

UNIVERSITATEA "BABEŞ - BOLYAI"
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DOCTORAL THESIS SUMMARY



**The Partnership between Teachers and Parents in a Primary School in Israel: an
Experimental Educational Programme based on Dialogue**

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I. INTRODUCTION

Key words:

I.1 Parents - school partnership

The primary theoretical base that binds parents – school collaboration's influence on a child's achievements and adaptability is Bronfenbrenner's (1986) ecological developmental model. The model attributes the child's growth environment with great effect to his development. As the different systems surrounding the child provide him with ample opportunities for learning and development, his development will be improved (Downer & Myers, 2010). In addition, Epstein's theory deals with correlating influences in the pupil's life and the importance of the partnership between home, school and community, integrating educational, social and psychological perspectives (Epstein, 1995, 2001). Initial responsibility for children's development and their education lies with the parents (Cory, 2005). The 1948 declaration of human rights endowed parents the right to influence their children's education (Beatie, 1985). There is a consensus and an understanding regarding parental involvement in education. However, this almost never happens (Sheridan & Kratochwill, 1992). School and home cannot function as two separate, independent units, as cooperation must take place (Horowitz, 2000; Klein & Yavlin, 2008). The Israeli Ministry of Education had stated that teachers and parents must cooperate (Troan, 2004).

A UNICEF research found that parent-school partnership is necessary in creating a school culture that revolves around caring (Noddings, 1992). Parent-school partnership is defined as a process of constant negotiation between the two systems, by which both sides learn to work together for the child's benefit and well-being

within the educational institution (Amit, 2005; Stott & Tafford, 2000). Continuous dialogue is required to achieve solid partnership between parents and teachers.

I.2 Shared educational dialogue

Shared educational dialogue was presented by Buber (1959) who stated that the human being is an entity realized only through dialogue. Dialogue is viewed as a duet, novel creation. A crucial prerequisite for the establishment of a dialogue is to view the “you” at the center and not the “I”. Exploration and discovery must be shared democratically and evenly. A dialogue enables a shared discovery of reality and of new insights. Carl Rogers (1973) viewed dialogue as a central communication channel in education, a continuous present link between past and future. Bestowing freedom of choice and autonomy on a pupil will create a creative, daring, useful, contributing and meaningful person to society and its environment. Naveh (2008) claims that the curriculum, the teacher and the pupils are the dialogue-sharing elements in the classroom. This dialogue will enable the establishment of a frame of reference within the classroom (Alpert, 2006, 2008) which is based in real, non-judgmental attention, and upon a conditioning that brings out the best in pupils while setting a personal example for sharing and mutual trust. Children need parents and teachers that speak their language and touch their hearts. The familial narrative, structured within learning and education, is the greenhouse in which meaningful children are cultivated (Cory, 2005).

I.3 Familial narrative

A narrative is a life story. The chaining of events on a timeline makes them into a meaningful plot (Bruner, 1987). Through storytelling we bestow meaning to ourselves and the world around us (Bruner, 1986; Polkinghorne, 1988). We ‘write’ ourselves through our life story (Freeman, 1993); create our own identity (McAdams, 1993) and achieve a sense *Dialogue as a Bridge to Create Coop* of individual personality (Alasuutary, 1997). Through them we create familial, organizational, communal and national identities. The narrative both tells and structures our story. The narrative holds massive power in shaping reality, directing behaviour and effectively guiding individuals and groups’ lives (Spector-Marzel, 2010). Families’ stories and memories are among the tools that can change perspective on families. These are the basis to create sympathetic and empathetic communication.

I.4 Israel’s experimental schools

For the past 15 years, the experiments and initiative department of the Israeli Ministry of Education has been an enterprise at educational innovation. The department acts as an operational framework for conducting organizational and pedagogical experiments in Israeli educational institutes. Activity is based upon discovering successful, novel initiatives. The department employs a rationale and a strategy of change, attempting to encourage and cultivate systematic, coherent efforts to innovate and alter the face of education. The 100 experimental schools form a leading, exclusive group (Chen, 2006).

1.5 The experiment

Experiment title: "From my fathers' home to the future of my dreams". Experiment rationale: To utilize family stories as a basis for learning basic, significant values.

Experiment presuppositions:

1. Acknowledging family and school as educating, influencing factors.
2. Acknowledging the families' and the school's autonomy, responsibility and commitment towards children's education.
3. The school's role is to provide the composition of factors that influence children's education, including the family.
4. Stories are among the best educational tools: "To encourage parents and teachers to tell children stories about their lives and encourage children to tell parents and teachers stories about their own lives. Exposing these human facets can grant children something all the money in the world cannot buy: themselves, their life story, their experiences and time with their parents" (Cory, 2005).

Guiding principles

1. The school will incorporate families in learning in a significant position.
2. The school will educate pupils in affinity to their own and their families' culture and values.

Operational principles

1. Assuming responsibility over school-family dialogue and communication.
2. Integrating pupils', teachers' and parents' personal stories as a central tool for the inter-generational conveyance of cultures, values and moral-social perceptions.
3. Integrating the stories in an authentic, relevant manner in the curriculum.

1.6 Joint development of "My Fathers' Home" curriculum

The experiment's leading staff has developed the curriculum while cooperating with parents, teachers and pupils by way of action research (Elliott, 1995). The curriculum

involved activities for teachers, pupils and their parents that resulted in personal and familial life stories. The development process included four stages: planning, execution, reflection and modification. The reason was that the experiment was focused on the study of an authentic activity, namely, creating a joined space for home and family, as it takes place in the everyday routine of school and family. Relating to emotional personal and familial facets incurs sympathy in the learner (Saruk, 2003; Cory, 2005; Bruner, 2004). Parents convey their personal stories to their children and thus bring about an emotional and intellectual development. Listening to families' stories assist homeroom teachers to connect the families and the school in a joint course that revolves around children's education (Saruk, 2003). Processing the stories, as they are told within the family, has a great impact in shaping the child's life. This is why it is imperative to grant stories a large space within the school's learning environment. To promote parents' cooperation, the process of developing and constructing the curriculum (Levine, 2000) was conducted while maintaining a continuous narrative dialogue between all parties: teachers, parents and pupils. The narrative dialogue was culminated in a process of a shared search for knowledge significance and structuring. The curriculum involves constant work with parents, integrating them in task completion, locating stories and telling them and active participation in class. Each age group of the 1st to 6th grades studies a different subject in the "My Fathers' Home" class: name selection, parents/grandparents immigration stories, musical roots, how parents first met each other, and other subjects such as responsibility and authority. Thus a new dialogue is created between children and parents, children and teachers and also children within themselves through stories and shared tasks with parents. Teachers are exposed to a great variety of the pupils' families' features, thus enriching their ability to communicate and converse.

II THEORETICAL RATIONALE

II.1 Theoretical underpinning

The theoretical foundation for this study included the ecological-development model of Bronfenbrenner (1979), the dialogical perception of Buber (1959), the theory of Noddings (1992) concerning the value of concern and the theories and models of parent-teacher cooperation of Corey (2005) that related to family narratives as a

structural part of learning and education, forming a hothouse in which to raise meaningful children with meaning.

This study examined the influence of an attempt to construct a parents-school partnership through an experimental learning programme* entitled: "My parents' home". This experimental programme was employed to develop a partnership between parents and the school through a dialogue based on family narratives.

Foucault (2003) indicated that power is a primary characteristic of any system, and this may be expressed in power struggles and inequality. For this reason partnership between the different component bodies within a system is very necessary. According to Churchman (1988) a 'partnership' is a blend between cooperation and participation. Partnership reflects the initiatives of both sides, determining the equality of their rights and duties within the partnership. Thus, to form an effective partnership, it is necessary to create cooperation between the parties involved, cooperation being the work together of two parties with different characteristics to achieve common tasks and goals.

Communication and cooperation between parents and the school is an issue that has been studied intensively for many years. Some countries have passed legislation to organise and encourage these relationships. In Israel little attention has been devoted to the issue. However, according to Bronfenbrenner's ecological model, if the different systems in the child's educational environment cooperate and act in harmony and synergy, the child's status will improve and there is greater probability that the child will be able to develop appropriately. The opposite is also assumed by the model to be true: if the school and families do not cooperate and act in harmony, the child's development may be harmed or hindered.

Like Epstein, Noddings (1992, 1995) indicates different strategies for the formation of a school culture within which concern for oneself and for the 'other' serves as the central axis. Epstein's model (1992, 1995) that considers family and community empowerment as powerful values, is also fed by the educational perceptions of Noddings (1996), who proposed a balanced view of educational goals that defines

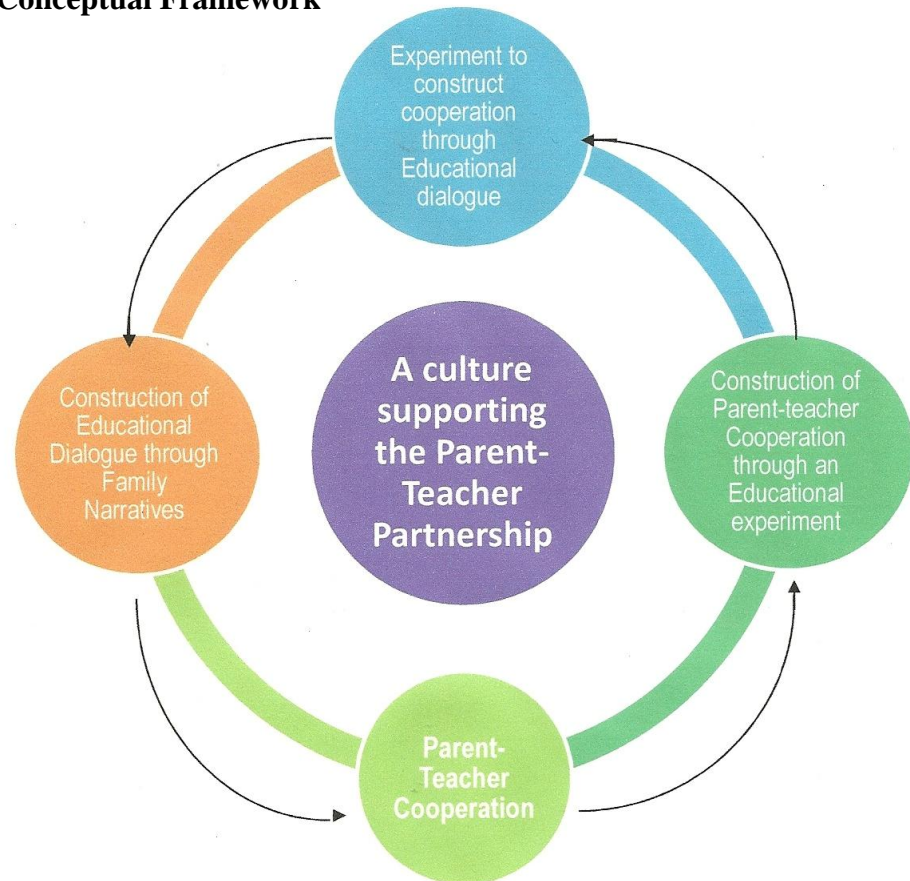
caring as concern for others combined with fostering of the self. Caring is the core centre of this approach and includes: the expression of concern and practical responsibility towards others, commitment to be attentive to others and willingness to respond effectively to their legitimate needs. The 'other' is seen as a valuable person that should be treated with respect and a worthy object for caring (Thayer-Bacon, 1997). According to Noddings this approach also involves acceptance of the uniqueness of the 'other'. This does not involve any relinquishment of responsibility for appropriate behaviour and achievements, rather these principles form the fundamental basis for the establishment and maintenance of a humane system of relations on which the education system can be constructed (Noddings, 1984). This is what Noddings calls the 'Ethics of Concern', reflecting abstract universal rules in the field in relationships with others.

This thesis describes the experimental process employed to create a parent-teacher partnership in the 'Alonim' primary school through an *educational experiment in a development town in Northern Israel. The department of experimental schools serves as an operative framework for the performance of organisational and pedagogic experiments in educational institutions in Israel. The school population included Israeli-born parents, parents who had immigrated from the former USSR and from Ethiopia. This is a middle class population that sees their children's education as a supreme value.

The school initiated the experiment and directed it. In order to actualise the experiment the school attempted to form a parent-teacher coalition based on the belief that school and the family are both influential educating factors and the relationship between them is inseparable.

II.2 Conceptual framework

Figure 1: The Conceptual Framework



The graphic description given in Figure II.1 below shows how such cooperation works through reciprocal relations – in the form of interlocking wheels: the cyclic motion of each wheel also generates the rotation of the wheel beside it and depends on its rotation for its own movement. Together they create movement and energy. This model is consistent with Bronfenbrenner’s ecological model, which sees the reciprocal relations between the different entities in the child’s environment as the inter-dependent cog wheels that drive each other (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

The present research employed a case study focussing on the development of the experimental learning programme: 'My parents' home' by the studied school. The research accompanied the parents and teachers during the programme examined whether any changes occurred in their attitudes and perceptions concerning their mutual relations as a result of the experiment. The researcher is employed as the Head of the Centre for Parents and Family in the "Gordon Academic Teaching College" in Haifa, Israel.

II.3 The Gap in Knowledge

Many studies have shown that the school and home cannot behave as if they were separate units (Epstein, 1995) and that integration and cooperation between them is essential (Crowson and Boyd, 1993; Epstein, 1996). There is a broad scholarly consensus concerning the importance of parents' involvement in their children's education in school and its significant contribution for their children, and for parents, teachers and the school in general (Epstein, 1992; Horowitz, 2000; Caplan, Perkins-Gough and McKinnon, 2002; Klein and Yavlon, 2008). However, despite the recognition of the importance of involvement and participation of parents in children's education, there is much evidence concerning the difficulties that arise in the actualisation of this relationship.

However, there is no substantial legislation concerning the parent-education system relationship in current Israeli law (Greenbaum and Fried, 2011) and it receives varying consideration by different departments and units of the Ministry of Education. There is no separate unit responsible for determining and developing this area of interest, so that there is often a gap between the Ministry's declarations of intent and principles and what happens in practice.

A study published by UNICEF conducted by Osher, Kelly, Tolani-Brown, Shores and Chen (2009) indicates that the parents-school relationship that is a central characteristic of schools all over the world should be defined as 'child-friendly'.

Despite these declarations there is little discourse concerning operative methods to create and maintain this relationship. This is the gap in knowledge that the research attempted to fill by creating a learning and teaching experiment integrated within the school's regular learning programme that would construct educational dialogue

between parents and teachers and help to establish cooperation between these two educational entities, establishing parent-teacher-pupil cooperation as a permanent value as part of the school's daily activity. The underlying assumption of this study is that this value, like the value of eating correctly, maintaining physical fitness and health should be introduced into each class, as a permanent feature, enlarging the range of consideration and the communicative repertoire of both school and family to include the dimensions of attention and interest out of mutual concern.

The present study therefore examined the implementation of parent-teacher cooperation¹ through a dialogue relating to family narratives. The research focussed on the contribution of empathy and concern, as expressed within the family life stories, to tighten the joint parent-teacher cooperation and responsibility for the child's benefit.

II.4 The Significance of the Research

The research is significant because it relates to an innovative experiment that attempts to cope with the complex issue of parent-teacher relations and to construct an essential partnership between these two entities. Underlying the research goal is the belief that personal and concerned dialogue that comes from the heart and is directed to the heart of others can have a beneficial influence on interpersonal relations and improve reciprocal caring and concern.

III RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

III.1 Research Goals, Research Questions and Hypotheses

The research goals were

1. To examine the change in parents' perceptions concerning parent-teacher cooperation as a result of the project.
 2. To examine similarities and differences between parents' and teachers' perceptions concerning parent-teacher cooperation as a result of the project.
-

The research questions

The main research question was: Did the “My Parents’ Home” programme, based on educational dialogue concerning family narratives, improve cooperation between parents, teachers and pupils?

Specific research questions were:

1. How will parental involvement in school related activities and parents' and teachers' attitudes toward parental involvement, change as a result of participation in the "My Parents' Home" programme?
2. How will parent-teacher daily cooperation be perceived as a result of participation in the "My Parents' Home" programme?
3. How will the contribution of parent-teacher cooperation (to children, parents, and teachers), as a result of participation in the "My Parents' Home" programme, be perceived by parents and teachers?
4. Are the perceptions of parental involvement in school related activities, attitudes toward parental involvement in school related activities, parent-teacher daily cooperation, and the contribution of parent-teacher cooperation to the children, parents, and teachers interrelated?

The research hypotheses

Following the implementation of the “My Parents’ Home” programme, based on educational dialogue concerning family narratives, that aimed to improve dialogue between parents, teachers and pupils, in the “Alonim” primary school, the following research hypotheses were constructed:

The research hypothesis asserted that:

As a result of the implementation of the “My Parents’ Home” programme, based on educational dialogue concerning family narratives, that aimed to improve dialogue between parents, teachers and pupils, parent-teacher-child cooperation will improve.

Specific hypotheses were:

1. Parental involvement in school related activities will be perceived as higher and parents' and teachers' positive attitudes toward parent-teacher cooperation will be stronger among parents and teachers in the research group than in the control group.
2. The extent of actual parent-teacher daily cooperation will be perceived as higher among parents and teachers in the research group than in the control group.
3. The contribution of parent-teacher cooperation (to children, parents, and teachers) will be perceived as higher among parents and teachers in the research group than in the control group.
4. Positive correlations will be found between parental involvement in school related activities, attitudes toward parental involvement in school related activities, parent-teacher daily cooperation, and the contribution of parent-teacher cooperation to children, parents, and teachers.

III.2 Research variables

Dependent variables:

1. The level of Parental involvement in school related activities
2. Attitudes of parents and teachers toward parental involvement in school related activities.
3. The level of Parent-teacher daily cooperation
4. The contribution of parent-teacher cooperation, as a result of participation in the programme, to children, parents and teachers.

Independent variable:

Research Group: with the application of the programme “My Parents’ Home” in the “Alonim” primary school, based on educational dialogue concerning family narratives, versus control group.

Dependent variable	Methods and Research tools
Parental involvement in school related activities	Quantitative: questionnaire. Qualitative: interview, focus group.
Attitudes toward parental involvement in school related activities	Quantitative: questionnaire. Qualitative: interview, focus group.
Parent-teacher daily cooperation	Quantitative: questionnaire. Qualitative: interview, focus group.
The contribution of parent-teacher cooperation to children, parents and teachers	Quantitative: questionnaire. Qualitative: interview, focus group.

III.3 The research paradigm, strategy and method

The research plan began with decisions regarding the choice of a paradigmatic and theoretical foundation for the research and definition of the research goals. The research strategy and the method for data collection and analysis were then selected, deciding which method would be preferred as the main method and how the findings should be presented (Creswell, 2003).

The chosen research paradigm a positivist qualitative paradigm was selected, reflecting the belief that social structuring creates multiple realities, which are not objective, so that they cannot be explained or described according to simple linear cause-and-effect relationships (Guba and Lincoln, 1981) and need elucidation through the opinions and perceptions of those who experience these realities.

The chosen research strategy was: Mixed Methods – Qualitative and Quantitative

The chosen research method was a case study. The school Alonim is the case.

These choices are now described in greater detail:

III.4 Mixed methods research

In the last two decades there has been a growing tendency to integrate the use of different research methods and analyses into a single organized approach with specific principles and characteristics known as 'combined methods' or 'mixed methods'. This approach offers a broad variety of tools and viewpoints and methods for interpretation of qualitative research, but is also challenging and stimulates questions. Mixed-methods research is defined as the simultaneous or sequential data-collection with both qualitative and quantitative methods in one study (Creswell et al., 2005)

The research employed the following data collection tools:

1. Questionnaires distributed to two groups of parents in the Alonim primary school (research group) and in the Oranim primary school (control group) and two groups of teachers in the Alonim primary school (research group) and in the Oranim primary school (control group).
2. Interviews with teachers and parent from Alonim primary school (research group)

3. Two focus-groups in the Alonim primary school: one with parents and one with teachers.

III.5 The Research Procedure

The Sample

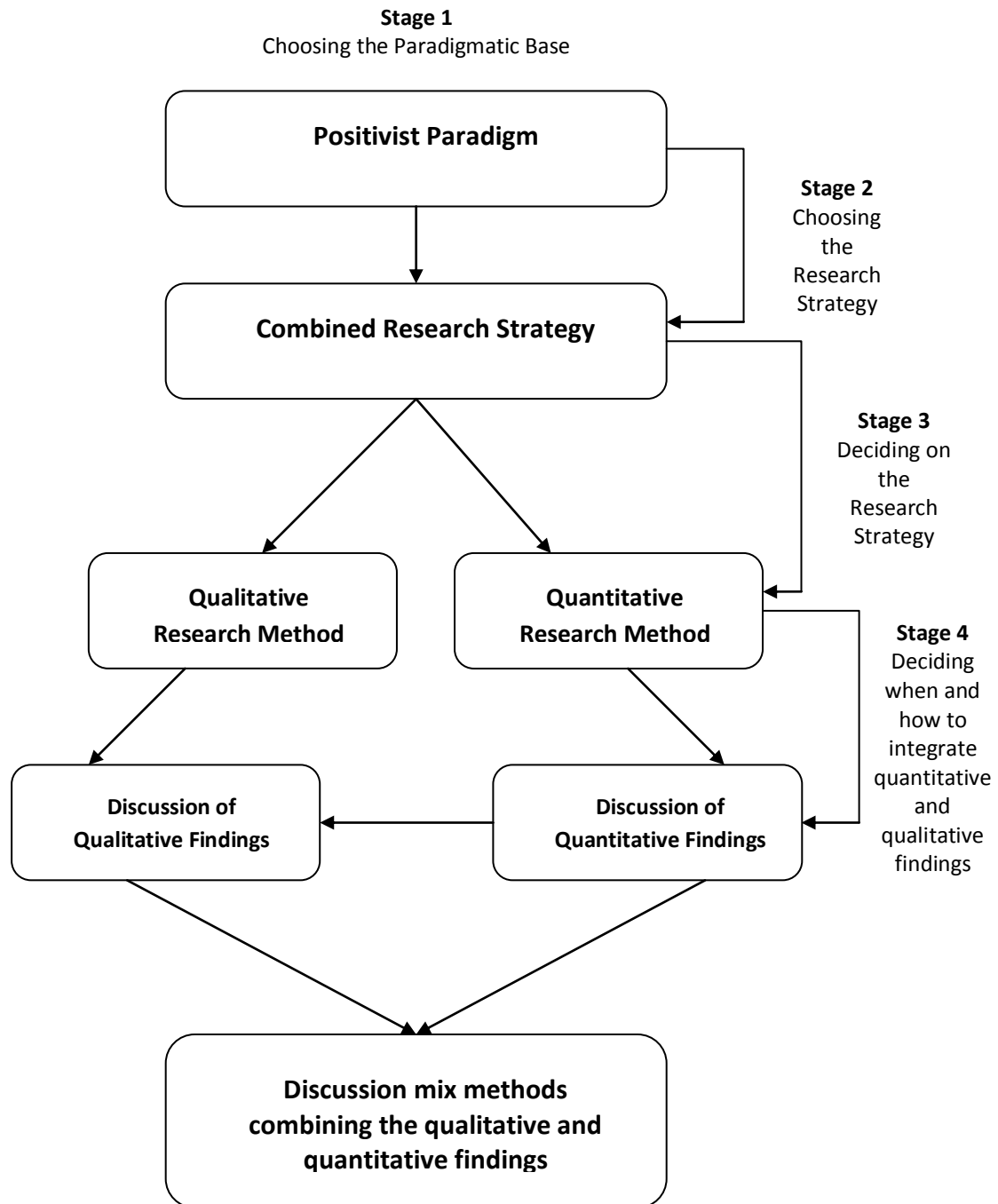
The sample was selected from several circles:

3. Teachers and parents who were given roles in the experiment conducted in the “Alonim” school.
4. Teachers and parents who had no role in the experiment but participated in the research in the “Alonim” school.
5. Teachers and parents from the control group who had no connection with the experiment in the “Alonim” school.
6. **Table IV.1: Distribution of the questionnaires’, interviews’ and focus group participants**
- 7.

	The "Alonim" School"		The "Oranim" School	
	Teachers	Parents	Teachers	Parents
Questionnaire participants	26	83	28	52
Interview participants	8	8		
Focus group participants	8	8		

III.6 The research design

Figure III.1: The Research Design



IV FINDINGS

IV.1 General Summary of all Qualitative and Quantitative Findings

IV.1.1 The First Research Hypothesis

In the quantitative analyses:

The first research hypothesis claimed that parental involvement in school related activities will be perceived as higher and parents' and teachers' positive attitudes toward parent-teacher cooperation will be stronger among parents and teachers in the research group than in the control group.

In the quantitative analysis this hypothesis was confirmed to a slight extent only with regard to active participation in different learning activities.

IV.1.2 The Second Research Hypothesis

The second research hypothesis claimed that the extent of actual parent-teacher daily cooperation will be perceived as higher among parents and teachers in the research group than in the control group.

In the quantitative analysis

This hypothesis was partially confirmed for the social dimension and the overall grade for cooperation according to the parents' perceptions.

In the qualitative analysis

It was found that most of the teachers and the parents in the research group saw cooperation as a positive and essential factor. Although they indicated difficulties involved, but this did not negatively affect their understanding concerning the necessity for cooperation and their willingness to form such a partnership.

IV.1.3 The Third Research Hypothesis

The third research hypothesis claimed that contribution of parent-teacher cooperation (to children, parents and teachers) will be perceived as higher among parents and teachers, in the research group than in the control group.

In the quantitative analysis

This hypothesis was not confirmed.

In the qualitative analysis

It was found that the teachers and parents had positive perceptions of their shared educational dialogue. They saw it as a means to bring them closer, to create reciprocal empathy and concern, improving communication and reciprocal relation

and influencing the children's quality of life in the school both academically and socially. They saw this dialogue as a bridge to assist the construction of parent-teacher cooperation.

IV.1.4 The Fourth Research Hypothesis

The fourth research hypothesis claimed that positive correlations will be found between parental involvement in school related activities, attitudes toward parental involvement in school related activities , parent-teacher daily cooperation, and the contribution of parent-teacher cooperation to children, parents and teachers.

In the quantitative analysis

This hypothesis was confirmed to a large extent. Most of the correlations between parental cooperation, attitudes towards parental participation, the existence of parent-teacher cooperation and perception of the contribution of cooperation to the parent-teacher partnership, were found to be positive and significant, especially for the parents' sample, and slightly less for the teachers' sample. In general, no correlation was found between cooperation and the evaluations of the children's academic and social achievements.

In the qualitative analysis

It was found that the work with the family narratives reinforced teachers' and parents' positive attitudes toward the cooperation between them. The familiarity created by the family narratives broadened the viewpoint of both sides and enabled them to recognise each other in a more personal, considerate and sensitive way. The pupils, parents and teachers connected to their identities and their roots and were able to feel that they were meaningful human beings.

V CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

V.1 Theoretical conclusions

The research synthesized these theoretical foundations, taking them one small step further by attempting to implement a worldview of concerned dialogue to produce cooperation between the different entities in the child's environment through an experimental programme based on family narratives.

The research found that a combination of two tools: dialogue and family narrative, broadened the scope of the connection between the family and school and promoted a cooperative partnership between them. The approach that guided the use of these tools did not focus on achievement and is not defined as purposeful (to improve grades and behaviour), and this is in line with the underlying theoretical foundations described above. This is the implementation of a humanistic dialogical approach, acting as a lever to engender a good atmosphere in which all the stakeholders in the educational enterprise can grow and educate the children.

The research findings revealed that conscious, directed and guided implementation of the basic skills of communication, listening, concern, interest and curiosity could create a culture of good cooperation that would cradle the children, making things easier for parents and teachers and improving the most important and central stage in the life of the children, the long years that they spend in the education system. This was a small and modest experiment to implement and extend the theories considered in the theoretical framework one step forwards towards practical implementation. The insights of this study add new tools to the existing ideas and models that attempt to create improved cooperation and communication between parents and teachers. The addition of further tools and their implementation increases understanding and consciousness concerning the parent-teacher relationship and its implications.

V.2 Practical Implications

The "Alonim" experimental school tried to construct cooperation with the parents based on a concept of joint responsibility. This case study indicated that there was almost no development of leadership and direction by parents in the construction of the cooperation and its operation.

A gap was created between the intentions and expectations of the school's teachers and head-teacher who initiated the creation of the cooperation and the willingness and dedication of the parents to participate in the construction of this process. While the parents felt that the teachers were investing serious efforts to bond them to the school experience and their children's learning process, the teachers were focused on their high expectations, and so they felt that the parents' cooperation was insufficient.

It can be assumed that this gap stems from the fact that the operative plan for the construction of cooperation did not provide sufficient response to the need for communication mechanisms, informing, bonding and enlistment of the parents for the process. Even during the structured conscious process of constructing cooperation with the parents, the school continued to function as the initiator, leader and manager. A process of change of the magnitude of construction of cooperation necessitates far broader system preparation than existed in this case. The teachers had not learnt how to create and maintain this cooperation either before, towards or during the performance of the experimental programme.

The insight that arises is that when a change process such as the creation of cooperation is planned, it is important to consider and take responsibility for the entire process, from the planning level until the performance methods in great detail, beginning with the definition of the necessary conditions and infrastructure, through the creation of suitable conditions and the performance, and the creation of control and measurement mechanisms that will accompany the process, leading to appropriate change and improvement.

It is suggested that this programme may be applied in other schools, whether in Israel or abroad. Each teacher, educator or school head-teacher could decide to replicate the dialogue with parents concerning the family narratives at any learning stage. The windows that were opened with these tools allowed the family to exhibit their family album and to present it as part of the learnt theoretical material in class. The potential for these tools is enormous; everything depends on the imagination and creativity of the teachers and their belief or insights that relations between school and the parents can develop into positive assisting cooperation.

One of the insights emerging from this study is that the constant presence of the parents within their children's learning experience is an essential component for the education of their children in school.

A general recommendation that stems from this study is that a body in the form of a national state authority should be established to be responsible for school-parent cooperation at the level of the education system and on the local level with representatives responsible for this issue in schools and nurseries.

V.3 Recommendations for future research

In respect to managerial aspects: further research could investigate which mechanisms and rules are required to establish regular continuous cooperation with parents and to examine the influence of such cooperation over time on teachers, parents and pupils.

To conclude: this study showed that when both teachers and parents believe in the importance of cooperation and the means for the implementation of this cooperation are available through personal and humane dialogue – almost all the parents and teachers will feel that they are meaningful participants in this process and will take part in the cooperation. In this way it is possible to instil and assimilate a culture of parent-teacher cooperation in the school.

V.4 Contribution to knowledge

This research contributes to knowledge by filling the gap in knowledge regarding a school culture of partnership between parents and schools. The research contributed to theoretical knowledge by proposing insights regarding the ways in which parents and schools can create a partnership around an experimental curriculum that enhanced communication and an on going dialogue between parents, teachers and school management.

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