

## Parental Involvement: Definition and Outcomes

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**Abstract.** The purpose of this study was to seek a definition of the concept of parental involvement and to examine the relationship that may exist between school achievement and specific parental involvement activities. Data were collected from 852 parents of sixth-grade students of both genders. It was found that the involvement of parents in their children's educational process is a complex behavior that may take different forms, not all of which are related to the child's school achievement. The following six types of parental involvement were identified through factor analysis: learning at home, volunteering and decision making at school, and four different parenting tendencies (emphasizing achievement, pressure, control, and personality development). Parenting through emphasis on achievement and through personality development had a positive, statistically significant correlation with actual school achievement, while parenting through pressure had a negative such correlation. A positive correlation was also found between parental volunteering at school and the child's actual school achievement. Learning at home and parenting through control had no significant correlation with achievement. The findings of this study suggest that the six distinct types of behavior that make up parental involvement have differential effects in relation to school achievement.

Getting parents involved in their children's educational process is becoming a very popular issue lately, keeping busy both practitioners and theoreticians in the field of education. This paper argues that, in spite of its popularity, the "parent involvement" concept is still vague, and its outcomes are unclear.

Scores of studies appear in the international literature claiming that everybody concerned – students, parents, teachers, schools, society as a whole – will benefit if parents are convinced to get involved in their children's education. After years of research, Henderson (1987) has come to the conclusion that parent involvement improves student achievement. Her findings show that "when parents are involved, children do better in school (...) than children of similar aptitude and family background whose parents are not involved" (p. 87). Reviewing the evidence produced by a number of studies, Epstein (1992) points out that "students at all grade levels do better academic work and have more positive school attitudes, higher aspirations, and other positive behaviors if they have parents who are aware, knowledgeable, encouraging, and involved" (p. 1141). Other reports link parental involvement to benefits for parents, including greater appreciation of their role, sense of adequacy, strengthened social networks, and motivation to resume their own education (Davies, 1988). Teachers come to realize that their lives are made easier if they get the help of parents in doing their job. They also realize that parents who are involved tend to develop more positive views of teachers as professionals. School administrators tend to give better evaluation reports for teachers who

include parents in their working plans. They rate such teachers higher not only in interpersonal skills but also in overall teaching ability. Finally, parents who are involved develop feelings of “ownership” for the school. As a result, they may form powerful pressure groups, and this leads to stronger political support for the school’s needs and demands from society (Epstein, 1992).

It is clear that involvement has its benefits. On the other hand, a number of authors (such as Lareau, 1987 and Lightfoot, 1978) express reservations about this movement, because it may contribute to social and political inequality among parents. Their main argument is that parent involvement attempts attract and are more accessible – and therefore more beneficial – to higher-SES parents. As a result, the gaps between children from rich and poor families grow wider. In any case, the issue here is not to agree or disagree with the usefulness of parent involvement in their children’s education. Obviously, projects and interventions that aim at getting parents more involved add to the quality of services offered by the schools. Nevertheless, we need to be more specific about the definition of the concept itself and of the effects it has on identifiable variables. Some of the reports that appear in the literature tend to present parent involvement as a “panacea” that will miraculously actualize educational goals such as improving students’ achievement, motivation, and conduct. If we do not know as accurately as possible why a certain practice works or is useful and what the specific descriptors of this improvement are, we run the risk of overgeneralizing and oversimplifying, accusations not unknown to educationalists.

#### WHAT IS PARENT INVOLVEMENT THEN?

The interesting thing is that we do not really know. According to Brito and Waller (1994) parent involvement is a concept that can include many different activities. It can range from an impersonal visit to school once a year to frequent parent-teacher consultations to active school governorship. Thus, individual parents can be placed on a continuum ranging from very low (or non-existent) to very active involvement.

A number of typologies have been proposed for home-school relationships. Tomlinson (1991) maintains that parental involvement in schools may take one of four forms: exchange of information (via letters, circulars, reports, visits); personal involvement in educational matters (homework or classwork); informal involvement in administrative matters via the Parent Association; and formal involvement in school governing. Fullan (1982) identifies four forms of parent involvement also: instruction at school, instruction at home, school governance, and community service.

The most comprehensive model of parent involvement is perhaps the one proposed by Epstein (1995). She describes the following six types of home-school relation:

- *parenting* – helping families establish home environments that support children as students and helping schools understand families
- *communicating* – establishing two-way communication schemes between home and school about school programs and children’s progress
- *volunteering* – recruiting and organizing help and support for school functions and student activities
- *learning at home* – helping parents help their children at home with school work, academic decisions, and other related activities
- *decision making* – including parents in school governance
- *collaborating with community* – identifying and integrating resources and services from the community to strengthen and support schools, students, and their families, as well as doing the same for the community by schools and families.

The first two types (parenting and communicating) refer to the basic obligations of the two institutions separately. Families are responsible for providing for children’s health and safety and for building acceptable home conditions for learning. Schools are responsible for communicating with the families of their students in order to inform them about policies, programs, rules and regulations and to advise them about the children’s achievement and conduct. The degree of fulfilling this obligation by either institution does, of course, vary. The point is that in both cases interaction is minimal. Types 3 and 4 include some involvement of the parents in the educational process of their children. The former (volunteering) has largely to do with involvement in non-educational activities in the school. The parents are requested to offer their help in various occasions or are invited to the school as audience for various events. The latter (learning at home) has to do with parental involvement in their children’s home-work and with organizing educational activities at home. The fifth type of relationship (decision making) describes a truly active parental involvement in schooling. Parents participate in planning, priority setting, budgeting, and other aspects of educational governing. The sixth and last type of relationship refers to family-school-community partnerships in which the co-operating parts share resources for the benefit of children’s development.

There are a number of problems associated with these typologies. Since they are descriptive in nature, they do not imply a ranking among the different forms of the relationship in terms of their importance or usefulness. Neither do they relate the individual types with each other. What if, for example, a parent never visits the school for any reason, never goes to a Parent Association’s meeting or event, but sits with the child regularly in the evening assisting with homework? Is he or she involved or not? In other words, does the term “involvement” refer to school life or to the child’s own, everyday life? The absence of a clear definition should be obvious.

### WHAT ARE THE OUTCOMES OF PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT?

As mentioned earlier, different studies report many different possible outcomes of parental involvement. Perhaps the greatest amount of research in this area was sparked by the claim that parental involvement affects directly the child's school achievement (Banks, 1993; Gonzalez & Blanco, 1991; Johnson, 1992; Song & Hattie, 1984; Stevenson & Baker, 1987). The findings are inconclusive. Campbell and Mandel (1990) say that at least some aspects of parental behavior – especially those which are perceived by the child as psychological support – lead directly to higher achievement. Other types of behavior, such as parental help and pressure on the child, have the opposite effect. Similar were the conclusions of Flouris (1989) who studied Greek students. Iverson & Walberg (1982) compared the accumulated evidence from a number of previous studies and reported that functional characteristics of the family, such as the existing intellectual stimulation at home, are better predictors of school success than structural characteristics of the family (SES, parental educational levels, etc.). Similar results appeared in a cross-cultural study conducted by Campbell & Wu (1994). A study conducted in Cyprus (Georgiou, 1995a) has reported a significant relationship between school achievement and family cohesion. This concept, which is in essence a functional characteristic of the family microsystem, can be perceived as an aspect of parental involvement in the child's life at home. Stevenson & Baker (1987) report that parental involvement is related to the child's school performance. Finally, Banks (1993), while acknowledging the existence of many complicating factors, accepts the fact that “parents who are involved in schools have a positive effect on their children's academic achievement” (p. 44).

Some other researchers are more sceptical about the relationship between the variables under examination. For example, Keith, Reimers, Fehrmann, Pottebaum, & Aubey (1986) found only indirect effects of parental involvement on the child's school achievement. On the basis of their findings, these authors challenge the importance of parent involvement and propose a closer look on factors outside school and family. Similarly, Brice-Heath & McLaughlin (1987) point out that “the expectation that bringing family and school together will set children on their way to productive adulthood ignores current societal realities and is, we believe, mistaken” (p. 577). They go on to say that the emphasis on parental involvement is misplaced and suggest new roles for school and family. Morgan, Fraser, Seamus, & Cairns (1993) criticize the politics that sometimes drive the parent involvement initiatives and the power-games that are often played by the interested parties. Their own case study revealed that parents and teachers have a totally different understanding of their roles and their cooperation, each group trying to impose its terms on the other. Along the same lines, Georgiou (1996), who studied the parent-teacher relations in Cyprus, notes:

The problem is that there are different interpretations of this involvement. Its content is not defined, its boundaries are not clear. What one party sees

as an expression of interest, the other perceives as intrusion. Parents and educators must find a common language on involvement before they can actually implement a partnership program and benefit from it (p. 42).

Another relevant point in this discussion is that generally the studies that link students' academic performance with their parents' degree of involvement in schooling suffer from many methodological weaknesses. Epstein (1992) is quite right in observing that "the measures in these studies lack the rigor needed to isolate and document specific effects on students of particular (parental) practices" (p. 1142). Henderson (1987) is even more definite. She points out that most of these studies focus on the well-proven family influence on achievement and not on effects of school practices to involve families who would not otherwise be involved.

To summarize, two major problems can be identified in the parent involvement literature. The first has to do with the concept's complexity and the confusion that has been created among the professionals in the area because of the absence of a clear definition. As a result, different studies use the term differently and examine different aspects of it. The second problem (closely related to the first one) stems from the fact that the outcomes or the effects of parent involvement are still ambiguous. Obviously, one needs to know exactly what something *is* before one can say what it can do.

## SOCIAL CONTEXT

The study that is presented here was conducted in Cyprus, a small Mediterranean island/State with socio-economic characteristics resembling those of western type of societies. The Cypriot family as an institution is still quite strong, even though changes that occurred during the last 4-5 decades have turned the collective type of society that existed then into an individualistic one. This process has weakened the connecting bonds of social microsystems including the family. Descriptions of the characteristics of the traditional and the contemporary Cypriot family can be found elsewhere. A brief comparison of the two types of family is given in Georgiou (1995a).

After being a British colony for almost a century, Cyprus gained its independence in 1960 and established a centrally administered educational system. At the beginning, and for several years, Cypriots showed a deep respect for the teachers and an almost blind trust that the system (governed, at last, by "their own" people) would give to their children the "right" education (Persianis, 1978). Before independence the representatives of the system were the colonial authorities, the foreigners. Parents used to be very suspicious about their motives. Now the teachers and the principals and the Ministry Officials are "just like them," the parents. As the society becomes more and more complex and more heterogeneous, parents are starting to question the authority of the professional educators and want to voice their own concerns. The end of the twentieth century is a period of social and

educational change for Cyprus, and parental involvement is going to be one of the critical issues in the next few years.

The relationship between family and school can be formal or informal. Formal are the relations that the school personnel has with the elected officials of the Parents' Association (P.A.), and informal are the relations that parents as individuals have with the school. The formal home-school relations in Cyprus according to a recent study (Georgiou, 1995b) are as follows:

- There are P.A.s in every school. Their role is basically to raise money through the organization of various events and to use it to support financially school programs or individual students in need. They are not involved in any educational decision making and have no access to the school's everyday life. Their national assembly is a powerful pressure group that the decision makers take seriously into consideration.
- The Governing Committee of each P.A. usually includes individuals of high-SES and high-educational level. This often creates friction among parents themselves, since some suspect that those who seek election to the Committee have personal agendas ("showing off" or gaining privileges for their own children) and are not genuinely concerned about the whole of the student population or the school as an institution.
- Even though the principals and the representatives of the parents would report that the co-operation between the school and the P.A. is smooth and fruitful, a closer inquiry (preferably without a tape recorder) reveals that there is constant friction between them, each one blaming the other for it. A frequent grievance voiced by teachers in urban schools is that parents use their political connections to interfere with teacher placements.
- In the P.A. elections of most central schools there is often involvement of the political parties. Also, members of the P.A. governing committees sometimes use their position as a step stone in order to move to more powerful political positions.

Regarding the informal contacts that the parents as individuals have with the school, the situation could be described as follows:

- The parents visit the school as invited audience to social events or to school performances. They are also invited to be informed about their children's achievement and behavior at school.
- Parents of higher educational level and higher SES have more frequent and better contact with the school than lower educational level and lower-SES parents. Also, parents of children who have no problems academically or socially visit the school more often than the parents of children who have these problems. According to the teachers, those parents who should be coming to the school more often don't, and those who don't need to come, do.
- Some parents volunteer for various non-educational activities in the school building (offering breakfast, watching younger children after school, cleaning or fixing equipment).

According to Phtiaka (1996) Cypriot parents can be divided into three groups: the “insiders” who feel closer to the school in every aspect (visits, communication, activity involvement), the “outsiders” who are isolated and maintain no contact with the school’s activities, and the “so-so” who express desire to get involved but also react to the stress that this involvement will create for them. The parents who belong to the first group are characterized by identification with the school’s ideas; they usually have high self-esteem and better skills for receiving and controlling relevant information. Those who belong to the second group are characterized by helplessness, intimidation, and school fear; they express feelings of neglect and guilt mixed with unjustified expectations for miraculous solutions to their problems. They cause no real trouble to the school because they are marginalized and ignored by the system. Finally, members of the third group demand more information and more opportunities for involvement, but at the same time they are overwhelmed by the anxiety associated with their role as parents. They resent the teachers’ control of the situation and are the most likely ones to be in friction with the school.

Cypriot teachers tend to have a conservative attitude concerning the school’s relations with the family. They encourage some involvement of the parents in the schools but only to attend performances or to talk (or rather listen) to the teacher about their child. Parental involvement in other non-educational, volunteer activities is also encouraged, provided that it is done on the teachers’ terms and in a non-threatening fashion. As for involvement in learning activities at home, the school personnel seem to expect it without doing anything much to facilitate it. Even though the teachers would accept theoretically that a good school-family co-operation can have positive effects for everybody involved, they are concerned that the parents may exceed some unspecified “safety limits” and cause problems to the school. They clearly believe that the relationship between the school and the parents should be basically informative in nature and preferably in a one-way direction! Active involvement of the parents in the school life appears to be at the bottom of their priorities. Furthermore, the majority think that it is the parents’ own fault that they don’t visit the school as often as they should.

The prevailing attitudes that teachers generally have about parents and parent involvement in the schools (Georgiou, 1996) are the following:

- The school is the only institution responsible for children’s formal education.
- The teachers are the specialized professionals for offering formal education to the children; parents should not interfere in the teachers’ work.
- The social respect that the teachers used to enjoy is diminishing. Teachers should protect their professionalism. One way to do this is by “not revealing trade secrets” to the parents! This concern seems to stop the teachers from helping the parents help their children with homework.
- Parents do not sit enough with their children at home, or when they do they do not follow the “right” instructional method and get the children confused instead of helping them understand the material.

In summary, the current parent-teacher relations on the island are as follows:

1. The home-school relations in Cyprus are actually controlled by the school system. Teachers and principals are satisfied with this arrangement and behave defensively when it is threatened.
2. The parents, on the other hand, have their own insecurities and confusion about their role in this process. They want to get more involved, but they resent the fact that the teachers have the upper hand in the home-school relationship. Also, they do not want to do at home what they feel is the teachers' job at school.
3. In general, both parents and teachers accept theoretically the idea that family and school should cooperate, but when the plans for this co-operation become more specific they realize that their agendas are quite different.

## Method

The purpose of this study was twofold:

1. to analyze the vague term "involvement" into more concrete types of parental behavior; and
2. to examine the influence that each of these specific parental involvement types may have on the child's school achievement.

## PARTICIPANTS

The parents of 852 sixth-grade students (11-12 year olds) of both genders participated in this study (48.9% were parents of females). These students constitute the total sixth-grade population of 20 randomly selected public schools. The only criterion that was taken into consideration for the selection of schools was their geographic location. Thus, six of the selected schools were situated in towns, four schools were in the suburbs, and the remaining ten were out in the countryside. As a result of the selection procedures, 44.4% of the participants came from urban areas, 30.5% came from large rural schools situated in the periphery of towns, and the rest (25.1%) were residents of small, remote, rural communities. In terms of socioeconomic status (SES), the sample was quite representative of the Greek Cypriot society at large. It included 218 families of low SES (25.6%) and 209 families of high SES (24.5%). The rest (49.9%) were classified in the medium or average SES category.

## DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURES

A specially designed questionnaire was sent home with the children who were instructed to ask their parents to complete it. Either parent could respond, depending on availability. The completed questionnaires were returned the following day in a sealed envelope that was provided for purposes of confidentiality. The rate of return was 96.7%. The children were asked to write their own class catalogue number on



the completed questionnaires before submitting them. They were assured that the researcher had no access to the class catalogue and that their anonymity could not be violated. Furthermore, each participating teacher produced an anonymous class catalogue that included only the students' code numbers and information about each individual student's achievement in language and mathematics.

Following the procedure outlined above, the researchers were able to secure each participating parent's response to the questionnaire as well as valid information about each student's achievement. It should be noted that the school achievement variable was operationally defined as the average language and mathematics score received by each student. The combined score was used because previous studies that utilized separate scores for language and mathematics (Flouris, 1989) found almost identical results for these two areas of achievement. The correlation between language and mathematics achievement for the present sample was quite high ( $r = .85$ ).

#### INSTRUMENTATION

A self-report inventory developed originally by Campbell, Connolly, and Mandel (1986) and adapted to the Greek language and culture by Flouris (1989) served as a basis for the questionnaire that was used for this study's data collection. Some of the items included in this questionnaire referred to activities that parents do at home in relation to their child, and some referred to activities that parents do at their child's school. The first category was further divided into three sub-categories. The first such sub-category included activities that are related to the child's homework (for example: "I examine my child after he/she finishes his/her homework," "I go over the corrected tests or papers he/she brings home from school"). The second sub-category included activities that are related to the child's everyday, non-student life (for example: "I want to have a say on issues that have to do with my child's appearance," i.e., clothes, hairstyle, tidiness; "I arrange my child's diet," i.e., when, what, and how much to eat). Finally, the third sub-category included activities that are related to the child's interests or hobbies (for example: "I send my child to private lessons in art, music and/or sports," "I encourage my child to read for pleasure").

The second major category of items that made up this study's data collection tool had to do with the parents' involvement in school activities. An earlier study (Georgiou, 1995b) that combined quantitative and qualitative data (i.e., parent and teacher responses to questionnaires and to interviews) found that the main parameters of the family-school relationship are: visiting the school for consultations with the teacher; participating in activities organized by the school; attending official meetings of the Parents' Association (P.A.); attending social, cultural and educational events organized by the P.A.; volunteering for school programs and actual involvement in school governing (being a member of the P.A. Committee). Therefore, a set of relevant questions were included in the data collection instrument.

Examples of such questions are: "I visit the school to talk to the teacher about my child," "I attend events organized by the P.A.," and "I am a member of the P.A.'s governing committee."

Special emphasis was given to the measurement of the behavioral manifestation of the parents' attitudes about education as a value. Thus, questions such as the following were asked: "My child's achievement is very important for me," "I show my satisfaction when my child brings home good marks," and "I am demanding when it comes to my child's school marks." The questionnaire appears in Appendix 1.

The parents who participated in the study were asked to mark their response on a five-point scale (4 = always happens, 3 = often, 2 = sometimes, 1 = rarely, 0 = never happens). Information was also sought about the family demographics (membership, place of residence, income, parents' educational and occupational level, SES).

## Results

The most interesting findings of this study refer to the existing relationship between school achievement and each of two aspects of parent involvement; namely, parental help with homework and involvement in school activities. These two facets of the concept were emphasised by previous conceptualizations (Epstein, 1995; Fullan 1982; Tomlinson, 1991). In fact, most authors refer to a combination of these two types of parental behavior when they talk about involvement (for example, Henderson, 1987; Lareau, 1987; Lightfoot, 1978).

The collected data were analyzed first with the intention of examining these very relations. At a later stage, the questionnaire was factor analyzed in order to determine empirically the existence of independent factors that may be part of the parent involvement construct. Let us look into these analyses separately.

### HELPING WITH HOMEWORK

There seems to be an inverse relationship between a student's school achievement and the amount of help he or she gets at home from his or her parents. All the questions that were related to this aspect of parent involvement had a negative correlation with school achievement. For example, questions such as "I help my child with his/her homework," "I insist that my child spends a certain amount of time studying every day," "I monitor the time that my child spends studying," and "I push my child to do his/her homework when necessary" were found to have a statistically significant correlation with achievement ranging from  $-.09$  to  $-.26$  ( $p < .01$ ) (see Table I).

Table I. Correlation Matrix of Selected Questionnaire Items.

	ACH	Q01	Q02	Q03	Q04	Q05	Q06	Q07	Q08	Q09	Q10	Q11	Q12	Q13	Q14	Q15
ACH	1.00															
Q01	-.12	1.00														
Q02	-.24*	.32*	1.00													
Q03	-.09	.01	.00	1.00												
Q04	-.08	.27*	.31*	.00	1.00											
Q05	.36*	.26*	-.01	.13	.12	1.00										
Q06	.13	.27*	.14	.22*	.54*	.18	1.00									
Q07	.19*	.11	.02	.02	-.03	.27*	.00	1.00								
Q08	.17	.19*	-.05	.11	-.00	.26*	.00	.63*	1.00							
Q09	-.18*	.25*	.26*	.12	.41*	.11	.24*	-.08	-.09	1.00						
Q10	.08	.00	.01	.03	.13	.11	.15	.13	.17	.13	1.00					
Q11	-.26*	.26*	.41*	.00	.25*	.00	.03	.00	-.00	.44*	.26*	1.00				
Q12	.13	.28*	.11	.32*	.52*	.27*	.61*	.12	-.07	.27*	.26*	.18	1.00			
Q13	-.04	.25*	.33*	.33*	.41*	.26*	.44*	.08	.00	.26*	.25*	.14	.17	1.00		
Q14	.09	.26*	.22*	.28*	.27*	.19	.32*	.00	-.01	.27*	.18	.11	.18	.27*	1.00	
Q15	.26*	.27*	.03	.18	.19	.28*	.17	.18	.18	.19	.08	.10	.09	.18	.12	1.00

Note 1: An asterisk (\*) shows a statistically significant correlation ( $p < 0.01$ ).

Note 2: The actual order of the items in the questionnaire was different than the one in which they appear in this table.

The items as they appear in the questionnaire:

Q01. I help my child with his/her homework.

Q02. I push my child to do his/her homework when necessary.

Q03. I insist that my child spends certain amount of time studying every day.

Q04. I urge my child to continuously strive for better results at school.

Q05. I visit the school to talk to the teacher about my child.

Q06. I show my satisfaction when my child brings home good marks.

Q07. I attend events organized by the P.A.

- Q08. I am a member of the P.A.'s governing committee.  
Q09. I worry when my child has a test the following day.  
Q10. I buy books as presents for my child.  
Q11. I monitor the time that my child spends studying.  
Q12. My child's achievement is very important for me.  
Q13. I examine my child after he/she finishes his/her homework.  
Q14. I go over the corrected papers or exams he/she brings home from school.  
Q15. I volunteer for school activities.  
ACH = Student's achievement

The results of the present study suggest that the more the parents help their child, the less the child achieves at school. The issue, then, is what does happen first? Low-achieving children get more parental assistance at home because they need it, or over-protecting parents turn their children into irresponsible and therefore underachieving students? It is quite possible that both processes occur, reinforcing each other in a circular fashion. Another issue to be considered is the way in which the child interprets the parental help. Some children may see it as desirable parental concern, while others may see it as undesirable intrusion. The effects of these two types of child perception on actual achievement would undoubtedly be quite different. Furthermore, helping with homework has a quantitative and a qualitative aspect. In this study, only the first aspect was examined. How a parent helps and how this help is appreciated (or not appreciated) by the teacher is also very important.

#### MAINTAINING CONTACT WITH THE SCHOOL

In contrast to the previous aspect of parent involvement (helping with homework), maintaining close contact with the school seems to be positively related with the child's achievement. Different manifestations of this behavior were assessed, such as visiting the school to consult with the teacher, attending organized events, volunteering for activities, and participating in school governance. The strongest correlation with achievement ( $r = .36, p < .01$ ) was found in the question that asked the parents to report the frequency with which they visit the school to talk to the teachers about their child. Positive correlation coefficients ranging from .17 to .26 were also found between achievement, and each of the items related to contact with the school. Examples of such items are the following: "I volunteer for school activities," "I attend events organized by the P.A.," "I am a member of the P.A.'s governing committee." See again Table I which contains a correlation matrix of selected questionnaire items that refer to these two parent involvement categories (i.e., helping with homework and maintaining contact with the school).

### FACTOR ANALYSIS RESULTS

The collected data were also factor analyzed in order to produce more valid and internally consistent categories of parental activities both at home and at school. The *varimax* rotation method was used for the factor analysis. Six orthogonal factors were extracted, accounting for 56.2% of the total variance.

The six factors, which were then treated as variables, included: parenting through emphasis on achievement, parenting through pressure on the child, parenting through control, parenting through personality development, learning at home, and volunteering and decision making at school. These factors, their eigenvalues, the percentage of variance that each factor explains, and representative questionnaire items for each one are presented in Table II. Interestingly enough, the item "I visit the school to talk to the teachers about my child" was grouped under the factor "learning at home" and was thus differentiated from the other items that made up the "maintaining contact with the school" set of questions. One explanation for this unexpected categorization may be that these visits are used by the parents as feedback regarding the amount of help that is necessary to give to their child at home.

Four out of the six parent involvement styles identified through the factor analysis procedure were found to have statistically significant correlations with school achievement. Learning at home and parenting through control did not. Specifically, the correlation coefficients for the factors named "parenting through achievement," "parenting through personality development," and "volunteering and decision making at school" were .08, .16 and .15 respectively ( $p < .05$ ). One of the significant relationships – for the "parenting through pressure on the child" style – was negative ( $r = -.33$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

### REGRESSION ANALYSIS RESULTS

A multiple regression analysis was computed in order to examine the contribution of each factor in the total variation of school achievement scores. The variables were entered into the equation simultaneously. The multiple regression results were statistically significant (regression mean square = 74.24, degrees of freedom = 6, residual mean square = 3.17, degrees of freedom = 706,  $F = 23.45$ ,  $p < .001$ ). These results showed that the following four variables are significant predictors of school achievement: "parenting through pressure on the child," "parenting through personality development," "volunteering and decision making at school," and "parenting through emphasis on achievement." Table III presents the strength of each variable in explaining the variance of achievement scores.

### *Discussion*

The main argument of this study based on the evidence found is that parental involvement can be analyzed into more concrete and meaningful behaviors. Some

Table II. Parental Involvement Styles as Revealed by the Factor Analysis.

Parental Involvement Style	Factor Eigenvalue	Percentage (%) of Explained Variance	Examples of Questionnaire Items
<i>Factor 1.</i> Parenting through emphasis on achievement	5.7	24.1	"I am demanding when it comes to my child's school marks" "I show my satisfaction when my child brings home good marks"
<i>Factor 2.</i> Parenting through pressure on the child	2.2	9.1	"I push my child to do his/her homework, when necessary" "I worry when my child has a test the following day"
<i>Factor 3.</i> Parenting through child control	1.5	6.2	"I arrange my child's diet (i.e., when, what and how much to eat)" "I control my child's TV watching time"
<i>Factor 4.</i> Parenting through child personality development	1.1	4.6	"I encourage my child to try new hobbies" "I encourage my child to read for pleasure"
<i>Factor 5.</i> Learning at home	1.8	7.4	"I help my child with his/her homework" "I examine my child after he/she finishes his/her homework"
<i>Factor 6.</i> Volunteering and decision-making at school	1.2	4.8	"I attend events organized by the P.A." "I am a member of the P.A.'s governing committee"

Table III. Multiple Regression Analysis Results.

Variables in the Equation	Beta	T	p<
Parenting through pressure on the child	-0.33	-9.63	0.001
Parenting through emphasis on achievement	0.08	2.37	0.05
Learning at home	0.03	0.97	0.33
			(non significant)
Volunteering and decision-making at school	0.15	4.36	0.001
Parenting through child personality development	0.16	4.65	0.001
Parenting through child control	0.02	0.74	0.46
			(non significant)

of these have positive, some have negative, and some have no relationship to school achievement. Two parenting styles, "emphasizing achievement" and "fostering personality development" through widening the interest scope of the child, were found to have positive correlation with achievement. The same was true with "involvement in school activities" (volunteering and decision making at school). A negative correlation was found for "parenting through pressure," while no significant relationship was found for "learning at home" and for "parenting through control." Each of the factors for which a statistically significant relationship was established with school achievement is discussed below.

#### PARENTING THROUGH EMPHASIS ON ACHIEVEMENT

It is not surprising that when parents set high standards for achievement children tend to raise their efforts and do better at school. However, one may ask: To what extent is this type of parent behavior different than parental expectations for the child? Previous research (Hossler & Stage, 1992) has demonstrated that expectations influence directly and positively the child's school achievement. In order for a parent to set high standards, he or she must also have high expectations, and vice versa. More research is needed before we can distinguish between these interrelated and possibly overlapping concepts.

#### PARENTING THROUGH PRESSURE

There is a fine line that separates emphasizing achievement in a positive manner and pressing the child for higher achievement in such a way that cannot be perceived as psychologically supportive but rather as oppressive. The findings of this study are in line with previous findings (Campbell & Mandel, 1990; Flouris, 1989) that putting pressure on the child in order to do better at school, often has exactly the opposite result. Pressure causes anxiety and stress; this, in turn, reduces the individual's ability to perform, which produces more anxiety and the cycle repeats

itself. Teachers and parents should take notice of this point which appears very often in the motivation literature. An alternative interpretation of the negative correlation between parenting through pressure and school achievement, however, may be that anxious parents press their already low-achieving children for better results after they realize that the children are facing difficulties with their school performance. To what do these parents attribute their children's failure – to low ability or low effort? This would be an interesting idea for further research.

#### PARENTING THROUGH PERSONALITY DEVELOPMENT

It is comforting to know that a child with broader interests tends to have higher academic achievement as well. Educational systems are often criticised for being too “dry” and insensitive to students' needs other than the strictly cognitive ones. The Cypriot system is certainly among them! This study suggests that parents can make a difference by supplementing their child's formal education with increased opportunities for developing their interests. The idea that young children (and those interested in them) should look for networks beyond the family and the school in order to develop their potentialities has been expressed repeatedly in the past (see, for example, Brice-Heath & McLaughlin, 1987).

#### VOLUNTEERING AND DECISION MAKING AT SCHOOL

Parents of high achievers maintain closer contact with the school than parents of low achievers. As many teachers might comment, “those parents who really need to come to see us don't, and those who don't need to come (because their child achieves well) do.” Involvement in school activities, either those organized by the Parents' Associations or those organized by the school personnel, seems to be positively related with achievement. It should be kept in mind, however, that as Finders & Lewis (1994) point out, parents may not come to school for a variety of reasons – difficulty in getting permission from work, cultural differences with the teachers, psychological obstacles due to personal academic failures, etc. – not because they do not care enough about their child. Projects that aim at getting parents involved in school activities should take into consideration the special needs of specific subgroups of parents. Otherwise, they will end up widening the existing gaps as Davies (1988), Lareau (1987), Lightfoot (1978), and other social scientists have predicted.

#### THE PRESENT IN RELATION TO PREVIOUS RESEARCH

The findings of this study offer partial support to Epstein's (1995) theory of home-school relations, since they document the existence of three basic types of involvement: parenting, learning at home, and volunteering at school. The new element that this study adds to the parent involvement literature is the analysis of the “parenting” concept into four distinct styles, depending on the emphasis given. This emphasis



can be on achievement, personality development, pressure, or control. Furthermore, it was shown that not all styles of parenting are related to school achievement, and when they are related the direction of this relationship may differ.

Another point of discrepancy between Epstein's conceptualization and the factors that came out of the present study is that "volunteering" and "decision making" were grouped into the same category. This may be a culture specific finding. As it was mentioned earlier, in Cyprus the parent involvement movement is still young and the home-school relationship is presently dominated by the teachers (Georgiou, 1995b, 1996). Therefore, no actual involvement is possible for parents in school governing. Even the members of the P.A. Governing Boards see themselves as mere volunteers for fund raising and for organizing social events. No real decision making is left for them to do.

The remaining two types of involvement that are included in Epstein's model (i.e., the school's own communicating patterns with families and the establishment of home-school-community partnerships) were beyond the scope of this discussion, since the study was designed to look at the home-school relationship from the parents' point of view.

#### CONTEXTUAL INFLUENCE

To what extent are these findings influenced by the specific context in which the participants live and function? In addition to the collapsing of "volunteering" and "decision making" into one category that was mentioned earlier, we can identify a few more cases where the results may be culture specific.

1. The "learning at home" factor had a non-significant correlation with school achievement. This is in contrast, not only to previous research findings (Campbell & Wu, 1994; Henderson, 1987; Keith et al., 1986), but also to common logic. One would expect that parents who organize educational activities at home and get involved in their child's homework would tend to have high-achieving children. The failure to confirm this tendency in the Cypriot sample may be explained by the Cypriot parents' confusion regarding their role in their children's educational process. The message they get from the teachers is "don't help your child unless we tell you that she needs it." Note that "helping with homework" which is a part of the "learning at home" factor was found to have a negative but statistically significant correlation with school achievement among Cypriot students. The existing friction between teachers and parents on the island (Georgiou, 1996) and the former's powerful position creates a puzzling situation for the latter. Many times parents (especially the less well educated ones) are afraid that their involvement in educational activities at home will produce problems rather than be helpful to the child because they may not do things "right" as far as the teachers are concerned.

2. The "parenting through control" factor was also unrelated to achievement for the Greek Cypriot students. In other western types of societies the relationship between these two variables would be expected to be statistically significant and

negative. The modern Cypriot family is not collective as it used to be at the beginning of the century. Individualistic and egalitarian values prevail in recent years. This allows children to voice their objections when their parents attempt to control their lives and in some cases to take action against such control. However, this behavior is not yet generalized to all the population. As Triandis (1986) says, the Greeks continue to be psychologically and socially bound to a traditional culture that influences their lives in a myriad of ways, even though externally they seem to conform to more contemporary, western life styles. The role of the parent as a "controller" of the children's everyday life is still both expected and accepted to a large extent. Therefore, parenting through exercising control on daily, non-academic child activities does not create the same reaction as does the parenting through pressure for higher achievement. The children's reaction to parental controlling behavior may make itself obvious in other areas, but not in actual school achievement.

#### LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The reservations expressed by Henderson (1987) and Epstein (1992) about methodological weaknesses of the studies that try to connect parental practices to school achievement apply to the present study as well. Limitations inherent to the questionnaire data collection tool (i.e., who replies and how, interpretation of the items, social desirability bias) could not be avoided completely. Also, the effects of the specific parental behaviors could not be separated from the effects of the general family influence on the child's school success. In some cases, types of involvement overlapped with each other (for example, setting high standards for achievement and putting pressure on the child). Other important aspects of parent behavior and attitudes were not examined (for example, expectations, values, roles). Finally, the results of this study were to some extent correlational, and this creates a difficulty in their interpretation since no causation can be implied. More research is needed in order to establish definite cause-and-effect relations between specific aspects of parent involvement and school achievement.

#### Conclusions

Regardless of its limitations, this study has managed to reach two basic conclusions that can add to the current discussion about parent involvement. The first one refers to the concept's definition and the second to its outcomes.

1. Morgan et al. (1993) correctly point out that, "to talk about parent/teacher relationships as a unitary concept is an oversimplification" (p. 48). The same is true for the parent involvement construct. It seems that parent involvement has become a generic term with so many meanings that soon it will have no meaning at all. The present study has identified six distinct types of involvement. It would be preferable

to use these specific behavioral indicators rather than the universal and potentially misleading term “parental involvement” that so often appears in the literature.

2. Certain parenting styles or preferences are related either positively or negatively to the child’s school achievement. This finding supports theories of co-development (Demetriou, 1996) and other ecological theories that refuse to see human development as a process of individual growth alone.

### Appendix 1

**THE PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT QUESTIONNAIRE**

Instructions: Place a mark in one of the columns to show how often you exhibit each behavior (in other words, how typical each behavior is for you as a parent).

PARENT BEHAVIOR	always happens (4)	often (3)	some- times (2)	rarely (1)	never (0)
1. I help my child with his/her homework.					
2. I push my child to do his/her homework when necessary.					
3. I insist that my child spends certain amount of time studying every day.					
4. I urge my child to continuously strive for better results at school.					
5. I visit the school to talk to the teacher about my child.					
6. I show my satisfaction when my child brings home good marks.					
7. I attend events organized by the P.A.					
8. I am a member of the P.A.'s governing committee.					
9. I worry when my child has a test the following day.					
10. I buy books as presents for my child.					
11. I monitor the time that my child spends studying.					
12. My child's achievement is very important for me.					
13. I examine my child after he/she finishes his/her homework.					
14. I go over the corrected tests or papers he/she brings home from school.					
15. I volunteer for school activities.					
16. I want to know (and approve) my child's friends.					
17. I want to have a say on issues that have to do with my child's appearance (i.e., clothes, hairstyle, tidiness).					
18. I make suggestions about how to spend his/her free time.					
19. I inspect his/her workbooks and class-notebooks.					
20. I am involved in my child's life.					
21. I am demanding when it comes to my child's school marks.					
22. I encourage my child to read for pleasure.					
23. I control my child's TV watching time.					
24. I check to see if he/she has everything he/she needs for school before leaving home in the morning.					
25. I maintain personal/social relations with teachers in my child's school.					
26. I help him/her choose books for reading out of class.					
27. I attend student performances at school.					
28. I help him/her plan his/her spare time creatively.					
29. I encourage my child to visit libraries.					
30. I am afraid that he/she will not do very well at school.					
31. I encourage my child to try new hobbies.					
32. I care about my child's personality development.					
33. I want to know all his/her secrets.					
34. I help my child study before exams.					
35. I telephone the school to get information about my child.					
36. I encourage my child to get involved in extra curriculum activities in the afternoon.					
37. Whenever I am invited to my child's school, I go.					
38. We spend weekends and holidays together as a family.					
39. I arrange my child's diet (i.e., when, what and how much to eat).					
40. I send my child to private lessons in art, music and/or sports.					

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