 3.4, page 102).

From the parents' characteristics presented in the table 3.4, it can be observed that more mothers were more involved than fathers in the research (11 out of 16). In addition the vast majority of parents were from Cyprus, with the exception of two mothers from Russia and one mother from Moldavia. Interestingly, these mothers were all well educated, having a Bachelor degree. However, it seems that they did not find jobs equivalent to their qualifications, something that was not the case for Cypriot participants.

Overall, ten out of sixteen participants held a university or college degree (seven from a university, three from a college). Four parents had completed high school, one technical school and one primary school. Interestingly the half of the parents who accepted to be interviewed came from the suburban area (four from each city region), while five came from urban areas (three from City 1, two from City 2) and just three came from rural areas (two from City 1 region, one from City 2 region). This was very interesting as it was regarded as an indication of parents' interest and their participation in schools' practices. By contrast there was not such a corresponding interest in the schools of the urban area, as well as the small schools of the rural areas.

iii. Procedures

In the classes participating in the research a letter/form was distributed to each child, explaining the research's aims and asking their parents to indicate if they were willing to participate in the interviews. Parents filled them up and their children returned them to their teachers. All parents who answered positively were contacted by the researcher and a meeting was scheduled. The place where the interviews were conducted was determined by the parents. In most cases, parents wished to give the interviews at their homes but, in some cases parents were interviewed in their workplace. The average time of interviews was about 14 minutes. The longest interview took about 20 minutes and the shortest interview took 9 minutes.

8.4 Analysis

The analysis of data, as mentioned in methodology chapter, was centred around three main themes: practices, views, aspirations-expectations derived from research questions and the international literature. These themes constituted the a priori categories. For example, in the examination of practices, questions investigated issues such as: homework, existence of PAs, communication, current home-school relationship.

The N-Vivo software was used for coding the interview texts in order to identify common themes and discrepant themes that emerged from the interactions with parents. By the analysis not only were the a priori categories identified but also grounded categories were generated as revealed from the data (Freeman, 1998).

8.5 Results

8.5.1 Practices

Parents' meetings

Examining how parents and teachers typically worked together, parents meetings appeared to be a very common practice in Cypriot primary schools. Parents mentioned the existence of the weekly parent meetings, but the frequency of their attendance mostly depended on their employment obligations as these meetings were organised in the morning hours. All of the parent participants mentioned that they visited school in order to ask about their children's progress and behaviour.

Three parents referred to the organisation of parents' meetings in the evening time (Loukas, Sotos, Vera). Parents from each class met the teacher and discussed all together educational and behavioural issues. Teachers many times were reported to suggest useful tips about the appropriate upbringing of the children, referring to setting rules and having high expectations, giving responsibilities to children and offering them educational experiences. Parents also had the opportunity to share their experiences about the difficulties they faced with their children and through a productive dialogue the teacher and the other parents proposed solutions to solve problems. The teacher provided instruction and tips about how to help the children at home, either with their homework or to overcome any educational difficulty.

Additionally, they were asked to express the difficulties they faced influencing their involvement. Six parents out of sixteen referred to job limitations saying that they worked in the morning hours and it was difficult to take leave to visit school often (Vera, Laoura, Maria, Stella, George, Sotos). The self-employed parents did not face these difficulties. In addition, another difficulty that parents faced was that they might be responsible to take care of either their young babies or their old parents (Constantina, Sofi, Sotia).

Homework

Teachers appeared to expect from parents that it was parents' responsibility to check their children's homework. On the other hand, parents appeared to accept this responsibility even though it was an unwritten one. Particularly eleven

parents stated that they checked their children's homework almost every day. Three parents mentioned that they had checked the homework whenever needed or whenever the child had difficulties. Just two parents (Sofia, George) did not check the homework as their children were high achievers and they reported that they trusted them. Both of them said that in the previous years they checked their children's homework but this year, when their children went into sixth grade, they should become more independent. Christopher highlighted that it was of paramount importance to spend time to see your child's homework in order to find out if your child understood the lesson.

Interestingly, Loucas highlighted his awareness about his child saying: *'I don't know if they are doing similar exercises in class but my child is very slow and she will not do them if she doesn't feel that we are by her side'*. Also Lefteris believed that the primary schools should be expanded to afternoon as well, in which time the children would do their homework there. At this point it should be mentioned that primary schools in Cyprus begin at a quarter to eight o' clock in the morning and finish at one o' clock in the noon. However, there are few schools that finish at four o' clock in the afternoon. In such a way, he believed that by extending his daughter's school day to the afternoon, parents would be less stressed and many families would save money as they paid teachers to help their children with their homework.

Communication

Parents indicated that home-school communication was limited. They believed that teachers usually called at the home when something negative happened at school, or if they would like to speak with the parents about any behavioural problems their children presented (Kate, Stella, Constantina). Only two parents out of sixteen (Stella and Sophi) said that they interacted with the teacher by phone calls.

A grounded category that emerged from the data was the existence of one-way communication. In fact, the teacher determined the period of parents' meetings and then parents were regarded as responsible to visit the school and 'get informed'. As a result, parents did not have the opportunity to be informed by any different means (Lefteris, Kate, Christalla). Kate highlighted the existence of one-way communication saying, *'When you go to ask, you get information. If you do not go, you are informed only when something serious happens'*.

However, three parents appeared to understand that this was the way the school operated and criticised the parents who were not attending parents' meetings. Particularly interestingly Elena highlighted that *'the nature of the relationship a parent has with the teacher is dependent on parents. The parents who are interested in their children they meet the teacher'*. Lefteris also said that parents should be more interested and visit the teacher on a more frequent basis. Constantina observed that she saw the same parents at the school and she emphasized that the other parents should be more interested as well.

Information about the students' progress and behaviour were provided only in parents' meetings and, on some occasions, some teachers had an exercise book in which they wrote comments about the children's performance and behaviour. In this exercise book, parents had the opportunity to write something to the teacher that concerned them. As a result, it was used as a 'bridge of communication'. However, only Reveca and Elena mentioned the existence of such an exercise book, while Christalla and Cristopher mentioned that they learned about their children's progress by reading the teachers' comments from both exercises books and tests.

In terms of written communication, parents appeared to receive announcements, being informed about children's progress and being invited to fairs, excursions, organisation of celebration events or other activities. They were also often informed about the need of sending money for many reasons, such as for an excursion, a charity, an activity and an educational visit. However, there was not any written information provided to parents on a systematic basis about the progress and the behaviour of the children (Sophi, Sotia, Christopher, Loucas, Constantina, Vera, Sotos, Christalla).

Parents' associations

Each primary school had a PA. Three out of the sixteen parents of the sample were members of the PA of the school (Kate, Stella, Lefteris). For many years, the main role of PAs was to deal with financial issues, mostly about material and technical infrastructure of the schools (Lefteris). Christopher and Lefteris

highlighted that PAs were responsible to improve the conditions in which children spent much time in school.

However, as Kate mentioned, this trend changed in recent years. In fact, she mentioned that in the last five years an improvement could be observed in the way the parents were faced by the MOEC. The MOEC was more open to organised parents and the PA's voice was listened to a greater degree. Both Lefteris and Kate stated that the PAs nowadays could handle a range of issues related to the education of their children.

PAs also organised a range of activities aimed to raise money. For example, six parents said that a very common practice in Cypriot primary schools was the organisation of fairs in which parents and children visited the school in the afternoon where they could buy sweets, toys, or participate in some tradition organised games (Stella, Kate, Lefteris, Constantina, Sotia, Sotos). The PAs usually used the money they collected in order to help the poor families of the school or to support the school in other ways.

Furthermore, nine from the sixteen parents mentioned that lectures addressed to parents were organised by PAs in which very interesting subjects related to the upbringing of the children, the psychology of the child and the education of the child were discussed. These lectures were organised in the evening time, for which parents were more available to attend and people with specialist interests were invited to the school (Laoura, Reveka, Kate, George, Lefteris, Sofi, Sotia, Christopher, Sotos).

A grounded category revealed after the analysis of the data was that some parents were unsatisfied or against the PAs, doubting their beneficial role. Particularly Loukas, Christalla and Vera were the three parents who appeared to possess negative feeling for the PAs. Interestingly, these three parents belonged to different schools and it can be assumed that this kind of view can be met in a range of schools. Vera, a Russian parent, tried to attend one PA meeting. However, to her surprise there was not any attempt made to discuss any issue concerning the children. They were talking about ways of raising money and funds, and organisation of events aimed to raise money. She observed also that parents on this board did not work in a team. However, she blamed herself about the way she felt, saying: *'This might be my fault and I might feel like this because I don't know Greek well and I am uncomfortable there. So I don't like to go there'*. She found it strange that parents in Cyprus did not discuss issues related to the well-being of their children which was something considered as very important in her country. Vera was a highly educated parent, being a biology teacher in her country. However, she appeared to feel uncomfortable blaming herself about not being able to participate with other parents, saying that she did not know Greek well.

Loukas also said that he did not like to be involved in the PA. He believed that the parents who were involved were doing so not for the best of the school but only for personal gains. However, he expressed his concern saying: *'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 specific children are benefitted'*.

Moreover, Christalla believed that the PA contacted parents whenever elections of new boards were coming up but they were not in the side of the parents to ask and solve any problems they might face at other times. That was why she doubted the ‘beneficial’ role of the PA in the school’s operation and she refused to attend any event organised by the PA.

8.5.2 Views

Firstly, parents expressed their views about whether they believed that education of their children was a family, school responsibility, or both. Half of the parents (eight from sixteen) appeared to believe that the education of the children was a shared responsibility between home and school. Each party had its own role to play. For instance, Vera and Reveka highlighted that the teachers could not give much attention to each child individually as they had many children in the class. Hence, parents should check if their children faced any difficulties and help them to overcome them. They believed that if the families did not help their children at home then their children would be in a vulnerable position, rather than the other children in the class. Also Kate, even though she understood that nowadays the education of children was a shared responsibility of home and schools, she believed that this was wrong as the school should have been an institution fully responsible for the education of the children.

Additionally, four parents believed that the education of their children was a family responsibility (Elena, Lefteris, Loucas, Christalla). Lefteris criticised the

educational system as well as teachers' attitudes, having the view that if children liked to learn, they learned, if not, the parents were responsible for their children's learning.

The rest of the parents (Sotos, Sotia, Sophi, Stella) believed that the education of their children was mainly the school's job. However, they admitted that the family should contribute particularly in lower grades. Specifically, Sotia said: *'Education is by 90% the school's responsibility. But we know that we have to help nowadays. But I don't agree that the parents should get more responsibilities than the school'*. Sophi also said: *'We are in favour of co-operation but the school is mostly responsible for the children's education. Parents just inspect their children's work'*. Also Stella highlighted the fact that in recent years, the majority of families both fathers and mothers worked, and they did not have plenty of free time to spend on their children's education. Hence they believed that the main responsibility for the education of the children belonged in schools.

Parents' beliefs about the contribution of parents to the progress of their children were examined as well. All of the parents participating in the research believed that parents can play a vital role in their children's achievements. They agreed that the co-operation with the teachers could affect positively children's attainments. For instance, Sophi said that she had a perfect relationship with the teacher when her child was in nursery school and the teachers recognised by themselves that this relationship had a direct effect on the child's progress. Kate said that *'...many times parents might notice problems that their children face*

(educational difficulties) and they should inform the teacher about them in order to work together to overcome any problem. Conversely, 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'.

Moreover, Elena from Moldavia, believed that the home-school relationship was the key for the success of the children, as from this close co-operation children are benefited. Both Maria and Vera, coming from Russian, emphasised that when parents meet the teacher, then the teacher pays special attention to the specific children, and the children feel that their parents care for them, and they try harder to become better.

In addition, Loucas highlighted the need of exchanging information between home and school about the home environment of the child. He believed that the child's 'psychological world' can be influenced easily by a divorce or a loss of a parent, leading to strange behaviour displayed in the class, such as violent behaviour. Hence the teacher should be informed, in order to try to support and protect the child, working in his/her emotional field and avoiding punishing him/her.

In terms of the role of the family in the behaviour and the discipline of the children, parents appeared to accept their responsibility towards this. All of the parents believed that the behaviour of the child begins in the home. Lefteris, mentioned that the family is the 'alpha and the omega' determinant of the behaviour of the children. Elena and Vera emphasised that when parents observe

bad behaviour they are obliged to do their best to correct it. Hence, frequent communication with the teachers is required in order to be informed when something goes wrong. Sotia added that when a teacher finds out and informs the parents about some disciplinary problems their children faces, then parents should work with their children in order to improve their behaviour. She continued saying: *'Our error these days is that we try to give everything to our children, paying much attention to materialism and we are missing the main point. Materialism brings bad behaviours. It makes children envious, to want everything...'* Also Laoura mentioned that *'the parents who have the illusion that the responsibility for their children's behaviour belongs to teachers, harm their children'*. Also Christalla emphasised that parents should teach their children how to behave not only for their teachers but also for the sake of their classmates.

Moreover, Sotia, Christalla, Lefteris and Stella believed that the behaviour the child possessed in class was a reflection of the family's conditions. Particularly, Stella mentioned: *'Whatever you model for a child at home, he/she will do it outside the house as well. The parents should be a good example as their children imitate them. A climate of love should be sustained at home avoiding violence and hate, as whatever a child sees, he/she repeats it as well'*. Also Christalla agreed with this view saying: *'If a child swears at home and this is acceptable by his family, he will do it at school as well. If this is restricted at home, he will not ever dare to do it at school'*.

Additionally, it was investigated whether the parents were satisfied with their level of involvement in the education of their children. Four out of sixteen appeared to wish to be involved more. Vera and Maria could not increase their involvement due to their working timetable's constraints and Sophi due to the responsibilities she had, having a newborn child. Reveca believed that she could participate more but some health problems prevented her from doing it always. The other twelve parents appeared to be satisfied with their existing involvement.

8.5.3 Aspirations-expectations

The aspirations and expectations of parents about how they wished home-school relationships to develop in future were also examined. Issues about extra-curricular activities, participation in the decision-making process, organisation of open lessons were examined. Parents shared their views and experiences about positive practices that they believed needed to be adopted by teachers.

Firstly, it was considered whether the extra-curricular activities involving parents should be increased. Parents mentioned that already some extra-curricular activities existed at schools but they were not organised on a frequent basis (Reveka, Kate, George, Constantina, Sotos). On the other hand, Christopher disagreed with organising these events more often, even though he understood their beneficial effects, as parents do not always have plenty of free time to be able to attend such events.

The vast majority (thirteen out of sixteen) appeared to be in favour of increasing these kinds of activities but concerns were expressed regarding the availability of the working parents to participate in such events, if they were organised in school time (Christopher, Elina, Sotia, Stella).

Parents expressed their views about the beneficial effects of these activities, emphasising the importance of improving the relationship with the teachers, the other parents and their children as well (Christalla, Vera, Constantina, Kate, Stella). Also Kate and Rebeca talked about the importance of organising lectures in order to educate parents. Finally, three parents appeared to enjoy activities that they could contribute themselves, such as cooking, doing handicrafts and painting. Particularly Constantina mentioned that she cooked with the children already at school and she enjoyed sharing her experiences with the children.

However, three parents appeared to be against the increase of extra-curricular activities. Leteris talked about the apathy of the parents towards the existing home-school activities. So an increase of parents' interest would be required first, rather than organising activities that were not attractive to a satisfactory number of parents. Also Sophi emphasised the need to improve the communication between home and school rather than organising activities and events which were not so important. Finally, Elena highlighted that children should be independent in schools and such activities could be organised by each family individually in an afternoon or a weekend.

Moreover, parents talked about how they felt about the potential involvement in the decision-making processes. Seven out of sixteen parents were afraid that Cypriot parents were not ready to be involved in such a way that the school and all the children would benefit. Particularly they believed that many parents tended to be involved for individual gain, for the betterment of their own child but also for themselves in the social and political arena, intervening in the school's processes. As a result they believed that they were not in a position to take unbiased decisions (Elena, Kate, George, Loucas, Sotia, Sophi, Christopher). Interestingly this view was repeated from parents coming from four different schools. Also all of the parent participants, coming from one primary school, which belonged in the urban area of City 1, talked about the danger of interference if more responsibilities were given to parents. It seems that before they answered this question parents had in mind the PA of their schools. For instance, Sotia stated: *'PAs sometimes create conflicts and these might lead to wrong decisions, as they do not work for the good of the whole school'*. Also Sophi added: *'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'*.

George warned about a chaotic situation that could be created by giving the opportunity to parents to be involved in decision-making processes, and Kate, in her turn, suggested a compromise solution saying: *'...this can be beneficial by only giving the opportunity to parents to express their views but not allowing them to participate in school boards, in which the final decisions are taken'*.

Finally, these parents appeared to trust the teachers, saying that they were the most appropriate people to take educational decisions as they were equipped with enough appropriate knowledge and skills to find the solution to the totality of problems that might arise. For instance, Sotia said: *‘The headteachers and teachers can constitute a strong group. The experiences and the knowledge of this group will definitely lead them to take appropriate decisions’*

Also, the remaining nine parents believed that the participation of parents in the decision-making processes could improve the school and positively affect the children. Stella supported her view, highlighting that parents knew better than anyone their children and they could judge if a specific decision would benefit their children or harm them. She emphasised that parents always acted for the best of their children. Also, Reveca and Christalla emphasised the important role of parents, adding that if the parents’ views were heard, this was positive for the school. Finally, Laoura even though she recognised that parents can play a central role in the school, talked about ‘discreet’ involvement that avoided being involved in educational matters which were the exclusive responsibility of teachers. By referring to the term involvement she referred to home-school interactions, participation in schools’ events when she was invited and supervision of her children homeworks.

Finally, parents shared their beliefs about how they would feel if they had the opportunity to participate more centrally in their children’s school learning by participating in the class lesson. Five out of sixteen parents talked about the positive experiences they had had in the past when they were invited to teach, or

talk about something in which they were specialised (Sotos, Kate, Lefteris, Constantina, Sotia). All of them described these events with excitement, emphasising the fact that they felt that the children were really attracted and their knowledge had been enriched. Parents shared their experiences about such events, such as being invited to talk about their job, cooking a traditional dish, or having parents from different countries showing something from the culture of each country. Particularly Kate highlighted the beneficial effects of inviting parents to talk about the customs and the habits of the countries concerned, as they probably knew them better than teachers, as they were older than many teachers. So she believed that the teachers themselves could expand their knowledge in such events, and children would pay attention as these kinds of activities were unique. Sharing their experiences and their positive feelings towards these activities, they strengthened the view that such events should be organised more frequently.

On the other hand, six parents appeared to prefer to watch a lesson rather than teach, as they believed that the teaching was a responsibility of teachers (Elena, Reveca, George, Sophie, Christalla, Loucas). Some of the parents watched a lesson when their children were in lower grades. Even though open lessons were organised in the first and second grade, this was not continued when the children grew older. However, parents who participated in open lessons were very satisfied about the experience; they felt that these kinds of activities should continue to be organised. Loucas and Christalla emphasised that by participating in an open lesson you could see the approaches that the teachers used, how they explained some things in order to help the children learn. This was very helpful

for the parents as they could learn some methods that they could use as well to help their children to overcome any difficulty they might face. Also, Elena highlighted that she had asked in previous years that such a lesson should be organised, as she wished to learn how her child behaved and interacted with other people in the class.

Three parents (Christopher, Stella, Kate), recognised that even though the participation of parents in class was beneficial, this was not an easy task to organise. They appeared to understand, as Kate said, that it was a little utopian to believe that nowadays parents could leave their jobs and participate in class sessions systematically. Also, they trusted teachers' knowledge and skills considering them as the most appropriate persons to teach their children.

Additionally, ten out of sixteen parents suggested ways of improving the present home-school relationships, highlighting the need of increasing communication options. For instance, Vera highlighted the need of organising parents' meetings in evening hours, while Elena emphasised the need for giving more flexibility and freedom to parents to feel comfortable to visit the school whenever they liked. She also stressed that the existence of one parents' meeting each week was restricting for the majority of parents.

Sotia and Sophi emphasised that teachers are responsible to try to approach parents, especially the ones who are not so close to the school. Sophi suggested that teachers should call these parents and inform them about their children's

performance. She concluded by saying that: *'Actually, we are dependent on the availability and the will of the teachers to approach the parents'*.

However two parents (Laoura and Stella) appeared to criticise parents for not establishing a productive home-school relationship, as some parents appeared to be selfish, not accepting teachers' views easily. Also Stella talked about some parents interfering, being aggressive when something happened, such as when a teacher shouted at their child. They both concluded that teachers needed support and not challenges.

8.6 Discussion

Even though the parents recognised that they were responsible for their children's behaviour as well as learning, they emphasised that the current home-school relationships were limited to some parents meetings and some restricted communication. There was an one-way communication between home and schools, as only the schools provided information to parents. The limited communication opportunities revealed, indicated that home-school relationships in Cyprus were still in the early stages, as there are many other types of involvement that should be covered in order to achieve a partnership (see, for instance, Epstein, 1997).

From the parents' interviews it can be concluded that the lack of communication restricted further involvement of parents, especially noticeable since this exists in the first years of schooling. As Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995; 1997)

indicated when the child enters school, the parents enter unconsciously the involvement process and opportunities should be given to parents to deepen understanding of their valuable role. Parents, by realising that their involvement can benefit their children, are self-motivated to deepen their involvement (Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler, 1995; 1997). So at this time, parents have to take a serious decision about their involvement or otherwise.

However, the fact that parental involvement opportunities in Cyprus are still limited raises concerns about the readiness of the educational system to approach parents and bring them closer to the school. So parents, by not being encouraged further, take a more apathetic position avoiding participating in schools' practices and consequently teachers may lose an important ally.

Parents were not happy enough with the current opportunities of meeting teachers, as during a school's year, only one or two parents' meetings are organised in evening times. Hence working parents faced many difficulties to attend parents' meetings as often as they wished, as they were forced to take leave from their job. This discouraged many parents from being involved.

Additionally, as mentioned in the previous chapter, teachers expected from parents to keep in contact, by attending parents' meetings (Zaoura and Aubrey, 2010). On the other hand, parents disagreed with that view, as schools are the ones determining the activities parents can attend, the dates and times of parents' meetings. So schools were not flexible if parents did not appear in parents' meetings due to their jobs' limitations. In other words, teachers did not provide

any alternative way of communication. For instance, schools used to call the parents or send written notices, only when behavioural problems have arisen. This finding was indicated also by Symeou's research (2002).

Moreover, the different views parents hold might be due to differences in social and cultural capital (Symeou, 2007; 2008). In particular, as Georgiou (1997) found, PAs attracted people who were better educated, having more power, as they might have important established social networks with political parties and the government. However, other parents reacted against them as they were afraid that injustices would ensue.

Additionally, some parents, most of them coming from lower SES classes, doubted the importance of PAs, saying that they dealt mostly with financial issues rather than caring about any educational matters of the schools. This indicates that parents coming from lower social groups placed more emphasis on matters related to the children. As a result they criticised PA members, feeling that they were involved for individual gains, either because they were members of a political party or in order that their children will be benefitted. A similar finding about the characteristics of PAs members was revealed by research of Georgiou (1997) as well.

Similarly, a group of parents criticised the parents who were not attending schools' activities and events. It seems that parents were critical of other parents either because they did not attend in schools' activities and events, or because they were causing problems to teachers and schools, intervening in school

processes (Zaoura and Aubrey, 2011). Hence they tended to agree with teachers' labeling of parents as supportive or problematic (Zaoura and Aubrey, 2010).

It is important to recall at this point, that more than the half of the sample were highly educated parents. So a question that arises is whether if a more socially diverse group would have participated in the research, the voices against the members of PA might have been even more intensive. The fact that a larger number of parents with higher SES backgrounds participated in the research, cannot lead to the conclusion that the other parents were not interested, but that their participation might have been due to their self-confidence, as well as their social and cultural capital. The decision to participate is a more difficult one for someone who does not have such an experience, especially for immigrant parents who might feel insecure in communication skills.

However, teachers cannot expect parents to be involved in schools' processes, whilst throughout the year, teachers did not care about them. They were regarded to have failed to hear parents' concerns by not being able to find a way to approach them and establish good communication channels. By using the Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler model (1995; 1997) as an explanatory tool, it may be concluded that if a strategy to approach parents were developed from the beginning of the school's year then, both teachers and parents could build a more productive relationship by giving to parents the confidence to be involved and in sense of self-efficacy in educational matters (Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler, 1995; 1997).

Finally, it seems that parents are ready to increase their involvement if schools and teachers are willing to change attitudes too, by being more approachable and open to parents. Parents believed that there is a need for improving the communication between home and school and they wished that teachers will offer more opportunities to participate with a class to see their children or share their experiences.

8.7 Conclusion

Parents shared their views and experiences about their parental involvement. They also emphasised issues concerning them more. It seems that parents had a different view from teachers about their involvement.

Parents understood for their part that home-school relationships nowadays are limited, and needed improvement, but they warned that parents were not ready to participate in boards in which important educational decisions are taken. They emphasised that first of all the communications should be improved and that they expected from teachers to take the lead in narrowing the gap between home and school.

The fact that some parents were more involved than some others may be explained by the social and cultural capital of the family which is a very important factor affecting the decision of parents to be involved (Symeou, 2007). Also the social and cultural capital of the family affects children as well (Bourdieu, 1986). Hence parents felt that children coming from higher SES were treated more favourably and they complained about potential injustices.

It can be concluded that PAs were exclusive associations dividing parents into two categories, the participants of PAs and the other parents who did not only underestimate the role of PA but also they did not feel that they were represented by the specific association.

However, nowadays, educational researchers have doubted that the SES and the educational level of the parents were the only indicators affecting children's performance. They believed that the time parents spent with children, the engagement in learning activities were stronger indicators of children's later achievements (Sylva *et al.*, 2004; Sammons *et al.*, 2007).

Finally, parents wished that home-school relationships will be improved by suggesting that the school should become more open to parents by giving freedom and flexibility to them to visit the school and by increasing the meetings organised in evening time. Moreover, they believed that teachers should approach 'hard to reach' parents, to make them feel welcomed and confident to visit the school and participate in schools' events.

In the next chapter the children's views will be examined as well in order to find out how the children feel about the importance of involving their parents in their educational processes and whether they believe that home-school relationships should be improved.

CHAPTER 9

GROUP INTERVIEWS WITH CHILDREN

9.1 Introduction

Taking into consideration that every promoted change in education is addressed to children first of all, affecting their lives most directly, it was significantly important to give them the opportunity to talk about their perceptions and feelings about the involvement of parents in education. This chapter presents the children's views about a range of issues concerning parental involvement.

9.2 Aims

This chapter introduces information about current parental involvement as seen through the eyes of children, as well as children's views about further involvement of parents. The research questions investigated in this chapter are:

- What are children's aspirations, views and understandings of parental involvement in education?
- What are the current reported practices of children with regard to the parental involvement?

9.3 Methods

i. Materials

The investigation of children's views and feelings was achieved using semi-structured group interviews. The children were interviewed in groups in order to feel comfortable to express their views. The interview questions addressed the

research questions and drew upon the international literature. Each interview was audio-taped in Greek, then transcribed and translated by the researcher in English.

ii. Participants

Sixty-two pupils from three different age groups (10 years, 11 years and 12 years) from the same six primary schools participated in the research. Each group was composed of four children, boys and girls, with a range of abilities; high, average and low attainments. (For details, see table 3.5, page 103).

iii. Procedures

The participants were selected in the following way. A letter/form was distributed to each child explaining the nature and the aims of the research. This information was given to parents in order for them to give their written consent to allow their children to participate in the interviews. Then they returned the forms to the teacher of the class. The researcher's goal was to conduct three group interviews in each school with children from three different grades, for ages 10, 11, 12, as it was felt that children were more mature and would have more experience of schooling and parents' role in this. The aim was to choose four children for each group interview.

In some cases less than four children expressed their interest and willingness to participate in the group interview. In the cases that there were more than four children wishing to participate, the researcher co-operated with the teacher to

select four children having a range of academic achievements and a balance of boys and girls. The group interviews were conducted in empty classes or offices, after gaining the permission of the teacher and trying to choose a convenient time that children were not going to lose any important lesson.

9.4 Analysis

The main trends of each group interview were identified by coding the data in NVivo software. Each question that was in the interview schedule addressed an a priori category and then similarities and differences in these and in emergent themes amongst the 18 group interviews were identified.

9.5 Results

9.5.1 Practices

Communication

All groups talked about the parents' meetings in which parents discussed with teachers their progress and behaviour. Some teachers used to send written notices either to invite parents who did not come in schools often, or to inform them about their children's achievements and behaviour (Groups 1, 5, 12, 16). With regard to discipline, five groups (4, 5, 6, 10, 17) emphasised that teachers discussed issues, such as whether they respected their classmates and if they were polite. Five groups (1, 2, 6, 7, 9) said that their teacher used to call their parents to inform them about their progress, if they forgot to do their homework or if they came in schools unprepared, not bringing the right books, but mostly

they called them when they misbehaved. Also four groups (1, 2, 11, 18) referred to the organisation of events and activities where parents could meet teachers.

Parents' meetings

Children talked about how often their parents met their teacher each year. The groups expressed mixed answers. For example, in group 2 a child said that his mother talked with his teacher almost every day because they were neighbours, while another child said that her mother met the teacher every week, while the other two members said that their parents attended the parents' meetings once a month. Mixed answers were expressed also in the groups 2, 5, 7, 9, 16, 17. However nine groups agreed that their parents visited the school to meet the teacher once a month, or once every two months (1, 3, 4, 6, 8, 10, 11, 12, 14, 15). Finally two groups mentioned that their parents met their teacher every three to four months (13, 18).

Children talked about whether they believed that the parents should meet teachers more frequently. Each group tended to have mixed answers to this question. The three main answers repeated by children were the following:

- a) Parents should come more often to schools in order to be informed about their children's progress and this will help them to be improved;
- b) If parents meet the teacher once a month, there is no need to increase these meetings as teachers would not have anything new to discuss with parents if they came more frequently to school;

- c) The parents of some children who faced difficulties or misbehaved should come more often, to help them to become better students. Teachers wished to meet more often with these parents.

Family contribution

Children answered a question about how their parents helped them to become better students. All the groups mentioned that their parents checked their homework. In eight groups, some children stated that their parents gave them additional exercises to practice and overcome their difficulties (1, 2, 7, 8, 10, 12, 14, 16). They understood that this was beneficial for them, saying that if their parents were not interested, they would not be high achievers as they were not going to push themselves enough to try harder to overcome their weaknesses. Furthermore, children in some groups mentioned that they were attending additional private lessons in the afternoon, like English language lessons, computer lessons or to pursue a hobby such as playing a musical instrument, football or basketball in order to expand their knowledge, interests and skills (1, 2, 5, 8, 12, 15, 17). Five groups referred to the support and the motivation that parents gave to children. Some parents used to give awards to their children when they achieved something special (6, 9, 12, 17, 18).

Parents' feelings

Children were asked to state whether their parents felt welcome and comfortable when they visited the school. The trend was the same in all the groups. Every group emphasised that the parents did not feel bad when they visited the school

in order to be informed and especially if they were hearing positive things from the teachers. However they felt uncomfortable, when they were invited by teachers to visit the school because their children misbehaved and especially when the teachers were telling any bad things that the children had done.

Children's feelings

Children talked about how they felt when their parents visited their school. All the groups had mixed views saying that, on the one hand, they felt happy and impatient to learn what the teacher had said but, on the other hand, they were afraid that the teacher might say something bad. When the teacher did not say positive things, their parents shouted at them and punished them. However the children who were behaving appropriately were happy when their parents were visiting the school as they wished to know what the teacher thought about them. In each group, there were some students who were happy and some who were anxious.

Homework

Children reported whether their parents checked their homework and if they believed that this was useful. In each group there were children whose parents checked their homework every day, or three to four times a week, or when the child faced difficulties. However all the groups agreed that parents should supervise their children's homework to find out if they made mistakes and if they understood everything. Children from seven groups stated that they felt secure when their parents checked their homework as they were well prepared for the

next day and in such a way they ensured that the teacher was not going to say something bad about them in the parents' meetings (4, 5, 8, 9, 12, 16, 17).

School work

Students were asked whether they talked to their parents about their school's work. All the groups emphasised that the parents were interested to learn about their school activities as they asked them every day what they have done at school. However, in many groups mixed answers were expressed. Some children were telling everything that happened at school to their parents and their parents were advising them, for instance to concentrate more or to be friendly with their classmates. However, some children even though they appeared to talk a lot about the lessons, the tests they have done and their relationships with their classmates, they kept some secrets as well (3, 5, 6, 10, 11, 18). For instance, these children avoided telling to their parents if they were punished or if they have done something bad.

Parents' reactions to grades

Students then talked about their parents' reactions when they did not make the expected grades in tests. All of the groups stated that parents usually encouraged them to study harder and advised them to concentrate more. Also they gave them more exercises to see if they had made mistakes because they were not concentrating enough or because they had difficulties. If they understood that their children had weaknesses, they explained to them in order to help them not to repeat the same mistakes again (1, 2, 4, 6, 7, 8, 10, 12, 14, 16). In some

groups (3, 5, 8, 9, 13, 14, 15) children emphasised that their parents were angry and punished them by forbidding them to go out somewhere, especially if they realised that they were not well prepared for school tests. However children understood that this was reasonable and done in order to make them try harder.

9.5.2 Views

Parental involvement and school performance

Children answered a question indicating whether or not close co-operation between home and school could benefit them. Apart from two groups (2, 9), all the other groups expressed the positive effects of home-school relationships. Children mentioned that when parents co-operated with teachers frequently, then parents knew everything about their children's weaknesses and they could help them to improve. Characteristically, they said that many times they did not tell their parents if they did not understand something but by co-operating with the teacher they would learn better. They emphasised that teachers could not give as much attention as a child might need in the class and, as a result, the contribution of parents helped the teachers as well. Some children also felt that the involvement of parents could be an indication of the interest of the parents. For instance, a girl from group 1 said: *'I would like it if my mum came to school more often and I believe that my grades would be affected as my parents would pay more attention to me and not only to my little brother'.*

Group 2 shared the view that some children would feel bad if their parents co-operated with schools as they would know if their children misbehaved and they

would punish them. Also they said that the parents who visited the school more frequently were the ones whose children faced academic problems. They suggested that parents could be informed about their children's performance by supervising their homework. Also group 9 children mentioned that if parents visited the school continuously and they heard the same things from teachers, children would not be motivated any more. Especially when teachers said positive things about the children, then they would feel that they knew everything and that there was no need to try to become a better student.

Education: parents' or teachers' job?

Children answered a question indicating whether or not they believed that learning and teaching was the responsibility of parents or teachers, or a shared responsibility between school and home. All of the groups emphasised the importance of both home and school in learning, giving interesting arguments. For example, one boy in group 3 stated that parents are the best teachers. This was a common statement that was expressed by all the groups indicating that parents helped their children at home to overcome all of their difficulties. Also twelve out of eighteen groups emphasised the role of parents in cultivating proper manners and improving the behaviour of the children. For example, a boy in group 15 said: *'At school you might learn to write and read but at home you learn how to behave on every social occasion'*.

Only group 12 students talked about the high expectations the parents had. Particularly children stated that parents pushed them to try harder in order to be high achievers and to be able to be accepted at university in the future.

Parental involvement and behaviour

All the groups believed that parents could affect their children's behaviour, as they advised them, they cultivated in them proper manners, such as to be kind and respectful to their classmates and their teachers. Many children said that their parents got angry with them and punished them when they misbehaved either at school or at home. Moreover, a frequently expressed view was exemplified by one girl's view in group 12 who said that she wished to make her parents happy and she tried always to behave appropriately. Also a boy from group 9 emphasised that the way children behaved at school reflected their home environment and how they grew up. Finally, children in all the groups emphasised that when they knew that their parents would visit the school they tried to be as good as possible in order not to disappoint them.

9.5 3 Aspirations-expectations

Increase the involvement of parents

The aspirations and expectations of children about parental involvement were elicited by asking them if they believed that parents should get more involved in the school's life. In some groups, children shared their experiences about the participation of their parents in activities, events, lessons and excursions in the past. There were mixed answers. Some of the groups were positive, while some

of them were negative and some groups had mixed views. Particularly, in some groups (1, 2, 8, 12, 13, 17) children believed that they would not feel free and comfortable if the parents attended schools' activities. They also said that they would feel embarrassed as their parents would give them excessive attention. They continued that they would be tense and they would not concentrate on the activities or the lessons. A boy from group 2 mentioned that his parents attended a tennis competition that he participated in and he was very angry about that as he did not feel free enough. He said: *'It was painful to have my parents all the time with me'*. Also, in group 8, children mentioned that school activities, events and lessons are teachers' jobs. They also stated that their parents worked until late hours, so it was extremely difficult to help in the school's work.

Some groups appeared to be positive (5, 7, 10, 14, 15, 16). The children of these groups expressed their concerns that their parents did not know what children were doing at school. They emphasised that by further involvement of their parents they would see what they were doing at school and they would notice their potential weaknesses. In some groups (5, 10, 14) children also said that, in such a way, they would spend more time with their parents and they might help them also in the completion of an activity.

The remaining six groups had mixed views. Some of the children were positive and some negative. The children who were negative referred to the independence that the children should have in school. The children who had positive views, said that they would like parents to visit the school more often to learn things for themselves but not to participate in activities or to help the teacher, as the teacher

knew better his/her job. An interesting view was expressed by one girl of group 11 who said that: *'Parents might have different views from the teacher and this might lead to a conflict between teacher and parents and, as a result, the teacher will feel pressure, affecting his/her behaviour towards students. However, it is good to visit school, as they might give us new ideas and they would see how we learn and where we have difficulties'*. Also in group 12, a girl emphasised that she was in favour of the further participation of her parents in school events and activities as she did not enjoy her relationship with parents in the afternoon because they did not spend a lot of time together, while a boy said that he saw his parents for enough time at home and there was no need for them to come in school as well. Another girl talked about the need to be more independent at least during school time.

Extra-curricular activities

Many children were against the participation of parents in extra-curricular activities, especially in excursions. Interestingly, only eight girls and one boy wished to organise visits or excursions, in which parents and children would participate. They said that they would feel secure and that parents would take care of them. For example, a girl from group 8 said: *'I don't have problem about parents coming. I like to spend time with my parents'*. Also a girl from group 3 said: *'This is a very good idea because I will be able to see them more, as they work and I don't see them a lot'*. However the boys of the group were extremely opposed to the involvement of parents saying: *'We have grown up, we need to be independent.'* Another boy said: *'This is too embarrassing. Imagine you go to a*

cafe with your friends and your parents are coming behind you, holding your hand'. The vast majority of children were not in favor of the involvement of parents in such activities as they believed that they would not be independent and free to spend their time with their friends. They said that their parents would probably pay much attention to them advising them all day not to run, to be careful not to hit, not to be sick and not to get dirty. They said that they would probably ask them if they ate their food and if they drank enough water. Hence they appeared strongly against organising such activities together.

Participation in decision-making processes

Children expressed their views about the potential participation of parents in decision-making processes. Some groups said that this was teachers' responsibility and parents should not be involved in such matters. Some other groups believed that the PA already took part in such processes and it should continue participating. The rest mentioned that parental involvement in such processes could be beneficial as parents could defend their children's needs and interests.

Eight groups in particular (1, 2, 3, 5, 10, 15, 16, 18) talked about the role of PA stating that members co-operated with teachers about issues concerning schools and children, they organised events and activities that they enjoyed a lot. A boy of group 5 said that the PA was the board that should take part in such processes, as '*...only the responsible people should take decisions for the school and not everyone*'. Another child of the same group expressed her concerns saying:

'Teachers should do their jobs and the PA should do its job. If they co-operated

in more areas, some conflicts might be created as parents might intervene in the teachers job'.

Some groups of children (4, 7, 8, 12, 17, 14) believed that parents should be involved, as parents were more sensitive about their children, while headteacher and teachers were stricter. They were in favor of the idea that their parents would be participants of decision-making processes and through them the students' preferences would be heard as well. For example, a female student from group 12 mentioned that if their parents' voices were heard by the headteacher, then they might influence him/her to organise some things that children liked.

Moreover, some groups of children (6, 8, 9, 11, 13) believed that the participation of parents in decision-making processes was not necessary as teachers were experts and qualified enough for that role. For instance, a child from group 9 said that teachers knew better from anyone else how to do their job and a student from group 11 stated that teachers were able to take decisions that would affect positively the education of the children, but parents would pay more attention to the happiness of their children, so they would not be able to take the right decisions. Also students in school 6 said that parents should be able to express their views but teachers should take the final decision.

Help in lessons

Many groups (3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 10, 11, 12, 14, 15, 16) talked with enthusiasm about some experiences they had had in the past in which some parents taught

something, helped in a lesson or watched a lesson. It seemed that all of the children had such experience but mostly in the classes for younger children. They were in favour of increasing such activities as they were very excited about them. For example, a boy from group 7 said that he enjoyed a lesson when the parents came and talked about their careers as he could see what he can do in the future. Also, a female student from group 12 emphasised that: *'Parents can teach the lesson of life through their experiences'*. Also these groups appeared to be interested and attracted more favourably to activities in which parents taught something.

However, many groups were not so excited when their parents attended their class to watch a lesson (1, 2, 8, 9, 13, 17, 18). Particularly they said that they felt uncomfortable. On the other hand, they understood that this was beneficial, as their parents could see if they had any weaknesses and help them at home. As far as their behaviour was concerned children stated that they changed their behaviour when their parents attended the class.

Finally 5 children from groups 1, 3, 7, 16, were negative saying that the teachers were responsible for teaching them everything and they were able to bring in specialists who had the appropriate knowledge if they wanted to have help.

9.6 Discussion

Children's views were very interesting as they discussed issues related to the parental involvement, having an objective view about the contribution of parents

and teachers in their learning. Bearing in mind that children are the ones who are influenced by any innovation or change promoted, their views and perceptions are of paramount importance. However they have not had the opportunity to express their views in previous research regarding the parental involvement, in Cyprus.

First of all, children agreed with parents and teachers that the parental involvement can affect their schools' performance. However they shared a similar view with the parents in the previous chapter, emphasising the important role of home-school communication. They explained why the communication is beneficial, saying that by feeling that their parents would visit their teacher, they tried harder to make their parents happy. In other words, they were self-motivated.

Also children confirmed finding of Phtiaka (1998), indicating that Cypriot parents were interested a lot in their children's education, as pupils mentioned that their parents were always available to help them and support them to overcome any difficulty. The acceptance of the responsibility of parents for their children's behaviour also emerged from children's interviews. Children shared similar views with parents and many teachers, underlining that parents and school have equal responsibilities for children's education, emphasising the parents' role in cultivating the proper social behavior and manners, at home.

Furthermore, many parents were reported to set high expectations for their children, trying to motivate them to get better. The fact that parents gave

additional exercises to their children at home and discussed frequently with their children about their schoolwork meant that they cared about their children and they participated indirectly in schooling but directly in their children's education and learning. This leads to the conclusion that the parents who were characterised as disinterested by teachers and some parents, might still support their children's learning at home, which is regarded as a more important practice as Desforges and Abouchaar (2003) emphasised.

Furthermore it can be concluded that the organisation of shared activities involving parents, teachers and children was not a common practice. That was why the children emphasised that parents were not completely informed about their school work. Hence, this might constitute a potential reason indicating why many children were not very positive towards the idea of involving parents in school and the organisation of extra-curricular activities. On the other hand, some children wished parents to get involved in open lessons, as they related this experience to similar situations they had had in the past which they had enjoyed. In particular, they enjoyed activities in which parents taught them something, more than parents watching a lesson.

However, not all the children had the same needs. Some children needed their parents' care more than others, wishing to feel that their parents were interested in them and that they wished to have common activities organised in order to spend some more time together. This need was mostly mentioned by girls. On the other hand, there were some children, especially boys, who needed to feel

that they were independent. This leads to the conclusion that a range of children's needs should be addressed carefully.

Furthermore, some children trusted their teachers, believing that they knew how to handle them better than anyone else or deal with any issue revealed at school, and parents were not needed either in activities in class or in the leadership of the school. Some children expressed their awareness, stating that if parents were involved more, then conflicts and problems might be created. These statements were very interesting creating serious questions about the reasons underlying children's lack of trust in their parents. It seems that some children did not believe that parents and teachers can co-operate effectively and preferred to avoid conflicts by leaving to the teachers the responsibility of decision-making. This mature point of view combined with teachers' interview references about the existence of conflicts and problems between parents and teachers, can lead one to assume that there is a possibility that children were witnesses to tensions created between parents and teachers. On the other hand, there were some children who believed that parents should participate in decision-making processes in order to express the children's needs and preferences. This leads to the conclusion that some children felt secure with the current situation, while some others were in favour of more parental involvement opportunities in all aspects of their education.

9.7 Conclusion

Through children's interviews it can be concluded that children had limited experiences of the involvement of their parents. The picture the children gave

about the current situation leads to the conclusion that there are still many things that should be done in order to involve parents.

Concluding, it seems that children provided a realistic picture of the issues, indicating their positive attitudes towards offering more parental involvement opportunities. On the one hand, they emphasised the fields in which parents contribution can be beneficial, such as two-way communication, open lessons, behaviour matters and homework and on the other hand, they mentioned some practices that would not be as beneficial, such as participation in decision-making and extra-curricular activities.

After the analysis of the interviews of all the stakeholders who were involved in the education processes, it can be concluded that in some areas all of them agreed but some differences could be observed as well. That is why the next chapter will help to identify similarities and differences in stakeholders' perceptions by analysing an exemplar school. In this chapter all the stakeholders' views were combined in order to indicate the common views, concerns and disagreements, between all the stakeholders.

CHAPTER 10

PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN ONE SCHOOL

10.1 Introduction

This chapter presents home-school relationships in Cyprus from a different angle, as it examines the data gathered from a specific exemplar school. Particularly, parents', teachers' and children's views were triangulated in order to consider parental involvement in one setting from a range of perspectives. The present chapter seeks to consider the extent to which attitudes, values and reported practices were shared as well as to reflect upon the extent to which parental involvement was jointly constructed and enacted.

10.2 Aims

The present chapter aims to introduce the current home-school relationships in a specific school, as described and enacted by parents, teachers and children. Also their views, aspirations and expectations will be presented. The research questions examined in this chapter are:

- What are the current reported practices of school personnel, pupils and parents with regard to the parental involvement?
- What are parents', school personnel's and pupils' aspirations, views and understandings of parental involvement in education?

10.3 Methods

i. Materials

For the examination of the stakeholders' views, the semi-structured interviews conducted with them were used as described in chapter three. More precisely some questions from each interview schedule were selected to be examined, related to common issues addressed by all the stakeholders.

ii. Participants

School five was selected to be analysed individually. This was selected randomly by a draw, from the schools involved. The selected school was in a suburban area of city 1.

The following tables present the participants of the exemplar school. In particular four teachers, four parents and twelve children were interviewed.

Table 10.1: Teachers' participants

N/N	NAME*	POSITION	CLASS
1.	Theodora	Headteacher	---
2.	Soula	Deputy Headteacher	E
3.	Andrea	Teacher 1	D
4.	Stace	Teacher 2	St

** Names have been changed to protect anonymity*

Table 10.2: Parents' participants

N/N	NAME*	SEX	OCCUPATION	EDUCATION LEVEL
1.	Christalla	F	Waitress in cafe	Primary School
2.	Christopher	M	Electrical Engineer	University
3.	George	M	Work in waterboard	College
4.	Lefteris	M	Policeman	High School

** Names have been changed to protect anonymity*

Table 10. 3: Children's participants

N/N	GROUP	AGE	PERFORMANCE
1.	Group 4	10	Low
2.	Group 4	10	Average
3.	Group 4	10	Average
4.	Group 4	10	Low
5.	Group 5	10	Low
6.	Group 5	11	Average
7.	Group 5	11	Average
8.	Group 5	11	Low
9.	Group 6	12	Low
10.	Group 6	12	High
11.	Group 6	12	Average
12.	Group 6	12	Low

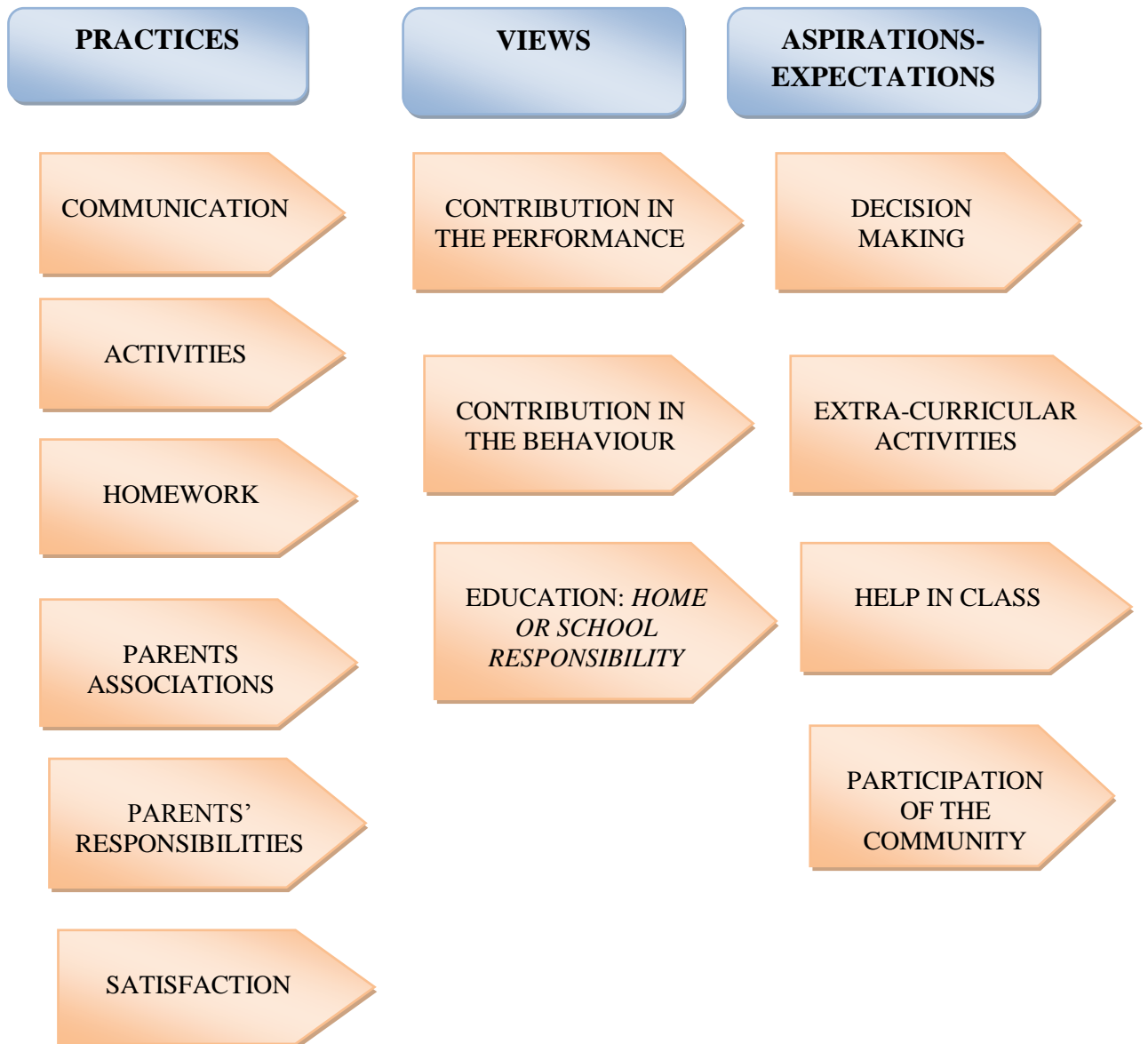
iii. Procedures

As described in previous chapters the researcher sought agreement with the headteacher for the research to be conducted in her school and then she identified four teachers who were interested to take part in the research. Following this, four children from each class were selected to participate in group interviews. Finally the parents who were involved in the research were the ones who expressed their interest to be interviewed and provided consent for their children to take part.

10.4 Analysis

The analysis of the exemplar school was focused on common issues which were addressed by all the stakeholders. The analysis focused on the a priori categories that addressed the three main topics of the research: practices, views, aspirations and expectations. The diagram below indicates the a priori categories upon which the analysis of the exemplar school was focused.

Figure 10.1 Examined a priori categories



10.5 Results

10.5.1 Practices

Communication

Everyone agreed that the most common way in which parents kept contact with the school was through the weekly preset parents' meetings. Parents were allowed to visit the school and meet the teacher every week. As the headteacher, Theodora, indicated many teachers of the school set appointments to see all the parents and they were available to meet parents at different times from the preset engagement where necessary. However, even though there were some parents who visited the school each month such as Christopher and Lefteris, there were some other parents like George who could not attend these meeting as he was working on night shifts.

The teacher Stace mentioned that she set appointments with parents at the beginning of the year in order to meet all of them at least four times during the year and she observed that parents did not miss their appointments. However Soula expressed her concerns saying that only the parents of children who did not face any academic or disciplinary problems attended the parents' meetings.

The students from group 6 indicated that their teacher (Stace) called the parents to inform them about their progress and behaviour, especially when the parents could not attend in parents' meetings. Also Stace, in her turn, said that she paid much attention to the establishment of good relationships with parents and that

was why she was used to calling them but also to sending them written notices when she observed a problem. However, the students of the other classes and their teachers did not mention anything about telephone consultations.

All the stakeholders mentioned that schools sent announcements to homes to inform them about celebration events, to invite them to participate in activities and to inform them about excursions or any issue revealed in school. Furthermore, parents mentioned that they were also informed about their children's progress through their children's and the teachers' comments in their children's exercise books (Christalla, George).

Activities

It seems that every year in school 5 lectures were organised in which specialised people were invited to inform parents about educational, sociological and psychological issues that concerned children (George, Lefteris, Christopher, Theodora, Soula). The PA was responsible for organising these lectures, but a parent (Christalla) said that she did not like to attend in such events.

Furthermore, parents and teachers referred to the organisation of fairs by the PA in which parents contributed each year by organising games, cooking and selling things. Children in group 4 and 5 talked with excitement about the fair and they said that they enjoyed such activities as they spent a pleasant time with their friends.

Moreover, the school at the beginning of each year organised evening parents' meetings in which parents were invited to be informed about the teachers' goals and methodology and to discuss issues about the school rules, the behaviour of children and anything else concerning parents (Soula, Stace, Theodora, Andrea, Lefteris, George). However, as Soula and Theodora indicated, the parents coming to the weekly parents' meetings were the ones coming in such evening meetings as well, assuming that some of the parents were uninterested.

In addition, only the headteacher, Theodora, mentioned that the school organised some activities in which parents were involved as well, in order to satisfy the goals of some programmes in which the school participated, such as the Ecological Programme and the Promotion of Health Programme.

Homework

In each group, children indicated that their parents supervised their homework either every day, or three to four times a week, or when the children faced difficulties. All of the children recognised the necessity of having their homework supervised as a child from group 5 mentioned that children might not do their homework otherwise and their teacher would get angry with them. Also four students said that parents could find out whether their children had any difficulties, helped them to overcome them and to be prepared for the next day of the school. The students of group 4 and 5 appeared to feel secure and more confident when the parents checked their homework.

Also parents mentioned that they felt that it was their responsibility to supervise their children's homework and this was used as a mean to monitor their children's progress. Even though the frequency that they checked their children's homework differed as Lefteris checked them three to four times a week, Christalla and Christopher almost every day and George when his child met difficulties, they shared the same view that by checking children's homework, students' performance could be significantly affected.

Furthermore, all the teachers of school 5 shared the view that the main responsibility of parents was to supervise their children's homework. However they emphasised that they should not do their children's homework but check whether or not they were well prepared (Theodora, Stace, Soula). Theodora mentioned that they could use the homework as a way to show their interest, to get closer to their children and improve their relationship. Stace indicated that parents could be informed about what their children learned at school but also about their academic progress, through the homework.

Parents' association

Participants talked about the roles of the PA. Two parents participated in PAs saying that the role of the PA was to improve the school (Lefteris) and to satisfy the financial needs of the school (Christopher). They pointed out that they had excellent co-operation with the headteacher of the school and they organised together a range of activities either to raise money such as through fairs, or to educate parents through lectures or even to bring parents and teachers closer.

However Christalla and George were not in favour of attending the PA board. Christalla justified her attitude by saying that PA remembered parents only when the election period was near. Taking into account that Christalla was coming from a lower SES group (in terms of education and profession), having limited personal experiences of participating in boards, this could be an indicator of her social discomfort in such situations.

Students from group 4, expressed a positive view about the PA, referring with enthusiasm to interesting activities organised in the past. Also students of group 5 mentioned that the PA was responsible for organising activities such as fairs and parties aiming to entertain children.

The headteacher of the school talked about the excellent co-operation she had with the PA. She mentioned that the PA helped her in the organisation of particular activities. She also emphasised that the PA satisfied some financial needs of the school. However even though she was proud of having very good communication and co-operation with parents, she emphasised that limits should exist also. More precisely she said: *‘The role of the PA is very important. But we need the right co-operation. You should set the limits. Like with your children. Could your children do whatever they like? Could your husband do whatever he likes? Could you do whatever you like? No. Everyone needs limits. And parents need limits too. You should be kind, accepting, co-operative but with limits. When parents exceed the limit, they might criticise a teacher without important reasons, but I support my teachers and I will not believe the claims of parents without examining the situation first’.*

Furthermore, Soula said that the PA was a board that could bring parents closer to the school and ensure that they cared and contributed to the smooth operation of the school. All of the teachers agreed with children saying that the PA was responsible for a range of activities and events in order to raise money, to support the school and to entertain children.

Parents' responsibilities

Parents and teachers talked about the parents' role and responsibilities. As indicated above a common perception, of both parents and teachers, was that parents should check their children's homework. Apart from that, teachers mentioned that parents should be interested in their children by establishing good channels of communication with teachers and asking them about their school work (Stace, Soula), by visiting the school to meet teachers and by being informed about their attainments (Stace, Andrea, Soula). Also, Theodora emphasised that parents should place emphasis on their children's behaviour (Theodora). Soula and Andrea mentioned that parents were responsible to satisfy the basic needs of children, such as sleep and food. Finally, all of them stated that parents should provide a happy environment for their children at home.

All the parents mentioned that the two main responsibilities of parents were to check their children's homework, as well as to attend parents' meetings in order to be informed about their children's school work. Also Lefteris stated that parents should try to communicate often with the teacher.

Satisfaction

Teachers were asked whether they were satisfied with parental involvement and parent were asked to indicate whether they were satisfied with the level of their involvement in school. Stace mentioned that she was satisfied with the 70% of the parents in the class as they were interested in their children's education and they adequately prepared their children for school. Soula was not satisfied with the parents as she expected them to attend in parents' meetings more frequently. She characterised the parents who did not go to school as uninterested. She said that when she observed that parents did not attend parents' meetings she sent notices to remind them that they should come to be informed about their children's attainments. Then she observed that when she sent notices, the parents responded to her invitation. Andrea did not appear to be enough satisfied with the parents' responses.

On the other hand, all of the parents appeared to be satisfied with their involvement. However, Lefteris criticised some teachers, saying that they underestimated parents by giving the impression that they believed that they were superior people. This happened many times creating bad feelings in parents.

10.5.2 Views

Contribution in the children's performance

All the stakeholder groups expressed their views about the impact of parents on children's attainments. Children of group 5 and 6 emphasised that when parents

were closer to the school they knew everything about their children's schoolwork and they gave them advice and pushed them to try to be improved. The students of group 4 expressed the view that children wanted to make their parents happy and their frequent involvement could be a key determinant of their achievements, as when they know that their parents would visit the school they tried to do the best.

Parents also strongly believed that parental involvement could affect students' performance. George said: *'My philosophy is that everything is dependent on the family. For example, it is fault of the family if a child has difficulties to work in a team and to co-operate with other children, because he/she did not learn to discuss and listen the others'*. Hence the importance of communicating with the teacher of the class was emphasised by Lefteris. In particular, he mentioned that by being regularly informed about his child's progress he had a shared tactic with the teacher, in order to help his child to progress.

Moreover, the teachers recognised the important role of parents in the performance of their children. Theodora emphasised that parents played an important role in the formation of the personality, the behaviour, as well as the attainments of their children. However she warned that home-school co-operation could be beneficial for the children when the parents knew their roles and do not exceed the limits. She emphasised: *'...They should come to the school to see and appreciate our hard job and become our partners and not our enemies. By visiting the school often they might be able to help their children at home'*.

Contribution in the children's behaviour

The views of teachers, parents and children about the influence of parents in their children's behaviour were examined. Everyone agreed that the family had a key role in the formation of the behaviour of a child. Theodora emphasised that the formation of the character of the child begins from infancy. The teachers continued to build a personality that had been formed for six years, mainly in the home environment. If the teachers noticed some bad attitudes, they tried to improve them at school. However, the children spent half of their day at home. If the parents did not co-operate to improve their children's behaviour, then the attempts of teachers would not be successful. That was why Stace believed that if the parents co-operated with the teachers, the behaviour of their child could be definitely improved.

Parents accepted their responsibility towards their children's behaviour. Lefteris and Christalla said that parents should teach their children to respect, to be kind, to listen to their teachers and follow the instructions of their parents. Moreover, Christopher and George stated that the way that children behaved at school was a reflection of how they grew up in the family.

As far as children's views were concerned it seemed that all of them agreed with their parents and teachers. They mentioned that when they knew that their parents were going to visit the school they tried to behave properly as their parents paid much attention to their behaviour. Children in group 5 and 6 also mentioned that many times their parents punished them when their teachers told

them that they were naughty in the class. Hence a child of group 4 mentioned that if the parents visited the school more often, the behaviour of the naughty students would be improved as they were afraid of their parents.

Home and school responsibility for education

The participants also answered a question indicating whether or not they believed that education was home, school or a shared responsibility. Children in all the groups agreed that teachers and parents were equally responsible for the education of children because parents helped them at home to fill the gaps from school that they had.

Additionally some parents believed that it was mainly the family's responsibility rather than the school's responsibility (Christalla, Lefteris, George). Christalla and George said that the family was the institution responsible for everything that concerned the lives of their children. Lefteris, even though he recognised that parents were responsible for their children's learning, was opposed to this situation saying: *'Unfortunately it is job of parents, because the teachers teach with the new system that the Ministry of Education gave them and they have the view that if you would like to learn, learn, if not, the parents should help their child'*. He also suggested that the school should be expanded in the afternoon as well in order that the children could do their homework and the teachers would help the children to overcome their difficulties. In such a way, the parents would not be responsible to supervise their children's homework and many families that worked and sent their children to private teachers would save money.

Moreover, Andrea agreed with parents that education was firstly, the job of parents rather than teachers. Also the teachers Soula and Stace mentioned that by being parents, too, they definitely believed that it was a shared responsibility. On the other hand, Theodora expressed a different view saying that the school was the institution responsible for the education of the children but she said that parents could contribute by their positive attitudes towards school and teachers. She also emphasised that children needed to feel that they would have their parents on their side, always being able to support them. Hence, parents could contribute to the education by just being interested.

10.5.3 Aspirations-expectations

Organisation of extra-curricular activities

The three out of four teachers (Theodora, Stace, Soula) believed that the organisation of extra-curricular activities involving parents could be beneficial. They recognised that such activities could improve the relationships between parents, children and teachers. Also Stace emphasised that children would be excited as such activities were not organised often. However, Soula was afraid that if such activities were organised, many parents would not attend due to their job's constraints. She also emphasised that many times parents did not have time to check their children's homework or to read the announcements of schools. On the other hand, Andrea was against the organisation of extra-curricular activities emphasising that teachers had their own lives and families as well. Particularly she said: *'The cost of this- would teachers pay it? We have our lives and families. So we can't organise these kinds of activities'*.

Parents also shared their views about the increase of extra-curricular activities involving parents. George mentioned that they might be beneficial but it was more important to increase the contacts with teachers first, rather than organising more activities. Also Lefteris believed that parents should increase their involvement in current activities first and then consider if there was a need to add more activities. He also expressed his disappointment that few parents were involved in activities and events organised either by the PA or the school. Moreover, Christopher stated that the busy programmes of parents should be taken into consideration. He mentioned that sometimes it was good to organise such activities but not continuously as the majority of parents worked long hours. Only Christalla appeared to be in favor of such activities, without expressing any concerns.

Children linked the extra-curricular activities mostly with excursions or events that were organised already. They appeared to believe that parents should not participate in such activities as they needed to feel that they were independent and free to spend time with their friends. Almost all the children said that their parents were overprotective giving them continuously advice such as when to eat, to drink water and to be careful not to be hurt. Only two children did not have problem with their parents attending such activities, as they felt secure that their parents would help them if they faced any problem.

Participation in decision-making processes

All the participants talked about how they felt about the potential involvement of parents in the decision-making processes of the school. Teachers expressed their concerns about the competencies and the knowledge of parents with regard to educational issues. Stace mentioned that parents did not have the knowledge and they were not in a position to take objective decisions, thinking only the best of the school.

Also Andrea agreed with Stace stating that parents saw only the good of their child and not the good of the whole. As a result, this self-centred way of thinking could possibly harm the children. Furthermore, Theodora stated: *'I don't have problem to co-decide with parents but the school will make the proposal first. I don't accept to have pre-decided something imposed on me. But if we discuss an educational issue, I will not allow them to be involved'*. On the other hand, Soula was positive towards giving the opportunity to parents to be involved in decision-making processes saying that it would be helpful for teachers' jobs as parents would become partners of teachers.

Two out of the four parents shared the same views as teachers. George emphasised that a chaotic situation would be created if the parents had the right to participate in such processes as the most of them tended to be involved only for individual gains and they were not in a position to take unbiased decisions. He added that only the involvement of some parents who were willing to work

for the best of the school could be beneficial. Christopher also expressed his concerns saying that parents would intervene in school's operation.

However, Lefteris and Christalla believed that parents could add value to school by being involved in decision-making processes. Lefteris being a member of the PA emphasised the role of PAs in such processes, saying that they already participated in such processes, in issues related mostly with the financial support of the school, but also with other difficulties the school faced and the headteacher asked for the help and the view of PA.

Students from group 6 emphasised that parents should be able to express their views about any issue revealed. However one student expressed his trust in teachers saying that even though parents' views should be heard, teachers should be responsible to take the appropriate decisions. In addition, students from group 4 and 5 appeared to be aware that they saw a danger of giving the opportunity to parents to intervene in the schools' operation if they had such increased rights. More precisely, two students from group 4 and 5 respectively, emphasised that parents would intervene, creating conflicts if they participated in such processes. Also two children from group 5 were afraid that their parents would be informed about everything if they were involved to such a great extent. However, a child from group 5 believed that the PA should co-decide with teachers. He said: *'Only responsible people should take decisions for the school, not everyone. Each one should have their own responsibilities'*.

Help in class

Soula believed that parents could be involved in teaching if the lesson was organised carefully by the teacher. Also Andrea emphasised that parents should be involved in lessons systematically and not occasionally in order to be beneficial for children. Stace talked through her experiences as she had invited parents to the class on some occasions in the past. She emphasised that parents could not imagine how their children reacted and behaved in the classroom if they were not attending the lesson. For example, a parent was surprised when she realised that her child did not participate at all in the lesson. She also mentioned that when parents visited the class they should watch their children read in order to understand their reading level, comparing it with the other children of the class. She warned that sometimes children changed their behaviour when their parents visited the class. However she said that the older children did not tend to change their behaviour as the younger students did. Finally Theodora agreed that parents should watch or teach a lesson in order to see the work of school and teachers.

Parents also talked through their personal experiences. For example, George said that he watched such a lesson only when his child was in the first grade, which it was very interesting. Also, Christalla emphasised that when her child was younger she went in to such lessons that they were very interesting as she could see the methods of teaching the teacher used and she used similar ways to help her child to learn something.

However parents also stated that they were invited to the classes only when their children were younger. Christopher emphasised that by increasing the organisation of open lessons the parents could be in a better position to help their children. Also Lefteris mentioned that he went into a lesson to share his experiences as a policeman with children. He found it a very interesting lesson as he saw that the children were attracted to what he had to say.

Also students were in favour of the organisation of such activities. Group 4 and 6 talked with enthusiasm about giving the opportunity to parents to teach something. They said that children could take more ideas and information from parents. However children in group 5 were more likely to recommend giving parents the opportunity to watch a lesson rather than teach something. They justified their view by saying that the school and the way of teaching, when their parents were students, were very different from the schools today. So they believed that they did not have the skills to teach something

Participation of the community

Finally, teachers and parents were asked to express their views about whether the schools should co-operate with the community. The parents believed that the co-operation between school and community could benefit both the community and school. Lefteris mentioned that school 5 co-operated with the community for the organisation of events.

The headteacher also believed that the community influenced significantly the school as the education and the culture of the area affected the students. However she complained that the municipality did not help the school. She said that they could offer some money to the schools of the area. She also said that the only co-operation she had had with the community was with the Youth Committee in which it appeared to make demands from the school only, but not offering anything. For example, this committee asked the headteacher to send them some children to help in planting or to organise an event, aiming to impress the community. Soula also mentioned that the involvement of the community can be observed more in smaller areas. The area in which school 5 belonged was large, serving many schools and they did not establish strong links. Finally Stace emphasised that if the community was taken seriously into consideration, then a very pleasant environment of learning could be created. She suggested that the schools of the community could co-operate as well.

10.6 Discussion

The analysis of School 5 presented the prevailing situation regarding the home-school relationships of a typical primary school of Cyprus. The results revealed in this school were similar to those of the previous chapters. It indicated that there was a common way in which all the schools operated, being limited to some minor communication options, the existence of PAs that did not ensure high acceptance/ appreciation from all the parents, the important role of parents in children's behaviour and homework and the organisation of extra-curricular activities that sought to raise funds for schools. These outcomes were in lines with outcomes of Cypriot researchers (Phtiaka, 1998; Symeou, 2002, 2007,

2008) indicating that things have changed little and not much in the way of improvement has been observed.

Furthermore, the traditional and controlling role of the school towards parental involvement was identified. Teachers were used to their traditional roles and responsibilities and they were not ready to re-negotiate them, in order to seek to improve students' achievements. It seems that parents were not involved in a productive way to raise achievements, as this was not the main school's concern. The stability of the current situation might be due to the centralised educational system of Cyprus (Persianis, 2010; Pashiardis, 2004) that has failed to motivate schools in working hard for improvement purposes. Consequently, school and teachers did not regard parents as a source of improving the students' attainments, but as a source mostly to solve financial limitations of the schools as well as support homework activities and deal with disciplinary problems.

Having limited opportunities, parents of school 5 as well as the other parents of other schools were not familiar with different/alternative ways of co-operation with school as they were limited to asking for their basic rights to access of information. More precisely, even though the current home-school relationships in Cyprus had an informative role, as Symeou (2007) also found, parents and children were still asking for more information leading to the findings that even in this aspect there were many weaknesses. Parents and children of school 5 were not satisfied with the current communication systems, while teachers blamed parents for this situation. However it seems that if teachers paid more attention to these issues they could possibly have attracted more parents. This conclusion is

justified by the experience of one teacher of school 5, who tried to establish good home-school communication, informing parents with a range of instruments and finding out that this was working out, as she was satisfied with the positive response of the majority of the parents in the class.

It is clear that children also had limited experiences of participation in activities involving parents. However they were excited about involving parents in lessons, as their parents did not know many things about their school's work. This practice was not common in classes for older-age primary school children. Teachers used to organise such lessons only in first and second grade. However as teacher Stace mentioned, the pedagogical value of such lessons is significantly important. The parents who participated in such lessons could understand their children's difficulties. Taking into consideration that parents cared a lot about the education of their children, checking their homework and helping them to overcome their difficulties, the involvement of parents in such lessons could make them enter into the involvement process. As a result, it can be observed that the teachers had different expectations from parents based on their children's ages as they were used to inviting parents of children only in younger-aged classes but this practice was not continued in subsequent stages.

A similar finding to the previous chapter revealed the negative attitudes of children as well as parents in this school, towards the participation of parents in decision-making processes. Their views that more problems might be created, leads to the conclusion that they might have experienced previously such

conflicts between school and parents. So they trusted to a greater degree, the teachers rather than other parents or even themselves.

Finally, through examination of this school, it seems that the families' background characteristics (professional and educational) did not play an important role in the determination of parents' perceptions towards parental involvement, as they all emphasised the importance of parental involvement, while concerns were heard from all the parents, independent of their social background. For instance, Christopher expressed concerns about the danger of parents intervening in the school's processes if they had increased rights giving them the opportunity to participate in decision-making processes. Also Christalla was positive towards increasing extra-curricular activities. So it seems that all of them were positive towards some practices, while not to others, being possibly influenced by their own experiences and perceptions. However, the small sample of parents cannot lead to safe conclusions that would hold constant for other parents.

10.7 Conclusion

The distance that parents were kept from school can be due to the limited opportunities of involvement that were offered to them. The analysis of school 5 indicated that the relationship of home and school was determined by teachers' attitudes. When the teacher possessed a positive attitude, inviting parents to attend parents meetings, calling them, sending them notices, the parents responded in a greater degree. However, the majority of teachers did not attempt to address themselves to parents, even though they were complaining that they

were not satisfied with the existing communication with parents. They were limiting the options, only blaming the parents for not visiting the school, rather than thinking of ways to approach them.

The fact that all the parents supported the learning of their children, supervised their homework and helped them to overcome their difficulties might lead to the conclusion that parents already participated in the learning of their children, in a spontaneous way. As a result, the school should offer more opportunities of involvement in order that parents would be in the position to offer still more to the school and in their turn they would be trained on how they could support their children's learning more effectively.

It seems that both children and parents were in favour of inviting parents into class. So by offering activities that were attractive to parents and children, then parents would see the school work and they could possibly help in the improvement of the education of their children. However the headteacher and the majority of teachers worked in a methodical way in order to secure their professional independence and excluded parents from the school's processes.

As a result, after the presentation of the outcomes of one school, the next chapter will revisit the findings and draw conclusions for the study in the light of the international and Cypriot research findings.

CHAPTER 11

DISCUSSION

11.1 Introduction

In this chapter the findings of the study will be drawn together and discussed. It will revisit the key findings in respect of the research questions, taking into consideration the outcomes derived from all the methods of data-gathering that were adopted by the present research.

The findings will be interrogated in the light of the policy trajectory model of Bowe, Ball and Gold (1992) in order to identify specific strengths and weaknesses in the policy-to-practice cycle pertinent to parental involvement in the Cypriot context.

It should be noted that in some cases, evidence has been used to address more than one research question as examination of evidence for one research question, revealed important information for other questions as well.

11.2 Research questions

The research questions investigated were as follows:

- What is the current policy in Cyprus in primary schools, with regard to the involvement of parents in education?
- How is parental involvement policy interpreted in practice?

- What are policymakers', parents', school personnel's and pupils' aspirations, views and understandings of parental involvement in education?
- What are the current reported practices of school personnel, pupils and parents with regard to the parental involvement?

11.3 What is the current policy in Cyprus in primary schools, with regard to the involvement of parents in education?

This section addresses the first research question. The response to this research question was derived from document analysis and elite interviews. The investigation of the current policy in Cyprus with regard to parental involvement contributed extensively to the knowledge base as there has not been such an examination before. This gap might have existed due to the lack of relevant policy texts. Even considering the absence of policy texts addressed to the role of parents can lead one to the conclusion that parental involvement in Cyprus has not been one of the priorities of policy-makers, regardless of their political and ideological beliefs. Different political parties have been in the government at different periods of time, since the independence of Cyprus in 1960, and little emphasis has been placed on issues related to parental involvement over these years. Even bearing in mind that a policy text may be a result of struggles and compromises between political parties and interest groups as Ball indicated in Mainardes and Marcondes (2009), it is safe to assume that Cypriot educational texts have not placed much emphasis on parental involvement. However more detailed findings will be presented below.

It is difficult to investigate parental involvement in Cyprus without first acknowledging the large-scale international studies of educational achievement that have linked students' performance to family background and in particular to SES (e.g. Coleman, 1966; Ho and Willms 1996; Jencks *et al.*, 1972) and the corresponding policy-making process of the time, oriented towards reduction of perceived inequalities associated with SES through related adjustments to educational provision. In particular there has been a growing recognition that schools could make a difference to these inequalities as shown by such English studies as those of Rutter *et al.* (1979); Mortimore *et al.* (1988); Smith and Tomlinson, (1989). Since then more complex accounts of what and how family factors influence patterns of parental involvement in their children's education have been advanced that stress the significance of a range of variables including gender, ethnicity and religion, parental educational level, housing and employment that operate to create opportunities and constraining factors on parents' participation in their children's education (see, for instance, Strand, 2007).

Whilst the study was essentially exploratory and hence descriptive and analytical, there was some indication in the findings that, in line with international literature, family background factors can influence parental involvement. Policy-makers regarded parents as a homogeneous group, without consideration of particular constraints on involvement of different groups of parents. This attitude could privilege the involvement of parents from middle and higher social classes, such as their over-representation on PAs. To take examples

from policies in the English context such as parents' school choice (DES, 1980), the participation of parents in governance of the schools (DES, 1986) and the publication of attainment league tables (DES, 1992) in fact raised educational inequalities, as middle and higher social groups were favoured by these policies. For instance, the study of Adler *et al.* (1989), conducting 616 parent interviews concluded that the parents who exercised their right to choose their children's schools were parents with higher SES. As Ball (2003) indicated middle-class families benefited from school-choice policy, as they had the appropriate networks and resources to choose the schools that occupied higher places in schools' performance rankings. It seems that such policies may serve to extend inequalities rather than decrease them in practice, as West and Pennell (1999) have indicated. A question that may arise at this point is - what about children coming from less advantaged families? What might governments do to ensure the more equal access to each student, independent of his/her social class?

Similarly, the policy of giving the opportunity to parents to participate in governance of schools may not be a policy addressed to all the parents. As Alexander (2010) indicated in the English context the decision to include parents in the governing bodies was taken for political reasons, in order to limit the role of teachers unions in governing bodies. Parent governors' responsibilities may be too demanding for most, as Golby and Lane (1989) indicated. In analysing parent-governor membership of primary schools in Exeter they identified the need for parent governors to develop new and specialised skills. This could be the reason for parents from less advantaged and lower SES groups to be under-represented in such bodies (Thomas and Martin, 1996). Indeed, in practice not

only were working parents not represented in such bodies but they did not even know who the parent school governors were, as Crozier (2000) found out in a case study she conducted. The above research findings lead to the conclusion that such policies might not always lead to expected results as they may marginalise some group of parents resulting in an increase of inequalities. This finding was in line with the outcome of Crozier's research (1999) who indicated that Home-School Agreements policy could contribute to the further exclusion of some parents.

Also such policies allow the mediation of the social and cultural capital of the family that determines the values, aspirations, expectations and attitudes of family towards education. Hence children coming from more advantaged families enter schools with developed 'habitus' and they are in a more privileged position during their adjustment to school-life than the other children (Bourdieu, 1986)

Armed with a more sophisticated understanding, one might suppose that schools would appreciate and empower different parents groups in support of children's education. This leads us back to consideration of the wider question of policy-making and deeper exploration of the policy-to-practice context to parental involvement.

In the case of Cyprus, however, the context and policy strategy were different. As was noted in élites interviews as well as recent policy document analysis of

three texts (*Educational Reform Report*, Commission for Educational Reform, 2004, *Strategic Plan for Education*, Kleanthous, 2007; and *New Curriculum*, MOEC, Pedagogical Institute, 2010), policy-makers were seeking to increase family and community involvement in order to achieve the decentralisation of education rather than to reduce educational inequalities. The attention of government to the decentralisation of education derived from the fact that the educational system of Cyprus was highly centralised and schools had little autonomy and limited responsibilities (Pashiardis, 2004). It seems that the idea of using community and parental involvement for school development was derived from an identification of high levels of centralisation of the educational system. However, there were few references in policy texts to increase of parental involvement until the formation of the *Educational Reform Report* (Commission for Educational Reform, 2004). This clearly suggested that decentralisation of education could be achieved by involving parents and community in the educational system, from the stage of planning for educational change, up to and including the stage of enacting such change in practice. This belief in families and communities as players in a move to decentralisation also underpinned the *New Curriculum* (Cypriot Ministry of Education and Culture, Pedagogical Institute, 2010). During its development phase, policy-makers had direct communication with organised parents groups and individual parents and exchanged ideas that led to improvement of perceived weaknesses in the *New Curriculum*, as a member of the Committee of Educational Reform (élite 3) indicated. Decentralisation has been one of the Cypriot government's priorities and parents have been identified as a means for achieving a development in the autonomy of individual schools. The involvement of parents in the governmental

planning process was a promising step forward, however, as the policy cycle model of Bowe *et al.* (1992) might suggest, it is important that monitoring and interaction during the interpretation and enactment of policy is maintained. This co-operation could become more intensive in the longer-term, for instance, by schools becoming more responsive to parents and community and giving the opportunity to parents to be involved in local educational policy development, as well as in the stage of interpretation and enactment in practice.

The *New Curriculum* was a text responsible for the implementation of the recommendations of the *Educational Reform Report* suggesting ways of achieving an increase of the parental involvement. The present study suggested that the *New Curriculum* was not successful in sending the appropriately strong messages to teachers and schools about the need for increasing parental involvement (MOEC, Pedagogical Institute, 2010). Through document analysis, an inconsistency was observed in relation to general goals of parental involvement with the proposed goals of individual subjects of the curriculum varying from subject to subject. Even though increased parental and community involvement was one of the goals of the *New Curriculum*, in fact it was highlighted in the text of only three subjects of the curriculum. As one élite emphasised in interview, parents still needed to be convinced that they were welcome to participate within the schools' processes, continuously and not just 'once in a while'. Hence it might be concluded that involving parents once in a while might create the impression that their presence was by invitation only, when teachers needed them and, at the same time, the school might equally

refuse to respond to, or ignore other family needs. As a result, this inconsistency in policy guidance could lead to a loophole and hence the avoidance by teachers of taking actions to satisfy this policy goal of increased parent involvement.

The intermittent reference to parental involvement in policy texts could create a misconception by practitioners that the government did not place much emphasis on any specific aspect of parental involvement. For instance, the *Educational Reform Report* (Commission for Educational Reform, 2004) is a document of more than three hundred pages focused on finding the weaknesses of the Cypriot educational system and making suggestions for improving it. References however to the need of increasing parental involvement were intermittently incorporated in this document without detailed guidance. This could have created the impression that it was not an important matter, also allowing practitioners to avoid paying it the appropriate attention.

After an examination of policy texts and the realisation that there was not a systematic and continuous attempt made to encourage schools to involve parents and especially the failure of the *New Curriculum* (MOEC, Pedagogical Institute, 2010) to guide teachers about how they might involve parents in their children's learning, this could raise concerns about the policy-makers' intentions. An important challenge for this research was to identify policy-makers' real expectations for parental involvement. For instance, they appeared to be in favour of increasing parental involvement in order to decentralise education, while at the same time they did not suggest ways to achieve that in a consistent manner. From the present study, it was revealed that policy-makers did not seek

to transform schools to autonomous units which would work in closer co-operation with school and society, rather they recommended giving some more responsibilities to parents, without specifying what those responsibilities would be. The problem was that the parents who were ready to respond to such a challenge of accepting more responsibilities were the ones from more privileged groups with relevant experience. Taking into consideration Crozier's (1998) finding that teachers in her study were against permitting interference from parents that might threaten their perceived professionalism, Cypriot teachers might not necessarily be expected to be in favour of giving more responsibilities to parents and especially if this might increase their power. It seems that parental involvement can also be perceived to undermine teachers' autonomy and hence teachers' interests might well appear to be opposed to such governmental policies. Bearing in mind the important role of teachers in the implementation of parental involvement policy, as three élites indicated, it seems that a policy which is perceived to be against teachers' interests can easily lead a policy to failure. That may be why policy-makers in interviews emphasised the need of persuading educational stakeholders about the importance of parental involvement, by offering guidance rather than producing legislation to require the necessary changes.

Another explanation for policy-makers' attitude of not paying special heed to parental involvement could be the existence of the competing needs of many pressing educational developments and improvements. The need for many changes and improvements thus led to the generation of policy documents that recommended solutions to a large number of educational problems. This could be

the reason why there was not any one policy document focused exclusively on parental involvement matters. The inclusion of many educational aspects in the same education act however is also common practice in the international context as well. For example, in England, the ERA (DES, 1988) was an Act that introduced many new practices that required the introduction of a new curriculum, assessment, local management of schools and parental choice.

In analysis of policy texts, it also emerged that even though some policy texts co-existed, they were based on different ideologies related to parental involvement. To be more precise, document analysis indicated that in the *Rules for School Operation* (Ministerial Council, 2008 and first developed in 1997), there was a focus only on stressing teachers', headteachers' and parents' traditional roles and obligations. These 'rules' included the maintenance of 'good communication' with parents but without suggesting ways in which good communication could be achieved. Limited responsibilities were thus assigned to parents and their involvement was restricted, as home-school relationships were conceived as teacher-led. An example of a rule that restricted parental involvement was one stating that parents should gain permission from the headteacher in order to visit the school. This policy text is still in effect to the present day, whilst the texts of new policy documents based on a different ideology co-exist, giving the impression of a contradictory view on increase in the involvement of parents and community in children's education.

The tendency to urge for increased parental involvement can be observed in the *Educational Reform Report* (Commission for Educational Reform, 2004) and

New Curriculum (MOEC, Pedagogical Institute, 2010). Consequently, the evidence outlined above demonstrates that in some cases parental involvement themes overlapped and, in other cases, conflicted leading to the need for some resolution. It is important that new policy documents are adjusted to take account of previous ones to become more attuned to current needs of attempting to achieve the decentralisation of education through increased sensitisation of schools to parents and community. Ideally, the involvement of parents would be promoted in all new policy texts in a consistent manner.

Interestingly, as one élite emphasised, educational policies were used by political parties as a tool to win elections. The political nature of educational policies was underlined by Ball in Mainardes and Marcondes (2009) who indicated that a policy may represent the prevailing voice of a particular party so the final policy text will inevitably be a result of struggles and compromises. The *Strategical Plan for Education* constructed in 2007, for instance, was abandoned in the following year when the government changed, raising concerns about the continuity of policies in Cyprus, as elsewhere (Kleanthous, 2007). The worrying thing is that this was not the first time that particular educational policies had been abandoned as Persianis (2010) pointed out, leading to a lack of stability in the educational system.

There was some indication from élite 3 who participated in the formation of the *Educational Reform Report* (Commission for Educational Reform, 2004) that the political parties in the Cypriot context were not always honestly involved for the improvement of the education but used it for political propaganda, intervening in

aspects of educational reform and causing conflicts and delays in the promotion of innovation and change.

Taking into consideration the view of Persianis (2010), it appears as if the *Educational Reform Report* (Commission for Educational Reform, 2004) was developed for political as well as educational reasons. It may also be concluded that there is a high risk that any attempt at modernisation of the educational system may be abandoned when a government changes.

However, the educational policy development in respect of parental involvement is still at an early stage in Cyprus. The promoted types of parental involvement have been limited. As élite 1 emphasised, the types of parental involvement promoted by policy texts have been limited to school-based activities. Examining the policy texts through document analysis, it can be concluded that even though there were some proposals recommending an increase in parental involvement, it was not considered seriously how schools might be sensitised to the needs of parents and communities with parental involvement having the potential to improve schooling and raise children's attainment. This is in contrast to the international interest in US and England in the impact of parental involvement on achievements (Epstein, 1992; Henderson and Berla, 1994; Harris and Chrispeels, 2006). Furthermore, it suggests that parental involvement may take different forms in different cultural contexts, serving different purposes of different policy agendas (Desforges and Abouchaar, 2003).

Re-reading the policy documents, one may observe that they were constructed in a general language in order to be applicable to a range of contexts, even though the local circumstances of each school would be different, rendering interpretation of a policy an easier task for some schools but a more difficult task for others and, in any case, different. As Ball emphasised, a policy is written considering the best of all possible ideal schools (Mainardes and Marcondes, 2009). The weakness of policy texts is an inability to consider differences between the contexts that allows for the different interpretations and enactment of a policy. As a result, often policy outcomes do not meet initial intentions and governments cannot control these (Bowe *et al.*, 1992).

In a few words, the investigation of the prevailing situation in Cyprus regarding policies addressed to parental involvement, indicated that there was a lack of clarity about the roles and responsibilities of parents in school matters, as well as the role of schools and teachers in maintaining and achieving an effective level of home-school-community relationships. Also the policies relating to parental involvement took the form of guidance rather than requirements, thus allowing the practitioners and schools to decide whether and to what extent they would implement them. The investigation of the first research question leads to the conclusion that the limitations of the policy texts themselves influenced the extent of policy implementation as well. The following research question will consider how schools responded to the policy-makers' recommendations in practice.

11.4 How is involvement of parents policy interpreted in practice?

The previous section indicated the failure of policy-makers to produce thorough policies addressed to the involvement of parents in children's learning thus recognising the factors influencing parental involvement. This research question will investigate whether the lack and inconsistencies of policies with respect to parent involvement were reflected in the context of practice. Teachers', parents' as well as élites' interviews reported how, if at all, schools and teachers involved parents, either in school-based or in home-based activities.

First of all, almost one out of every three teachers who participated in the interview (7 out of 24) did not know the recommendations of the *Educational Reform Report* (Commission for Educational Reform, 2004) regarding family involvement, leading to the conclusion that practitioners were poorly informed about this. This was the case firstly because the recommendations had the format of guidance and they were not mandatory and secondly there was not an established mechanism for transmitting new policies to teachers and evaluating the implementation stage.

Throughout the examination of context of practice, it was revealed that the majority of the primary schools in Cyprus introduced similar practices to those of the past and the situation in Cyprus did not change after the publication of key policy documents such as the *Educational Reform Report* (Commission for Educational Reform, 2004). This can be understood by comparing how parents are involved nowadays with the ways they were involved one or two decades

ago, as indicated by the research of Phtiaka (1994), Georgiou (1997) and Symeou (2002). The exemplar school analysis in chapter 10 illustrated the typical way that a primary school in Cyprus might work today. Indeed, parents were involved through communication practices, through some school-based activities and through their participation in the PA. There was not any special emphasis paid to home-learning. The general nature of parental involvement policies did not encourage teachers to find ways to approach parents. Moreover there seemed to be a lack of means to inform teachers about new policies. Specifically, there were many teachers who did not even know about new educational policies but also the teachers who knew about them but were unaware of how any strategy for increasing parental involvement can be implemented in practice. The lack of such strategies for changing the existing situation gave the opportunity to teachers to continue determining the relationship of home and school, adopting the same practices with the past. The practical ways that parents were involved will be examined in more depth below in addressing another research question. Considering the fact that policy texts did not make any references to home-learning, the absence of attempts to improve it, could be expected.

Even though the present research found a stereotypical way in which schools were operating, this can be an important finding. It indicated that stability prevailed in Cyprus regarding parental involvement in the context of practice, even though in the last decade there was an increase in the references in the policy texts, emphasising the importance of parental involvement. Hence it can be concluded that there is a gap between the context of policy texts and the context of practice.

The reasons leading to the prevailing stability in the development of parental involvement in Cyprus were explained by the élites. All the élites agreed that the situation in Cyprus had not changed after the adoption of the *Educational Reform Report* (Commission for Educational Report, 2004) by the government in 2008. They mentioned some aspects that needed to be improved first of all, in order that schools would be in a position to involve parents and community in their life. Particularly there was a consensus of opinion that there was a need to restructure the educational system of Cyprus as it was too centralised. This was intended to be achieved through the *Educational Reform* (Commission for Educational Reform, 2004), *Statetical Plan for Education* (Kleanthous, 2007) and *New Curriculum* (MOEC, Pedagogical Institute, 2010) by attempting to give more responsibilities to individual schools.

However, the government was seeking to promote its goal of building more autonomous schools through the *New Curriculum* (MOEC, Pedagogical Institute, 2010) which did not provide enough information on how to approach and involve diverse parents from a range of social-cultural and ethnic backgrounds and reflecting Cypriot society of today. Also it did not provide any teachers' continuing professional development or training programmes to guide practitioners in ways of building autonomous schools in practice. From the first impressions of élite 2, the schools, teachers and organised parents were not ready for accepting more responsibilities. He said that an example of this was teachers being strongly against developing their own schools' timetables. Similarly, organised parents groups (as mentioned by élites 5 and 6) were against giving

more autonomy to schools, expressing their fear that some schools with better teachers would be in an advantaged position thereby, causing social injustice.

An important finding of this research was that headteachers in Cyprus were not altogether persons with visions, wishing to work for the modernisation of the educational system. From headteachers' interviews, it was observed that all of them shared similar views. Even though they appeared to be positive towards parental involvement, at the same time they expressed their reservations about whether parental involvement opportunities should be increased, referring to issues of parental interventions in teachers' work. It seems that headteachers were uneasy that the specific policy text guidance might give parents more power. However headteachers' attitudes towards parental involvement might lead to negative results, bearing in mind Griffith's (2001) finding in a survey to parents and principals of 82 elementary schools in USA that indicated that 'principals' behaviour influences parental involvement' (p.18). The influence of leaders can directly influence home-school relationships but also indirectly through attitudes teachers possessed towards parents (Epstein, 1991; Griffith, 2001). This leads to the conclusion that ideally people with vision and motivation for changes would hold the key positions in schools. Hence, it seems that the Cypriot government should also develop a fundamental change regarding the promotional system of headteachers as well as the professional development of existing leaders, in order to ensure that persons with appropriate expectations for school change and development to be taken forward would hold the right positions.

It seems that either it is too soon to evaluate the enactment of policies related to parental involvement included in the *Educational Reform Report* (Commission for Educational Reform, 2004), as there were many other educational changes to be handled first, or that the schools did not pay attention in these policies as they did not regard them as important. Maybe both of these factors are in play.

Overall, one can conclude that there are new features of schooling that need to be handled at the same time in Cyprus in order to improve the climate in schools for the headteachers and teachers to understand the valuable role of parents and to try to increase parental involvement. The findings addressing this research question indicate that the enactment of policies is not a simple process as policies and practices are inter-related and each one affects others (Bowe, Ball and Gold, 1992).

The following section provides the findings related to stakeholders' views, aspirations and expectations of parental involvement, as these might determine their attitudes towards policies.

11.5 What are the policymakers', parents', schools' personnel's and pupils' aspirations, views and understandings of parental involvement in education?

This section will discuss the main findings revealed by the policymakers', parents', school personnel's and pupils' aspirations, views and understandings of parental involvement in education.

This study did not set out to investigate specifically the relationships between types of parental involvement and their influence on school achievements, but it was more focused on whether educational stakeholders recognised or not the positive role of parents on their children's learning. Educational stakeholders in Cyprus expressed a consensus of opinion about the importance of parental involvement in education. However, an interesting finding revealed was that each one understood the term differently, an outcome that was similar to Ho's (2009) findings in South-East Asia.

First of all, all the stakeholders, élites, parents, teachers and children did seem to recognise that parental involvement can affect positively children's attainments. An interesting finding revealed from the children's group interviews, was the explanation children gave for the association of parental involvement with their academic progress. All the groups of children explained that when they felt that their parents were interested or their parents visited the school often to be informed about their progress, they tried harder, in order to make their parents to feel happy. This finding is important because in the majority of published research and especially in Cyprus, children have not had the opportunity to share their views on parental involvement.

However, children are the ones who are affected directly and their views should be taken seriously into consideration. Considering children's views, it seems that when children realised that their parents were interested in their performance and consequently they valued education they tried harder to satisfy their parents' expectations. The relationship between student's achievements and families'

expectations was underlined by Hill and Tyson (2009) through a meta-analysis of fifty studies they conducted addressed with middle-school students. They concluded that their achievements were associated with their family's aspirations and expectations.

Another important finding was that many times, acceptable types of parental involvement were determined by teachers' expectations. This finding showed that parents and teachers shared similar views about parents' responsibilities for children's learning and behaviour, even though these were unwritten. In practice, teachers and parents emphasised the important role of parents in supervision of children's homework as well as the discipline of the children. Élite 3 referred to this situation, indicating that some 'unwritten' responsibilities had a stronger impact on families' perceptions about their roles than written rules of government policy. This outcome might raise questions about the most effective transmission of new policies into practice. It also raises questions about the implicit, unspoken rules governing parental involvement that seem to be agreed by all and operating through powerful expectations of the parties involved. The fact that the children, despite their young age regarded their parents as responsible for their homework and behaviour leads to the conclusion that teachers may also be transmitting their expectations to families through students.

Similarly, teachers in different social and cultural contexts (such as England and US), as indicated for instance by the studies of Russell and Granville (2005) and De Cavallio (2001) shared similar perceptions about the role of parents in their children's learning and behaviour. Hence, it seems that some views and

expectations of teachers and parents are common across cultures, at least Western cultures.

Even though the responsibility for homework supervision might have been imposed by teachers indirectly, as three *élites* (1, 2 and 3) mentioned in their interviews, parents were conscripted as ‘mini teachers’ or co-teachers. The involvement of parents in students’ homework has been regarded as a valuable practice in the international context, as homework can be used as a mean of linking the school and family (Epstein, 2009; 2011). This is because, through homework, parents demonstrate care about their children’s progress and by such means enter the process of involvement by recognising their valuable role in their children’s achievements. As shown by the self-efficacy model of Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995; 1997) homework can be used to demonstrate to parents the important effects of their involvement in their children’s attainments.

On the contrary, even though teachers of the present study recognised and emphasised the important role of parents in their children’s education, they appeared to be in favour of such involvement in specific areas, largely determined by them. It was revealed that teachers were negative towards giving parents more power, placing emphasis on setting limits that should not be exceeded. It seems that teachers felt that their profession was threatened by giving more power to parents and they tried to determine the fields where the parents were welcomed to be involved or not.

Even though teachers were against parents with power, talking about the danger of parents interfering in teachers' affairs, teachers valued some parental behaviours. For instance, teachers evaluated parents' interest based on the visits of parents to schools. As teachers indicated, parents from higher social classes were more frequently involved. Teachers' tendency to criticise the parents who were not able to visit schools could equally harm the attempts of increasing parental involvement, as teachers appeared unready to use a range of ways in order to involve parents. In particular, some teachers (8 out of 24) did not refer to parents as a homogeneous group or respond to them in a uniform manner, in contrast with policy makers who promoted policies addressed to all the parents. Policy-makers did not consider the different characteristics and needs of parents when referring to them whilst teachers tended to characterise parents on the basis of interest/participation in school practices. These teachers also talked about parents who were indifferent, as well as parents who were interested in and frequently attending parents' meetings, schools events, as well as participating in PAs.

The investigation of parents' views, attitudes and feelings provided important insights about the ways parents wished to be involved. Parents' most important concern was to be informed more frequently about their children's progress. However, some teachers (6 out of 24) did not plan to increase their communication options to parents, believing that parents should be responsible for being informed about their children's behaviour and learning by attending the existing parents' meetings. On the contrary, some parents (6 out of 16)

reported in their interviews that they faced difficulties in attending morning parents' meetings. Some teachers did not appear to understand these constraints in their interviews (6 out of 24) and survey (34 out of 122), being against the organisation of meetings at different times from the preset ones or the organisation of activities to suit parents' commitments (5 out of 24). This result is similar to Crozier's (1999) three-year research project findings in English secondary schools. This drew on interviews with parents and teachers in which teachers reported believing that parents were unsupportive and indifferent when they did not meet teachers' expectations. Even though the target age of children was different, there is a similarity of findings. This can also suggest the need for further research in Cypriot secondary and high schools to confirm whether or not educational stakeholders involved share similar views at all the levels of education.

Bearing in mind, the teachers' negative attitudes, even towards the increase in parents' meetings opportunities, one can wonder how parental involvement can be increased in practice. Two élites (1 and 3) were very critical of primary school teachers, saying that teachers regarded even simple changes to practice as very complicated. It was also reported by élite 1 that throughout the school year, teachers continuously refused to pay attention to family needs but still expected that when schools needed parents, parents should be there. In other words, the involvement opportunities and the attitudes of teachers towards parents were restrictive and on teachers' terms. This attitude of teachers might also be a result of the inconsistent and sometimes contradictory reference to parental

involvement observed in policy texts and discussed above, under the first research question.

The present study also indicated that some less advantaged parents shared different views from the other more advantaged parents, suggesting the importance of examining more in-depth the views of a larger number of such parents in future research. Nevertheless, the views of three less-advantaged parents in particular were highlighted by the present research. These parents were critical of PAs, emphasising that they felt that the PA did not care about their children's happiness but only how to help the school financially. Continuing, they emphasised that parents who were involved in PAs were doing so for personal gains, such as the favourable treatment of their children or for their own personal advancement in the political arena. This finding was similar to Georgiou's (1997) finding indicating that the parents who were more frequently attracted to PAs came from a higher SES background and they often represented political parties. A similar picture was observed in the international context as Alexander (2010) indicated. Indeed, PAs attracted parents from higher SES groups as their experiences, expectations and networks were equivalent to the ones promoted by schools.

A very interesting finding revealed from élites who represented parents, was that they did not have any plan to approach parents who were not involved in schools' practices also believing that they were indifferent. Hence, it was likely that parents from professional groups might exclude other parents and, as a

result, less advantaged parents felt excluded and excluded themselves from PAs, as well as some school activities as it seems that a number of such activities were organised in co-operation with PAs.

However, their limited participation in schools' practices did not mean that parents were unsupportive of their children's learning through home activities. As was noted in chapter 2 as well, home learning activities might have an even greater impact on children's development and learning (Alexander, 2010) than school-based activities. Melhuish *et al.* (2001) who evaluated the home-learning environment of families of young children in the UK identified that the home environment of some working-class families was even better than some middle-class families. The necessity of conducting further research concentrating on how families from different social groups support their children's learning at home was suggested by the present research.

So it seems that neither advantage of social class, nor the involvement in school practices could provide valid criteria that could be used for determining the interest of parents. Hence, teachers of Cyprus might well consider revising their views to avoid falling into the trap of feeling that certain parents who could not attend parents' meetings or activities were indifferent.

The tendency of professional groups of parents to be more involved in PAs, while working-class parents did not feel that they belonged there, can also be explained using the theory of Bourdieu (1986). In particular, social and cultural capital theory recognised how the distribution of social and cultural differences

can be reproduced. It seems that some social and cultural inequalities that occurred at school could result from the cultural practices of families of higher socio-economical status whose values and habitus matched those of the school (Bourdieu, 1986; Bernstein, 1975). In other words, the schools valued the habitus of higher SES families. At the same time, children entered the primary schools with developed habitus that was constructed through their everyday socialisation and experiences. Hence schools may be characterised as institutions of transmitting and hence reproducing and perpetuating class and social and cultural capital differences.

Cultural capital can influence parental involvement as professional families are used to having more experience and working knowledge of the educational system, causing them to feel more confident of being involved. This might explain why the professional-class parents were more likely to attend in PAs, as well as the negative views of working-class parents who felt excluded by the PA. Considering that half of the sample of parents participating in the interviews were highly educated parents, one might conclude that the parents' complaints and negative views against PAs could have been even more intensive if a larger and more socially-diverse group of parents had participated in the research. However, at this point it is important to state that there is a need of further and more nuanced examination in the future of the factors that led specific groups of parents to be suspicious about other parents and the impact of social class on parents' perceptions.

Also, an important finding of this study through students' interviews was that the majority of children (53 out of 62) were against the further participation of parents in extra-curricular activities, feeling that they should be independent of parents. By contrast, half of the groups of children were positive towards the participation of their parents in open lessons, sharing specific knowledge and experiences they possessed. Hence it seems that the preference of children and parents for open lessons might be a sign indicating that both feel a need for parents to be more informed about their children's performance at school. Parents also wished to receive more information about children's schoolwork, as well as the school environment. Taking into consideration the Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler self-efficacy model (1995; 1997), it seems that schools could make more of parents' need of more information by encouraging them to enter the involvement process in which parents can learn about and understand their valuable role in their children's learning and increase their involvement.

Schools did not try to give parents more options of involvement, such as more communication options, participation in schools' activities and events, participation in open lessons or in decision-making processes. Even though many teachers (15 out of 24 interviewed) were positive about increasing activities involving parents, as well as in open lessons, there was not observed any reported increase in these activities compared with the previous research findings (Georgiou, 1997; Symeou 2007). This situation may be explained either by teachers not being enough motivated by the headteachers or because they were not obliged by government to increase parental involvement opportunities.

Regarding the participation of parents in decision-making processes, the vast majority of teachers appeared to be negative in their interviews (18 out of 24) being afraid that by giving the opportunity to parents to increase their involvement in governance of schools and schools' decision-making processes, then they would interfere in the schools' operations. They seemed also to be afraid that they might give the impression to parents that they had increased rights, leading parents to overstep their existing limits of involvement. This finding is in line with Crozier's (1998) finding indicating that even though teachers wished for some kind of involvement of parents, they did not want any interference of parents in their professional activities.

Also parents' views about parental involvement in activities were very distinctive. Some parents (7 out of 16) believed that parents cannot be involved for the benefit of the school since they tended to be involved for the betterment of their own child and their position in social and political arena intervening in school's processes. A similar viewpoint was expressed by eight groups of children who stated that the further involvement of parents in decision-making processes was not necessary as teachers were experts, having the skills and knowledge to solve any educational problem. Hence it seems that either teachers' concern about parents' intervention was not unfounded, or teachers transmitted their perceptions to a group of parents and children as well.

On the other hand, in six out of eighteen group interviews, children expressed the view that parents could voice children's views if they participated on such boards. This might suggest that some children felt that their views should be

heard as well as parents', indicating a need to give involvement opportunities in decision-making processes to children as well.

To sum up, it can be concluded that the majority of parents wished for a reasonable increase of their involvement by being able to communicate more freely with teachers as well as to participate in schools' events. Teachers understood the term parental involvement differently, believing that parents should be involved in areas that they wished them to be involved in. The establishment of better channels of communication must be the first aspect of parental involvement to be improved, if the government wishes to increase parental involvement. It must be regarded as basic fundamental to parental involvement. For instance, communication and participation in schools' activities and events were identified stages of Epstein's (1997) typology that were regarded essential to building a home-school partnership. One might reasonably assume that parental involvement in school as well as home learning cannot be promoted if two-way communication between home and school is not established first, and hence, special attention is needed to this area. The following section will provide more information about the ways in which parents are involved currently.

11.6 What are the current reported practices of school personnel, pupils and parents with regard to the parental involvement?

This research question was addressed to the context of practice through interviews and survey with teachers and interviews with parents, pupils and elites.

The stereotypical way that schools that participated in the research were operating and presented in the exemplar school analysis, indicated a general tendency towards lack of parental involvement opportunities. The significance of this finding can be illustrated by noting that schools in Cyprus introduced only two types of parental involvement, in terms of Epstein's (1997) typology: the parenting and communicating types, allied to the fact that the centralised system of Cyprus ensured that the schools operated in a similar way. Even though Epstein's typology was not constructed on the basis of empirical evidence, it provides a useful tool to evaluate the level of home-school relationships. In particular, Epstein's home-school-community partnership typology identified six types of home-school relationships: parenting; two-way communication; volunteering in schools' activities and events; learning at home, or being involved with their children's schoolwork; participation in decision-making processes; and collaboration with the community. These practices of parental involvement identified were typical practices incorporated in the majority of parental involvement typologies, such as Tomlinson (1991) and Fullan (1982).

Similar findings have also been indicated in the international context. Indeed, parents in the studies of Russell and Granville (2005) and Clarke and Power (1998), examined in Chapter 2, were not satisfied with the information they received about their children's progress. Accordingly in our case study, it was important to find out that parental involvement communication options did not change at all, even though new policies promoting parental involvement were promoted. Georgiou (1997) as well as Symeou (2002) noticed the existence of only one-way communication established, as the school provided information to

parents. This finding was also revealed by the present study. Moreover, the written notices and announcements were mostly of an informative nature, avoiding reference to children's progress. As some teachers (8 out of 24) indicated in their interviews, they used to call and send notes to parents that were mainly focused on informing parents about bad attitudes of children. This may be an indication of the way that teachers transmit the responsibility for children's discipline to parents. Any further communication depended on the personal initiative of a few teachers. Bearing in mind the important role of teachers in shaping home-school relationships the finding that teachers were transmitting unwritten rules as if the 'norm', might lead one to the conclusion that teachers were responsible for the limited communication and that was why parents expected from teachers more opportunities.

The organisation of school activities also had similar goals to the past. Activities organised by schools apart of the weekly parents' meetings were not seeking to inform parents about their children's progress. Moreover, the parents' meetings were organised in specific morning time, restricting attendance of some working parents. Through parents', teachers' and children's interviews, it was revealed that the organised activities addressed to parents were mainly seeking to present the work of school to the parents. This outcome is in line with findings of Georgiou (1997) and Symeou (2002; 2007). The only other choice parents had to be informed in evening time was by some meetings organised by PAs or the school once or twice year but again seeking to present the work of school rather than being focused on individual children's needs.

The role of PAs does not appear to have changed over the years. The two élites, representatives of PA (4 and 5), emphasised in their interviews that the PAs of schools were elected each year and their main responsibility was to support the school financially by fund-raising. This was also emphasised by Symeou (2002). The parents who participated in PAs (3 out of 16) mentioned that for achieving the association's goals, they organised some activities such as fairs in which children, parents and teachers participated. Children in 8 groups talked with excitement in their interviews about these events. In contrast to children's views being against the participation of parents in activities organised in the school, can be set their enjoyment of such events, fairs and, as such, an inconsistency can be observed. Obviously, children did not have in mind such activities when they were thinking about the participation of their parents in schools' activities. The majority of parents (13 out of 16) were in favour of increasing extra-curricular activities, while a few parents (3 parents) had negative feelings, believing that the participation of parents in the existing activities should be increased first and they also referred to the need of increasing communication options first rather than simply extending activities. Taking into consideration the outcome of Phtiaka's (1998) study in which parents did not feel that they had any role to play in the school-based activities, one can conclude that this attitude has changed in the majority of parents nowadays, whilst a minority of parents still shared such views. The challenge now though is to find out whether particular parental groups are against the increase of such activities, identifying their characteristics and perceived constraints of involvement, as well as identifying influences on parents' attitudes, where possible.

Another practice introduced in all the schools involved was the organisation of open lessons, in which parents could attend in the classroom either to watch a lesson or teach a lesson. Evidence from parents' and children's interviews showed that these kinds of lessons were mostly organised in the early grades of primary school (first and second grade) indicating that teachers were seeking more participation from parents when children were in the earlier grades rather than later on. This finding emerged even though the research was conducted in 4th, 5th and 6th grades, as participants were able to express their past experiences. The tendency of different attitudes to be held by teachers towards parental involvement in lower and upper grades were observed by Symeou (2002), indicating that teachers who had classes of younger children established better communication channels with parents than the ones who taught older-age classes. Hence it seems that the nature of parental involvement changes based on the age of the children. This may indicate the need for conducting a study through different age grades to observe the differences and changes in parental involvement as children grow up. It would be very interesting if research could be extended into Cypriot secondary schools as well, as noted above.

In the survey, some teachers (52 out of 122) emphasised in an open question that parents can contribute to their children's education through the home educational activities and experiences they offered to children. Also a few teachers (7 out of 24) underlined the importance of the 'good' or 'happy' home environment in their interviews. In fact, these indirect kinds of involvement through values and attitudes have been found to have a greater influence on children's attainments than direct interventions as Harris and Goodall, (2007) and Desforges and

Abouchaar, (2003) indicated and, as a result, the educational system might well seek to find ways to guide families on how to improve the home learning environment and their contribution in the children's learning.

The present study indicated that teachers placed more emphasis on the responsibility of parents to supervise their children's homework rather than on their overall involvement in children's learning. Similarly, the previous research question indicated that the government paid more attention to increasing family involvement in school rather than at home, but not in a systematic manner. On the contrary, findings from international literature have indicated that parental involvement in learning can have an influence on children's outcomes to a greater degree than the participation of parents in schools' activities (Harris and Goodall, 2007; Desforges and Abouchaar, 2003). A challenge created is how to persuade parents to increase their home involvement but also how to persuade teachers to support home- and school-based parental involvement. Work of Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997) demonstrated that parents develop the sense of 'self efficacy' when they understand that their involvement is valued and when they see that their contribution has a positive impact on their children's attainments. However, in Cyprus there does not appear to be even any established mechanism for informing parents about their valuable role, as not all parents received feedback from teachers and schools on the importance of their involvement. This raises concerns about the state of readiness of Cypriot educational system for parental involvement.

The only increase in the activities involving parents to be identified, compared with the past, was due to the European educational programmes introduced into schools that urged the schools to co-operate with parents and organise together activities and events seeking to meet the specific programmes' goals. Also a few teachers (3 out of 24) and some parents (9 out of 16) talked about the organisation of lectures addressed to parents which was a new practice in Cypriot primary schools. To be more precise, some parents emphasised that they attended lectures organised by the School of Parents in co-operation with the PA of each school, in which specialised people talked to parents about educational matters, such as the psychological world of the children, the need to set rules and routines, discipline matters and everyday issues of concern to parents. The parents who attended such lectures had positive views about them, but it seems that not all the parents were attending such lectures, leading to reiteration of the challenge emphasised above about how to persuade more parents to participate in such events. As was emphasised under the previous research question, parents' decision to be involved in schools' practices was influenced by their social and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986). Even though it was not one of the main intentions of the present study to identify the impact of social class on parental involvement, findings indicated that there were cases of parents from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds who felt excluded, as well as parents from less-advantaged groups feeling that they did not belong to parent groups that could take an active role to PAs, as well as participate in schools' activities. There was evidence that there is a mismatch between parents' views and values and parent involvement, creating groups of parents with conflicting ideas about their role in children's learning. Hence it seems that further study might seek to explore in

more depth views of parents from more diverse groups reflecting current Cypriot society that might provide a more fine-grained analysis of the impact of diverse social and cultural beliefs and practices on the involvement of parents in schools.

Finally, evidence from interviews, suggested that parental involvement was still determined and controlled by teachers and schools as happened in the past as Georgiou (1996) and Symeou (2002) also emphasised. Teachers seemed to be responsible for the distance parents are kept from schools, as they did not wish to see parents involved to a greater extent in schools' practices, from the earliest years of their children's education. Even though they understood the importance of the parental involvement, the onus was still on parents to approach teachers (Zaoura and Aubrey, 2010). In fact, there was promotion of involvement in areas that teachers realised that they derived personal gains, such as in improvement in the children's behaviour and supervision of their homework. The transmission of responsibilities to parents in these two important areas is not a new practice, as this tendency was also identified in previous research (Phtiaka, 1998).

11.7 Parental involvement – policy to practice framework

The policy-to-practice cycle model (Bowe *et al.*, 1992) that was used as a framework for the investigation of family involvement allowed a textured representation of the study area and consideration of factors influencing each policy context. It also enabled the complexity of promoting parental involvement to be revealed from influences on policy, to possibly conflicting purposes in policy text and thence to the uneven interpretation of this in practice.

The present case study uncovered the macro-level factors that influenced the policy development and the micro-level factors associated with the school practices, as well as school and family attitudes and values. At the macro-level, it seems that parental involvement is introduced in many differing ways and for many different purposes in different countries. Even though in the international context (especially England and US) there has been an imperative to involve parents to raise achievements and reduce inequalities, there is little evidence that this has been achieved. It seems that still '*Education cannot compensate for society*', as Bernstein (1970) indicated. This might be because educational systems have not yet found the ways to serve society's needs and shape the people who would build and improve the society of the future or indeed do not have the power to do so. Indeed, schools are merely microcosms of society. Hence if education cannot find ways to reduce inequalities then the inequalities will not only be reproduced but they will possibly be expanded as well. However it is to be hoped that they should at least seek to contribute to the creation of a society operating on a more equitable basis.

Concerning parental involvement, as was indicated by this study, the focus of Cypriot policy-makers has been to promote family and community involvement in order to achieve the decentralisation of education. It seems though that Cyprus did not follow the international trends about promoting parental involvement in order to improve children's attainments. This was at least partly due to the especially difficult political and social conditions prevailing in Cyprus. In

particular, Cyprus has not yet developed a rich independent educational system since it gained its independence from British colonial rule relatively recently, in 1960, experienced a divisive war in 1974, followed by a period of educational ‘borrowing’ from Greece (Persianis, 1978). The more systematic attempts to develop its own educational policy began only after its integration within the European Union in 2004. However in such a short time there have been many educational challenges that policy-makers have had to address.

The present case study indicated that parents and community were regarded as a means for contributing to the decentralisation of education. The trajectory model of policy contexts (Bowe *et al.*, 1992) indicated that in practice schools were not well informed and well prepared to promote such a development. Even though the present case study’s findings indicated that teachers, parents and children shared an implicit recognition of the important role of parents, there was a lack of explicitly promoted parental-involvement practices. Also parents were already exercising their central role, accepting their shared unwritten responsibilities towards their children’s education. Findings of the present research indicated the powerful position of headteachers and teachers in transmitting their expectations about the parents’ roles and responsibilities in children’s education to parents.

Even though families were involved in their children’s education, there is a need for this indirect role to be made more explicit for each party and formalised. In such a way teachers would have fewer doubts about parents’ interests and parents, in their turn, would feel that teachers appreciated the family’s constructive involvement. In other words, schools should exploit the Cypriot

parents' great interest in their children's learning as Phtiaka (1998) indicated as well.

However it seems that there was a poor interaction and exchange of information between the contexts. First of all, even though policy was influenced by the context of influence and hence political, ideological and social factors, it could not take sufficient account of the prevailing situation and practitioners' attitudes and be well in tune with existing ways of working in the context of practice. Developing policies that do not fully consider the concerns, expectations and practices of professionals is not likely to guarantee bringing the desired results. The fact that the present research findings indicated that teachers were not informed about the newly-promoted policies also leads to the conclusion that a mechanism for informing practitioners about changes in policies is missing. Similarly, there was not any observed link between the context of practice and context of policy-making. In a few words, there was an absence of evaluation of implementation of the new policies being promoted and, as a result, policy-makers were not well informed about the effectiveness of the policies they created. This finding is of paramount importance and could be extrapolated to other areas of education. It seems that the disadvantage of the educational system in Cyprus is the absence of a feedback mechanism with links between the contexts of policy and practice. However the Ball framework, adopted as an analytical tool, could not identify who should be responsible for the exchange of information. Agents responsible for the monitoring and evaluation of policies might be different in different contexts and different periods of time. An important point revealed by this study was the urgent need to establish two kinds

of mechanism. The first one should be responsible for transmitting new intelligence about policies to practitioners and, where necessary, establishing training necessary for implementation. The second one should constitute a mechanism for evaluating systematically the implementation of new policies in practice and providing feedback to policy-makers, the advantages and challenges of the innovations being promoted.

The investigation of parental involvement in Cyprus emphasised both the strength and durability of informal parental roles and responsibilities and the gaps that existed in formally feeding back the operation of policy to practice and hence a system for adjustment in the Cypriot context. It is believed, that this finding could contribute not only to the parental involvement field but also to other educational areas, indicating that a possible reason why policy innovations and change promoted in Cyprus, have been abandoned very easily was due to the lack of feedback mechanism to enable policy to be fine-tuned or adjusted.

11.8 Conclusions

After the presentation of the main findings that addressed each research question, it seems that the present research investigated many levels of policy and practice related to parental involvement and identified gaps in the links between the contexts. The Cypriot educational system is still very centralised and the headteachers and teachers are not trained to be ready to work in an environment with more autonomy. They are still uneasy that potential increase in parental

involvement could bring unwanted change in their working conditions. The Cypriot educational system should not be compared with other mature educational systems since its developments reflect particular circumstances of its recently changing history and culture. Hence it is a country without a rich educational policy tradition, being focused initially on addressing issues of curriculum, teaching and assessment development. As a result, many educational issues that are considered as important in other countries, in Cyprus may not yet have gained the same prominence.

Any attempt at involving parents may not be successful, regardless of context. This research examined whether policy-makers, parents, teachers and children were in favour of parental involvement and how each group defined such involvement in practice. The vast majority of teachers and headteachers although from different school environments, shared similar views. They felt responsible to define the kind and the level of their relationships with the parents and they were not ready to negotiate the teachers' roles. The fact that there was a consensus of opinion amongst the majority of headteacher and teacher participants led to a conclusion that the schools were operating in similar ways and this attitude could be a result of the particular centralised educational system and specific circumstances of Cyprus.

In the case of children, this research examined how primary-aged students felt about parental involvement. The findings that emerged from children's interviews make an important contribution to the field. First of all, the majority of children talked about the motivation and support they received from their

parents at home. The shared perception between children, teachers and parents about parents' responsibility to supervise their homework, led to a conclusion that teachers had a strong influence on parents' as well as children's views. The children possessed a mature view about parental involvement, believing that parent-teacher interactions should be improved first of all, recognising that parents can help students at home as soon as they realise that their children face difficulties. Of course, children did not wish to undermine the role of teachers, but they felt that parents were equally responsible for their education. These views led to the conclusion that by improving home-school communication, then the contribution of parents in their children's learning could be formalised at the same time. The parental response to the children's needs, observed in Cyprus reflects the high levels of family interest towards their children's progress, as Phtiaka (1996) indicated. At the same time children may have underestimated the importance of the participation of parents in schools' activities and in decision-making processes, thus possessing similar views to teachers.

A finding revealed by the present study was that, even though the reason for promoting the parental involvement in Cyprus was different from other international contexts such as England or US, the parents who were the first to benefit from such a change were likely to be the parents with more social and cultural capital. One can conclude that this group of parents is likely to be more influential in many educational systems where educational policies serve for the reproduction of capital. This factor has to be taken into consideration in neo-Liberal policy development as it seems that home-school relationships function differently for different groups of parents.

Even though it was not an intention of the study to investigate how social and cultural capital influence parental involvement, the present study identified that some parent groups appeared to experience more power than the other parent groups. That is, parents from advantaged social backgrounds were more frequently involved in PAs as Georgiou (1997) indicated. The present study identified also that there is a trend for some parents involved in PAs to exclude others that those parents experienced as being placed in a vulnerable position. However the question that arises is whether the existing educational policies served to set parents' groups against each other. The analytical policy-making framework of Bowe, Ball and Gold (1992) suggested that the policies themselves might serve to heighten suspicion and set parents' groups against each other, firstly because they were addressed to parents as a homogeneous group without taking account of differences either due to their social class, ethnicity, or educational and professional status. Secondly, the analytical framework indicated that the implementation of educational policy can empower advantaged parent groups, as there was not any guidance and instructions as to how parental involvement could be equitably achieved.

This chapter has outlined and interrogated the basic findings from an investigation of parental involvement in Cypriot context. It has described investigation of the policy development, the political social and ideological factors that influenced policy development, the implementation of policies as well the situation of parental involvement in practice. The typical ways that parents were involved in schools can lead to the conclusion that there is still

much to be done to achieve the co-operation between home-school and community that *Educational Reform Report* sought.

It is hoped that this study may serve as a stimulus to further focused research. For instance, it seems that policy texts refer to parents as a homogeneous group. However, data indicated that there were some specific factors that may influence involvement. Race, social class, gender could be some factors that should be taken into consideration during the policy development, as well as in the enactment of a policy. Improvement may be needed at both policy and practice levels. Further discussion of the findings and implications of this study will be examined by the final chapter.

CHAPTER 12

CONCLUSION

12.1 Introduction

The thesis has provided a basic picture of parental involvement in the contexts of influence, policy text and practice in Cyprus, as well as identifying gaps and inconsistencies that needed attention. Chapter 11 revisited the research questions and discussed the findings. In the light of these, chapter 12 will outline limitations of the study and conclusions by considering implications and further research that might be taken in the field.

12.2 Limitations of the study

This study attempted to develop an understanding of the way that Cypriot parents were involved in school practices, identifying the policy influences affecting their involvement that shape and are shaped by a range of educational stakeholders' beliefs, expectations and unchallenged practices regarding parent involvement.

Even though the use of the Bowe *et al.* model (1992) ensured a macro to micro analysis of parental involvement policy, Cyprus is not rich in relevant policies, thus limiting clear conclusions about the impact of the context of influence on policy texts and thence practice that could be reached. There was also a lack of evidence to permit the identification of influences from the international context. Moreover, whilst the policy trajectory analysis model assumes the influence of policy contexts to be circular, analysis of the Cypriot case failed to identify any

feedback mechanism for monitoring the implementation of education policy in Cyprus with this information being used to feed back into the policy-making process to modify or fine-tune existing policy.

Being a single researcher, there was a limitation on time and financial resources. A maximum variation sample was planned through the involvement of urban, suburban and rural area schools, to provide a diverse sample of parents. Participation was voluntary and hence there was not a large enough number or a sufficiently diverse mix of social groups participants. Hence, indications of the impact of social and cultural group on parental involvement could have been more pronounced if more people representative of different social groups could have participated in the research.

Another limitation of this study could be the reliance on participants' self-reports in order to draw conclusions about the frequency and the types of parental involvement. It would be very interesting if the home-school relationships could be investigated through long-term observations that few studies have attempted. However, this was not feasible in the present study, as it was conducted by a single researcher and reliable observational results could only emerge only through longer-term and persistent observations. Moreover, at the time the research was conducted, there was a need for research providing an overview of basic parental involvement issues in Cyprus with the possibility of more focused research to follow.

Whilst triangulation through involvement of different stakeholder groups and use of different data-gathering methods increased trustworthiness, the research may not have been sufficiently large-scale to permit the generalisation of findings to a wider context. The qualitative nature of the case study may be criticised but the strength of interpretive research is the richness of data obtained. The intention of the present study was to illuminate by thick description the involvement of parents in Cypriot primary schools rather than to make generalisations. In fact, it investigated the involvement of parents ‘through the eyes of participants’ (Cohen et al, 2007; p. 257), considering as well the distinctiveness of each context, as Robson (2002) emphasised. This can lead to the provision of a ‘naturalistic generalisation’ in which parental involvement is explained in simple/accessible language in order to be understandable to readers who have witnessed similar experiences (Nisbet and Watt, 1984; Stake, 2000).

12.3 Steps taken to increase reliability, validity and trustworthiness

For achieving the macro and micro investigation of parental involvement, a case study approach was adopted and analysed using an interpretive framework. Taking an interpretive stance permitted the examination of parental involvement in its natural context, providing interpretations about the diverse meanings people gave for their actions (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994). Even though interpretive research permits an in-depth analysis and understanding of parental involvement, the presented interpretations cannot necessarily be replicated as they are based on particular people’s beliefs, from a particular context, at a

specific time. Bearing in mind that at the same time this may render the data less reliable, there was an attempt made to raise reliability of the study by selecting a range of data collection methods such as document analysis, survey and interviews allowing methodological triangulation. Indeed, the main goal of the larger-scale survey was to indicate the trends in parental involvement more reliably in order for these to be investigated more in-depth by the qualitative interview methods of data gathering that were employed.

To strengthen reliability, the data were analysed very carefully. For ensuring the appropriate interpretation of the data the researcher had to reflect views authentically and represent them in a fair and consistent manner in order to reduce any potential bias. For achieving this, a framework was designed and used for the analysis of the data. A priori categories were constructed to address questions related to the contexts of influence, policy text and practice at the first stage, through both qualitative and quantitative data. At the second stage grounded categories were derived from emergent analysis.

For ensuring the validity of the study, key aspects revealed from survey data were validated by eliciting participants' views which were expressed through their interviews. Interviewees in turn validated their responses through verification of their interviews transcripts. Involving many educational stakeholders in the research provided stronger grounds for accepting that participants' reported views were a reflection of practice. In such a way the researcher had different opportunities to validate participants' views and to achieve triangulation of participants' views.

The trustworthiness of the research was thus enhanced by using multiple methods of data gathering and multiple stakeholder groups, ensuring triangulation to increase the credibility, the transferability and confirmability of the research (Patton, 2001). The fact that the researcher was familiar with the educational context of the research and a member of the culture being investigated permitted her to use the technique of prolonged engagement and persistent observation for developing an understanding of the school context (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). For the interpretation of the data, knowledge of the context of the study was ensured so that the credibility was increased (Wallendorf and Belk, 1989).

The presentation of the findings at two international conferences, demonstrated the opportunity for peer review increased the trustworthiness of the research. Some of the research findings were presented at the Seventeenth International Conference on Learning at Hong Kong Institute of Education on 6th to 9th July of 2010, others at the International Conference European Research Network about Parents in Education at Milano Bicocca University on 29 June to 1 July of 2011. The papers that were presented in those conferences were subsequently published as well (Zaoura and Aubrey, 2010; Zaoura and Aubrey, 2011) and hence subjected to further peer scrutiny.

12.4 Implications for policy to practice

This study took research of parental involvement in Cyprus forward, indicating that the involvement of parents can be promoted to satisfy different political goals. It is not wise to present parental involvement simply as a means to improve children's attainments, without reference to the relevant educational policies that are being promoted. At the same time, the study revealed that at an implicit level, parents, teachers and pupils, recognise and accept the central role of parents in their children's learning and development.

A finding that emerged, that is probably common to other aspects of educational policy and other policy systems as well, is the lack of continuity in innovation and change in educational policies. The present research presented examples of policies being abandoned when a government changed, and the production of new policies which were not consistent with previous policies. Indeed, the influence of political parties in the development of education policy was emphasised by many participants of this study increasing the credibility of this finding. However, the lack of co-operation between the political parties that causes instability in innovations constitutes a serious obstacle in any attempt at modernisation of an education system in Cyprus or elsewhere. In an ideal world, politicians would not sacrifice the quality of education for their own political expediencies but they would follow a common long-term strategy for improving education, particularly in the case of a newly-formed and rapidly developing educational system.

Even though parental involvement can be promoted for different political purposes, the influence of social class and capital can be assumed to be operating. Hence it is important for future research to take into consideration the context of influence and policy-text production, as well as the investigation of what happens in the context of practice. The fact that parents must be assumed to be a homogeneous group of people in the policy text inevitably benefits the parents with more social and cultural capital in practice. As Cyprus becomes a more socially and culturally diverse society it may face the same challenges of inequality and potential social exclusion that the educational systems of the US and England have grappled with. At the same time it is important that the different and specific conditions of each school are considered and hence policies should give levels of flexibility in order to be adjusted according to each school's needs. This places the onus for interpretation in implementation on schools, headteachers and teachers themselves in achieving a more inclusive system and society.

This finding leads to the conclusion that parents and schools cannot be treated as homogeneous groups, but as different groups with different needs to be addressed, in order to achieve the educational goals of governments. The need to avoid treating parents as a single category was also emphasised by the key review of research by Desforges and Abouchaar (2003).

The strong effects of social and cultural capital of parents influence the implementation of policies, independent of their intentions. Hence, a continual interaction between the policy contexts may be required in order to achieve

effective implementation of policies that seek to promote an education which can compensate for society (Bernstein, 1970). By continuing to promote policies without considering the effects of social class and capital serves to support governments' and schools' contribution to the reproduction of the present microcosm.

The findings of the present research concerning the existence of policies that were conflicting and contradictory, reveals the importance of adjusting outdated policies and eliminating others in order to avoid unnecessary areas of confusion to practitioners. It seems that there is still much to be done. In the context of policy text, it seems that there is a need of long-term planning and evaluation. The planning should be based on consultation in the context of practice in order that promoted new policies could be implemented more effectively in practice. The policy-to-practice cycle (Bowe *et al.*, 1992) indicated that parental involvement policy served as a guidance and was not mandatory. This represents a serious weakness as in such a way policy-makers leave open for practitioners to decide whether or not and how, if at all, they implement policy. As a result, there is a need to promote required changes by providing teachers' with further professional development, monitoring in time and hence, the existence of a mechanism for evaluating implementation of changes is also crucial.

There is no doubt though that teachers' views and attitudes towards educational change, innovation and new policies should always be considered seriously. In fact, for the effective implementation of new policies, the present research indicated that teachers' expectations determined the acceptable types of parental

involvement. The doubts expressed by teachers influenced the enactment of policies, as they have a powerful role in transmitting their views to parents and children as well. The strength of the unwritten rules of parental involvement promoted by teachers, may lead one to the conclusion that teachers must be enlisted as supporters of the changes promoted. In the situation where new educational policies are not acceptable to teachers, then there is always a risk of their not being adopted, especially in educational systems such as Cyprus, in which the implementation of new policies are not evaluated systematically.

In a few reported cases of policies being monitored, policy-makers did not appear to fine-tune the policy or to improve it in order to take account of practitioners' needs, as one élite emphasised. Even in the recent attempt to operationalise the *Educational Reform Report* suggestions (Commission for Educational Reform, 2004), there were no mechanisms created for evaluating its interpretation and enactment. This point was emphasised by more than half of teachers (14 out of 24) as well as three élites. Hence a mechanism is required that is responsible for evaluating more systematically educational policies, gathering information about practitioners' reactions, as well as judging the effectiveness of policies in order to inform policy-makers about adjustments that should be made. By the development of such a mechanism, the interaction between the three policy contexts of influence, policy text and practice could be ensured.

As Ball has emphasised in Mainardes and Marcondes (2009), interpretation of policy is a complex process, as written texts are translated and enacted in practice and may be interpreted differently. So what is missing in the Cypriot situation is

a link between the contexts, that seeks to negotiate and communicate the new policies and ensure each party's roles and responsibilities, in this case regarding the increase of involvement of parents, are transparent and required. For achieving that, new parental involvement policies should be introduced through teachers' professional development programmes, in which teachers will not only be informed theoretically about new policies but also they would be prepared/guided about how they would implement them in practice. The kind of home-school relationships promoted is of paramount importance as the way schools treat families and families treat schools is observed by pupils who will be tomorrow's parents (Epstein, 2011: 11).

In the context of Cyprus, it seems that the construction of home-school partnership could begin through working at improving existing practices that are regarded as important by all the educational stakeholders. It might start with improving communication between home and school, informing parents about children's progress in a consistent manner, as well as being available to meet or interact with parents more frequently and informally, as all the stakeholders agreed on its importance. Working to establish two-way communication could possibly improve the interaction and the relationships between parents and teachers so that further parental involvement practices could be promoted in the future and trust established.

Through improved communication, parents would be informed about difficulties and problems that the school faced and they might also feel a greater part of the school's community. As a result, cultivating relationships of mutual respect and

appreciation between parents and teachers, could transform parents to becoming important school partners.

However the focus of schools should be to empower *all* parents to participate in education for the benefit of their children, regardless of their profession, education, social and cultural capital and SES background. Indeed, the PAs might increase their awareness of unwittingly excluding parents who do not participate in school boards and be persuaded that ‘uninvolved’ parents are not disinterested or indifferent about their children’s education so that, in time, they might have enough confidence to participate in schools’ activities and boards, even though not having much free time.

Schools could also develop their own common policy, strategy and vision about approaching and welcoming parents. Although the study was conducted with older primary-aged children, participants’ interviews indicated that when children were younger, teachers tended to approach parents, interacting more often with them, as well as organising a wider range of educational activities more frequently. This kind of relationship might be promoted in the older grades as well, in order to maintain parents’ interest, responsibility and attention better on their impact on their children’s academic progress and behaviour. The children who participated in the study emphasised that they tried harder to improve when their parents were involved. Hence schools by approaching parents at all the levels of education might be transformed into institutions that welcomed parents and made them feel comfortable and welcomed. A consistency in the school’s attitude is of paramount importance to ensuring that all parents

participate in the involvement process. They might then take the decision to continue being involved, feel empowered and realise the benefits of their involvement (Hoover, Dempsey and Sandler 1997). In the present state of our knowledge, there is still confusion and disagreement about which practices of involvement are important and how to obtain high participation from all families (Epstein, 2011). Wherever in the world they are located, all communities include individuals, families, groups and educational organisations who share responsibilities for children.

As noted by Epstein (2011), children, families and schools are valuable resources for their communities but currently most teachers and administrators are unprepared to work positively and productively with their students' families. Few educators enter their profession with an adequate understanding of how they can develop and maintain partnerships with families with diverse backgrounds, languages, religions, cultures, histories, social classes and other characteristics. What this study reveals is the need for preparation of new educators as well as established educational leaders, practitioners and administrators to understand and work with families and communities to support their children's education. In time, studies will be needed that help both to construct programmes to help future educators to understand the important roles that families and communities play in children's education and the impact of such programmes on future educators' knowledge, skills and attitudes.

There is no doubt that in the short time that Cyprus has been independent, the limited experience in educational policy development, as well as the large

amounts of change occurring at the same time, have been some of the factors contributing to restriction in the promotion of parental involvement. One can assume though that the intention of government to decentralise education can be aided through investing in parent and communities and in seeking to promote parental involvement effectively.

12.5 Recommendations for further research

As this chapter has emphasised, the case study was inevitably small-scale. A larger-scale study that ensured a more representative group of Cypriot parents might more reliably allow the exploration of the processes and impact of social and cultural diversity that this study has uncovered. Moreover, given the finding that the nature and quality of parental involvement changes with children's age, it will be important to gather data across the age range and at different stages of education, involving parents, teachers and students themselves. One important finding that demands further investigation is the reported variation in levels of parental involvement. This was judged in the main by parents' ability or otherwise to attend weekly school meetings, though in fact there was no evidence of low interest or aspiration in reports of parents themselves. Indeed, cultural capital has been considered as one explanation for variations in parental involvement by emphasising the roles of both schools and parents in discriminatory practices through class structures embedded in school life and home life. In order to investigate parental involvement in relation to social class, however, a more sophisticated research design would be required with a larger and more representative sample, using multi-level regression analysis. In such a

way, a wider range of parental involvement variables covering home and school activities might be employed. This would also allow the examination of possible relationships among variables both within and between Cypriot schools.

Whilst the nature of such research inevitably remains descriptive and analytical, some small-scale interventions by practitioners themselves might be envisaged that would allow specific school communities to collaborate together in seeking ways to increase the effectiveness of parental involvement in their own particular context. This could make a contribution to the knowledge-base in a different way.

As the researcher, herself a primary school teacher, attempted to work collaboratively with education policy-makers, teachers, parents and students in her study, a first step will be to provide a report of the study suitable for a various stakeholder participant groups as a means of feeding back the main findings and ascertaining their own views about taking the research forward.

A significant finding was the contrast between the implicit, yet shared expectation that parents were regarded as ultimately responsible for their children's learning and behavior and teachers' clear and explicit reluctance to increase parents' involvement in formal education. This finding could provide a useful starting point for discussion and debate with participants that questioned why this was the case and how school practices might be changed in order to

become more effective in respect of students' learning and behaviour. Topics for discussion might include:

- the nature of parental involvement for primary-aged children; homework policies;
- the possible introduction of workshops on parenting (that participants had agreed were popular);
- strategies for more actively involving parents in formal schooling to increase their understanding;
- ways of involving families when children were in trouble or difficulties;
- how family and community might contribute to events at the school (also reported as popular); and how might PAs operate to include all families better.

All of these areas emerged from participants' own contributions and could form the basis for developing a more formal home-school partnership policy and strategy. Such a way of working with individual school communities could help them to engage more actively with families and communities and at the same time, help parents to understand more about school organisation, structures, processes, curriculum and teaching approaches.

A major finding from this research was that headteachers, teachers and policy-makers had been ill-prepared to work effectively with the increasingly diverse families and communities they encountered in Cyprus. This has implications for

both initial training for new teacher recruits at the beginning of their careers and in-service training for more experienced practitioners to improve their skills and understanding of parental involvement. Central to this is the development of whole-school policies that set out what should families, schools and communities know and can do to gain mutual respect, confidence and trust in order to bring about effective learning and behavior of pupils. Indeed, an action research model of plan – act – reflect – adjust and then repeat, would be ideal for setting up the aims and content for such a programme of parental involvement that was planned and designed, implemented and evaluated. In other words, it carries its own continuous cycle of feedback that at the national policy-to-practice level is lacking. It is fitting that local and community-based research should do much to contribute to the improvement of home-school relationships and, hence become more autonomous, as policy-makers wished.

12.6 Conclusion

This chapter has revisited the key findings, discussed the main implications of the research, reported its limitations and suggested further research that could be conducted in the field. The Bowe *et al.* (1992) framework used by the current research shed light on the way that the context of practice serves as a reflection of policy text and a potential source of evaluation and feedback to the context of influence. In the meantime, the lack of interaction between contexts, means that practitioners' needs are neither identified nor fed back into the policy-making process.

There is no doubt that there is still much to be done in order to promote effective parental involvement in Cyprus at the national and local level and hence future research can make a contribution to its improvement.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1

Parental involvement in Cypriot primary schools

The aim of this questionnaire is to obtain information about the situation in Cyprus with regard to parental involvement. The questionnaire is anonymous and the information you give is completely confidential.

Parental involvement is defined as: the contribution of parents in their children's education. It could range from just one visit in the school to an active contribution in education. The present research focuses on six types of home-school relation: parenting (assist parents to understand children's learning needs), communicating, volunteering, learning at home, participation in decision making process and collaborating with community (Epstein, 1997).

Demographical Characteristics

Please indicate your answer placing a tick in the right box

1. What is your sex?

Male	
Female	

2. What is your age?

22-30	
31-40	
41-50	
51-60	

3. Years of teaching experience

1-5	
6-10	
11-15	
Over 15 years	

4. Teaching qualifications

Bachelor Degree	
Masters Degree	
Phd	

5. In which grade do you teach this year?

1st or 2nd grade	
3rd or 4th grade	
5th or 6th grade	

6. What is your position in school?

Headteacher	
Assistant Headteacher	
Teacher	

Parental involvement practices

Please describe in brief:

7. In which ways are parents involved in the education of their children in your school?

.....

.....

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.....

8. Please indicate how often you are involved in the activities presented below

(1=never, 2= almost never, 3=sometimes, 4=often, 5= very often)

When I meet parents I inform them about their children's progress	1	2	3	4	5
When I meet parents I inform them about their children's behaviour	1	2	3	4	5
In parents meetings I inform parents about their children's learning needs.	1	2	3	4	5
In parents meetings I try to obtain information about the family environment, in order to understand the family needs	1	2	3	4	5
I give guidance to parents about activities they can do at home related to the school-work	1	2	3	4	5
I ask the parents to look over their children's homework	1	2	3	4	5
I organise parents meetings at other times than the specified parents meetings, which are more suitable to parents' timetables	1	2	3	4	5
I communicate with parents who are not attending parents meetings by sending them a letter or calling them	1	2	3	4	5
I organise extracurricular events in which parents are invited to participate	1	2	3	4	5
I invite parents to come and help out in the classroom	1	2	3	4	5

Perception of teachers about parental contribution

Please describe in brief:

9. How do you think that parents should contribute to their children's education?

.....

.....

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.....

Please indicate your answer by putting a tick in the right box

10. Do you believe that the parents of minority groups give the same support to their children as the Cypriot parents?

Yes	
No	
I don't know	

11. Do you believe that the community contribution in education can benefit schools (*i.e. professionals from health services, social welfare and community development*)

Yes	
No	
I don't know	

12. Do you believe that a potential contribution of parents in the decision-making processes will benefit students' academic performance?

Yes	
No	
I don't know	

13. Please indicate to what extent you agree or disagree with the following statements

(1=strongly disagree, 2= disagree, 3= neither agree nor disagree, 4= agree, 5=strongly agree)

a.	Parents cause serious problems in schools	1	2	3	4	5
b.	Parents care about their children's academic achievements	1	2	3	4	5
c.	Parents give sufficient support to their children	1	2	3	4	5
d.	Parents are confused about the appropriate way of supporting them	1	2	3	4	5
e.	There are some parents that support their children while there are some others who do not pay attention to their children's education	1	2	3	4	5
f.	Parents coming from low socio-economical status believe that education is a job of schools only	1	2	3	4	5
g.	The parents of children that do not face any academic or behaviour problems visit the school more often than the parents of children who face serious problems	1	2	3	4	5
h.	All parents feel welcome to visit school	1	2	3	4	5

Communications

Please indicate the appropriate answer by ticking in the box. You are able to choose more than one answer

14. In which ways do you usually communicate with parents?

In parent meetings	
Attending in events organised by the P.A.	
Calling them at home	
Sending them letters	
Organising meetings in more flexible hours	
Organising extracurricular activities with students and parents	
Web-based communications (i.e. emails)	

15. Do you face any challenges in the relationship with the parents for whom Greek is not their first language?

Yes, they can't speak well Greek	
I have excellent communication with some of them but there are some other I can't communicate	
Yes, because they are not understanding the Greek educational system	
Yes, because they feel unwelcomed from the society	
No I don't have any problem	

16. Have you ever tried to use an interpreter to communicate with parents that Greek is not their first language?

Yes	
No	

If no indicate the appropriate answer

No, but sometimes I asked from their children to translate, if we can't communicate	
No, because they can communicate with me	
Indicate other.....	

Aspirations-Expectations

17. Please indicate to what extent you agree or disagree with the following statements

(1=strongly disagree, 2= disagree, 3= neither agree nor disagree, 4= agree, 5=strongly agree)

a.	The co-operation with parents is beneficial for students' progress	1	2	3	4	5
b.	Parents should participate in the governance of the school	1	2	3	4	5
c.	The parents' meetings should be scheduled based on parents' availability to attend	1	2	3	4	5
d.	I'm satisfied with the contribution of the parents in their children's education	1	2	3	4	5
e.	More extra-curricular activities involving parents should be adopted	1	2	3	4	5
f.	Parents should be more involved in their children's education.	1	2	3	4	5
g.	Communities should support schools by its resources and services	1	2	3	4	5
h.	I should communicate with parents only if their children face academic or behavioural problems	1	2	3	4	5

i.	Parents should help children at home in regard to their homework only	1	2	3	4	5
j.	It might be useful to have parents in the classroom, having the role of a teacher assistant	1	2	3	4	5

Thank you for completing this questionnaire!

Appendix 2

Élite semi-structured interview schedule

I am conducting research about home-school relationships in primary schools that focuses on the context of policy influence, policy text and practice. My research is going to investigate the practices that schools introduce to involve parents in education and takes account of stakeholders' views about the contribution of parents to schools' matters. The aim of the present interview is to gain information about policy makers' views about this matter and the policies that are currently being promoted in the primary years. The present interview aims to obtain reflections on the implementation of such policies as well as their effectiveness.

SECTION 1: BACKGROUND INFORMATION

1.1 Name of Organization/Ministry

1.2 Sex

1.3 Current position

SECTION 2: INTRODUCTION

2.1 What in your opinion are the benefits of involving parents in education?

Prompt: How are these best brought about?

2.2 How and in what ways do you believe that home and school should work together?

--

2.3 Do you believe that the participation of the parents in the leadership of the school will benefit schools?

--

2.4 Do you believe that the co-operation of school with the wider community will benefit schools?

Prompt: wider community: such as the co-operation of education with the health and social services?

--

SECTION 3 CONTEXT OF POLICY

3.1 Are there any specific policies that relate to schools' and parents' rights and responsibilities with respect to their working together?

--

3.2 Are there any existing educational policies developed with the aim of increasing the participation of parents in schools?

3.3 How would you characterise the current situation with respect to the development of educational policies related to home-school relationships in the Cypriot educational system?

3.4 The Educational Reform document reports that there is a need to *'strengthen the contribution of parents as well as the local community at the school level in order that the school will be regarded as the centre of the life in the local community'*

Do you know if there are any changes envisaged that intend to promote involvement of parents and the local community in educational matters?

3.5 What factors facilitate the change/development of parental involvement policies?

3.6 What factors inhibit the change/development of parental involvement policies?

3.7 In the strategic plan of the education of 2007 (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2007) it is reported that there is a need for an increase in the active involvement of parents in schooling. What is your view about this? Prompt: How will this come about?

3.8 Recently there is an increase in the numbers of immigrants coming to Cyprus. What are the particular challenges to schools in welcoming the contribution of these families into the school community?

3.9 How is participation of the immigrant parents facilitated?

3.10 Is there and/or should there be any mean of monitoring the implementation of home-schools policies in schools?

SECTION 4: CONTEXT OF PRACTICE

4.1 What is your view about the typical practices that teachers introduce, to involve parents in education? Prompt: Are they effective or not, do you think?

4.2 How do you think home-school relationships could be improved?

4.3 Do you think that schools should adopt special practices to welcome/support parents whose mother tongue is not Greek? (Prompt: If yes, what kind of practices?)

SECTION 5: EDUCATIONAL REFORM COMMITTEE

5.1 Why have you decided to include a section about the parental involvement in Cyprus in the educational reform?

5.2 Do you foresee any difficulties/barriers to the implementation of the recommendation of educational reform committee about involving parent in education?

Prompt: for example, potential resistance from teachers?

If yes:

5.3 How would you best overcome these challenges?

Thanks for your time and your participation!

Appendix 3

TEACHERS' INTERVIEWS SCHEDULE

I am conducting research about home-school relationships in primary schools focused on the policy-to-practice context. I should like to investigate the practices that schools introduce to involve parents in education, as well as consider a range of stakeholders' views about the importance of the contribution of parents in schools' matters. The aim of my interview is to gain information about the practices that teachers introduce to involve parents in education and their perceptions about a variety of aspects related to the participation of parents in education.

SECTION 1: BACKGROUND INFORMATION

1.1 Name of school

1.2 Sex

Male	Female
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

1.3 School Catchment Area

Rural ☐ Urban ☐ Suburban ☐

1.4 Years of Working Experience

1-5 years ☐ 6-10 years ☐ 11-20 years ☐ More than 20 years ☐

1.5 Position

Teacher ☐ Assistant Head Teacher ☐ Head Teacher ☐

1.6 Qualifications

Bachelor Degree ☐ Masters Degree ☐ Phd ☐ Other ☐

SECTION 2: VIEWS AND PRACTICES

2.1 Could you tell me how you understand the term ‘parental involvement?’

2.2 How would you say that parents and teachers do typically work together?

2.3 What roles, responsibilities/rights and duties do parents have in schools would you say?

2.4 In what ways do home and school best work together for the benefit of children’s education, do you think?

2.5 Are you satisfied with the contribution that parents generally make to school life and the education of their children? Prompt: Why or why not?

2.6 Over a typical school year, how frequently would you communicate with parents and what would be the typical topics of communication?

2.7 What results do you expect from these communications?

2.8 What are the typical modes of communication you use over a school year?
(Written communication or face-to-face exchanges)

2.9 What written information do schools normally supply to parents about the school and their pupils? (Prompt: policies, practices and teaching methods?)

2.10 Do you believe that cooperation between teachers and parents benefits students' achievements?

2.11 How would you say that teachers and school typically characterize parents?

2.12 How (if at all) do parents contribute to pupils' behavior and discipline within the school?

2.13 Do you believe that parents feel generally welcomed in schools? Why or why not?

2.14 Do you have minority parents (whose mother tongue is not Greek) at this school?

2.15 Are there particular challenges associated with establishing good relationships with minority parents and working together with them as partners in their child/ren's schooling? Why or Why not?

2.16 Is it easy to establish good working relationships with most parents?

2.17 Can you describe some of your good experiences?

2.18 Can you describe some experience that has not been so good?

SECTION 3: ASPIRATIONS-EXPECTATIONS

3.1 Do beginning teachers need training in skills' development/experience in working with parents, do you think?

If yes

3.2 What training would be helpful? Prompt: why?

3.3 How would you feel if parents were more involved in decision-making processes and the leadership of the school?

3.4 Do you believe that there is a need to include more extra-curricular activities involving parents? Prompt: why or why not?

3.5 Do you believe that the participation of parents in the class in a volunteer role, as a teaching assistant, can benefit students?

Prompt: What is your view about this?

3.6 Do you believe that the wider local community (such as the co-operation of education with the health and social services) has a role in schooling that can be of benefit?

SECTION 4: CONTEXT OF POLICY INFLUENCE AND TEXT PRODUCTION

4.1. Are there any policies with regard to the home-school relationships?

If yes:

4.2 In which ways are you informed about school policies with regard to home-school relationships?

4.3 The recommendation of educational reform committee was that one of the goals of teachers should be:

‘ the development of good relationships with parents in order to be regarded as important partners and be involved in the educational process effectively’.

Are you familiar with this?

If yes:

4.4 What do you think about this?

4.5 Have you changed your relationships with the parents since hearing about this recommendation?

4.6 Have you received any instructions from anyone about the ways you would introduce such a policy? Prompt: from the head teacher, guidance from the Ministry, for instance?

4.7 Has there been any evaluation and impact of the implementation of such policies that you are aware of?

Thank you for your time and participation!

Appendix 4

PARENTS' INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

I am conducting research about home-school relationships in primary schools. My research is going to investigate the practices of schools to involve parents in education, including a range of stakeholders' views about the importance of the contribution of parents in schools' matters. The aim of the present interview is to gain information about your experience of parental involvement within the educational system of Cyprus. Particularly I will ask you to consider the way you think that parents support their children's education, their relationship with the school as well as their involvement in schooling more generally. In summary, the present interview aims to obtain information about your perceptions as parents with regard to a variety of aspects related to the participation of parents in the education.

SECTION 1: BACKGROUND INFORMATION

1.1 Sex

Male	Female

1.2 Age and sex of Child/ren

--

1.3 Cypriot citizen or non-Cypriot citizen (please state nationality)

--

1.4 Job occupation/profession

--

1.5 Highest level of education (prompt: how many years school; college/university education)

--

SECTION 2: PRACTICES, VIEWS AND EXPERIENCES

2.1 In your experience, how do parents and teachers typically work together?

Prompt: what roles responsibilities/rights and duties do parents have in schools (if any)?

2.2 What information do schools supply to parents about the school?

Prompt: about policies, practices and teaching methods?

2.3 What information do schools supply to parents on progress of their children?

2.4 How would you characterize your relationship with the teacher of your child/ren's class/es?

2.5 Do you believe that the close relationship and the co-operation between home and school does benefit students' achievements?

2.6 Are you satisfied with the level of your involvement in school's practices?

2.7 What are the facilitating factors influencing your involvement?

2.8 What are the main barriers for further involvement?

2.9 How could the relationship be improved (if at all)?

2.10 Do you feel made welcome to visit the school?

2.11 In what ways and over what matters do you typically interact with schools/teachers?

2.12 Where do you see responsibility for the education of children in terms of schools and parents?

2.13 Do you supervise your children's homework?

Prompt: How often?

2.14 Do you feel confident enough to help your children with their homework regularly? Can you say more about that?

2.15 In which other ways do you support your child's learning, development, progress?

2.16 Are you a member of the P.A?

Prompt: if yes, what are your roles and the responsibilities as a member of P.A

2.17 Are you invited by school or P.A. to attend any other events?

Prompt: if yes, what kind?

2.18 How would you characterize relationships between schools and parents?

2.19 How do parents contribute to pupils' behavior and discipline within the school, if at all?

SECTION 3: ASPIRATIONS-EXPECTATIONS

3.1 Do you believe that a contribution of parents to the schools' decision-making process as well as the leadership of the school could be beneficial?

3.2 Do you believe that there is a need of including more extra-curricular activities involving parents?

3.3 Do you believe that the participation of parents in the class in a volunteer form can benefit students' achievements?

Prompt: as teachers' assistants

3.4 Do you believe that a potential collaboration between the school and the community; by working together with other services in the community, like health and social services can benefit schools?

Prompt: If yes: Why?

SECTION 4: MINORITY GROUP PARENTS

4.1 When did you come to reside in Cyprus?

4.2 Was it difficult at first to overcome barriers to communication with the school and teachers, if Greek was not your first language?

4.3 Who (if anyone) helped you with this?

--

4.4 Are you satisfied with the school's help and support for you and your child?

--

Thank you for your time and participation!

Appendix 5

STUDENTS' GROUP INTERVIEW

I am investigating the way your home and the school work together to help kids get on better in school. I am examining parents', teachers' and students' views and feelings about the participation of parents in schools' matters. The aim of talking to you now is to find out what you think and how you feel about the way that your parents best work with school to help children/kids get on well in schools.

SECTION 1: BACKGROUND INFORMATION

1.1 Name

1.2 Sex

1.3 Age

1.4 Nationality: Cypriot/Non-Cypriot (please state)

1.5 Parents' Jobs (occupation/profession)

SECTION 2: PRACTICES, VIEWS AND ASPIRATIONS

2.1 In which ways do your parents and teachers keep in touch with each other?

Prompt: Talk to one another? Communicate in writing about your progress or other school's matters?

2.2 How often do your parents meet your teacher, to discuss your progress, would you say e.g. termly, half-yearly, annually?

2.3 Should your parents meet your teacher more often? Prompt: Why/ why not?

2.4 Do you believe that if your parents and teachers worked more closely with schools this could benefit your school work (improve your grades)?

2.5 Do you believe that if your parents and teachers worked more closely together this could influence your school behaviour (being a better pupil—keeping school rules)?

2.6 How (in what ways) do parents help you to become a better student?

2.7 Do you think that your parents feel welcome (happy, comfortable) to visit the school?

2.8 How do you feel when your parents visit the school? Prompt: Do you like it when they meet? Why do you feel that way, do you think?

2.9 Do you believe that learning and teaching is the schools' job only or is it the parents' business too?

2.10 Do your parents check your homework? Is it useful?

2.11 Do you talk to your parents about your school work?

2.12 Are they interested to hear about your school work?

2.13 How do your parents react when you don't get good grades at school? (e.g. are they disappointed, disapproving or otherwise displeased)

2.14 Do you believe that parents should get more involved in what happens at school? Prompt: e.g. visit classes, share their knowledge and experience with students, help teachers in the organisation of events

2.15 How would you feel if the school was creating other extra activities (like excursions, camping) that involved parents?

2.16 Do you believe that parents can help schools (head teachers and teachers) make decisions about what goes on in school?

2.17 Do you believe that parents could help you in a lesson in the class (be a teacher's assistant/volunteer)?

Thanks for your time and participation!

