



# Supporting Teachers in Fostering Meaningful Family Engagement in Children's Learning

A View on Teachers' Perspectives on Family Engagement in Klaipeda  
Nature School

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## **ABSTRACT**

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Supporting Teachers in Fostering Meaningful Family Engagement. A View on Teachers' Perspectives on Family Engagement in Klaipeda Nature School

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This thesis focuses on what constitutes family engagement in children's education and what role it plays not only in children's learning but in a broader context of an education system. It also analyzes the role of school leadership in family engagement and various types of barriers that teachers face in their family engagement processes.

This research is being commissioned by Klaipeda Nature School, established in 2017 in Lithuania, and is on its journey to become part of international Waldorf schools. The researcher's role was to investigate the current school's policies and procedures in the context of parental contributions and needs and to understand teachers' barriers to fostering meaningful family engagement practices.

The theoretical framework of this thesis observed the transition of the concept of family engagement from participation to engagement and family-school partnerships. It introduced the primary authors of theories of family engagement as well as models and conditions required for the successful implementation of FE practices in schools. Finally, this thesis gave insight into educators' main barriers that decrease effective family engagement practices.

The author conducted qualitative interviews at Klaipeda Nature School to investigate the school's status of parental engagement practices. This research revealed that overcoming specific barriers is necessary for educators to foster meaningful and reciprocal relationships with the families in Klaipeda Nature School. Receiving in-service professional development and support in parental engagement, developing clear school policies and procedures in the context of parents' contributions and needs, working on personal beliefs, and building trust among community members might help overcome the barriers and enhance parental engagement in Klaipeda Nature School.

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Key words: family engagement, family - school partnerships, relationships

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**ABBREVIATIONS AND TERMS**

TAMK	Tampere University of Applied Sciences
cr	credit
KNS	Klaipeda Nature School
TP	Teacher – Parent
PE	Parental Engagement
PI	Parental Involvement
CPE	Collective Parental Engagement
EPE	Ecologies of Parental Engagement
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
NVC	Nonviolent Communication

# 1 INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Background

A considerable amount of literature has been published in the last three decades on partnerships between families and schools regarding children's education. Scholars widely describe the concept of family engagement in children's learning from being "a public good" and "a shared responsibility" to the process of "building a relationship and a collaborative experience" between a school, teachers, and a family (K. Mapp, 2019).

Research has shown that when schools implement strategies for family engagement, it can improve students' attendance, their academic performance such as reading, literacy, and mathematics (especially in elementary school), emotional reaction towards school, higher levels of motivation and attention, a more positive attitude toward learning in general (Wyrick, 2011). It has been reported that for educators, consistent parental engagement improved teachers' well-being, parent-teacher relationships, and overall school culture (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). Meanwhile, parents, who are actively involved in their children's education, experience higher levels of parental confidence, satisfaction in parenting, and increased interest in their own education (Hornby, 2011). What is more, an analysis of longitudinal studies has shown that stronger parent-teacher partnerships not only improve student behaviors in an academic environment but also help to determine higher expectations for a child's ability which in return has the most substantial effect on academic achievement (Epstein & Salinas, 2004; Jeynes, 2007).

This thesis focuses on what constitutes family engagement in children's education and what role it plays not only in children's learning but in a broader context of an education system. It also analyzes the role of school leadership in the context of family engagement and various types of barriers that teachers particularly face in their family engagement processes. Finally, this thesis discusses potential solutions for the Klaipeda Nature School educators to strengthen family-school partnerships by providing recommendations based on the research findings.

## 1.2 Research context

This research is commissioned by Klaipeda Nature School, established in 2017 in Lithuania, and is on its journey to become part of international Waldorf schools. Since 2017, the community has grown from having 2 to 100 students. Partially because of this growth, the covid-19 pandemic, and the principal founders' withdrawal from the leader's role in the school, the school has been experiencing a relatively low family engagement in school governance which, as a result, contradicts Waldorf School's philosophy on actively engaged and volunteering community and self-governance principles. The typical decision-making approach of Waldorf schools is based on an awareness of its founder Rudolf Steiner's political and social activism in the aftermath of World War I in Germany and his concept of social three-folding. (Illeris, 2008). According to Schaefer (2015), the three principles of self-administration are:

- Schools must be independent of the state.
- The central role of teachers in school management and decision-making processes cannot be overstated. It is crucial that they are given the necessary authority and resources to effectively lead and guide their students towards success.
- The school's organization should follow republican principles where all teachers are equal, but specific responsibilities are assigned to individuals and committees. (Schaefer, as per Soulé, 2015).

Because this research paper is being commissioned by a school, which is a candidate to become a Waldorf school, it is, therefore, essential to investigate how leadership has been traditionally perceived and practiced in Waldorf schools. Rudolf Steiner was the educational founder of the first Waldorf school for the Waldorf -Astoria Cigarette Factory workers' children after WWI. Hence, the name 'Waldorf' has spread worldwide and is now most known as Waldorf pedagogy or Waldorf education. In principle, the educational leadership of the school, in principle, belongs to the teachers' college and carries the responsibility of the educational quality and development, teacher development processes, student intake, and out-take, regardless of what leadership and management forms are

chosen in the physical aspect of school. The teachers have 'the core function of sustaining the integrity of the school (without which the education has no meaningful application) and enabling and optimizing the learning and development of each individual, starting with the pupils but including the teachers and other staff, and even the parents – though the pupils take priority' (Rawson, 2021).

*"Steiner's (1977) model of social renewal saw the functioning principle of education, as part of the cultural domain, as freedom. The same applies to the arts and cultural life generally and to science and religion. These activities should be free of all determination by the state or the economy. Only those who practice it and take responsibility for it should determine what is taught and how schools should be run. As a result, the teachers in a school should have full responsibility for the curriculum and pedagogy, appointment of teaching staff, and admission of children. They do this in a Waldorf school by constructing and maintaining a common vision based on a common understanding of the generative principles" (Rawson, 2021).*

It is important to remember that teacher-parent partnerships are a prerequisite for any school seeking to become a part of the community of Waldorf schools. As stated by the Association of Waldorf Schools of North America, "healthy human relationships with and among parents and colleagues are essential to the well-being of the school, and members of the community are invited to join in developing meaningful, collaborative, transparent forms for working together" (Association of Waldorf Schools of North America, 2022).

Currently, the faculty is the central leadership body at Klaipeda Nature School; however, most teachers are still cautious about fostering relationships with the broader school community – the families. Therefore, for the school to move forward and grow into a strong Waldorf school, it is essential to understand the importance of F.E., the effects it has on children's learning, and what are the barriers that faculty members experience in nurturing positive and meaningful family partnerships and to start purposeful work in changing that.



### **1.3 Research questions**

The strategic guiding question of this project is how to strengthen family–school partnership in Klaipeda Nature School by fostering higher parent engagement. Thus, the main objective of this project is to understand the barriers teachers encounter in engaging families in children's education as well as the governance of the school. The project aims to help:

- Teachers to understand their role in the current perspective on family engagement.
- The school that faces the challenge of a growing community but low family engagement.

**The main research question of this thesis is:**

**How to support teachers in fostering meaningful family engagement in Klaipeda Nature School?**

The following sub-questions will guide the answer to the main research question:

What are the current school policies and procedures in place that support and enhance parent engagement?

What barriers prevent teachers from engaging families in children's education?

Depending on the research results, the study will provide recommendations that teachers and administrators can apply to enhance parental engagement in children's education.

## **2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

### **2.1 Literature Review**

The following section will explore research literature related to the evolution of family engagement in childhood education, how family engagement affects education systems and schools, how school leaders and educators contribute, and what barriers they face to effectively nurturing family engagement.

### **2.2 From Family Involvement, Engagement and Partnership**

Family engagement in children's education has been described and evolved in the last few decades – from parental involvement or participation to parental engagement in their children's learning.

While "Parent involvement" refers to situations when parents participate in planned activities that the school has established, e.g., membership in PTA, membership in a fund-raising association, or even parent–teacher meetings with aims to discuss student's school report, the degree of involvement not necessarily requires parents to do anything, let alone play an active part in their children's learning because the communication is one way (Westergård & Galloway, 2010). Whereas "parent engagement" refers to parents actively supporting their child's learning outside the school establishment (Barton et al., 2021). Such shift represents 'an emphasis, away from the relationship between parents and schools to focus on the relationship between parents and their children's learning; it represents a change in a relational agency, with the relationship being between parents and schools, and the object of the relationship being children's learning.' (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014).

In the most basic and broad construct, parent or family engagement (family or parent referring to the primary caregivers of the children) today is considered as parents and teachers co-working to support children's education (Gross et al., 2022). The picture below illustrates the continuum that places parent involvement in schools on one end and parent engagement with children's learning on the

other. It represents a transformation from relationships between school and parents to relationships between parents and their children's learning (Figure 1.).

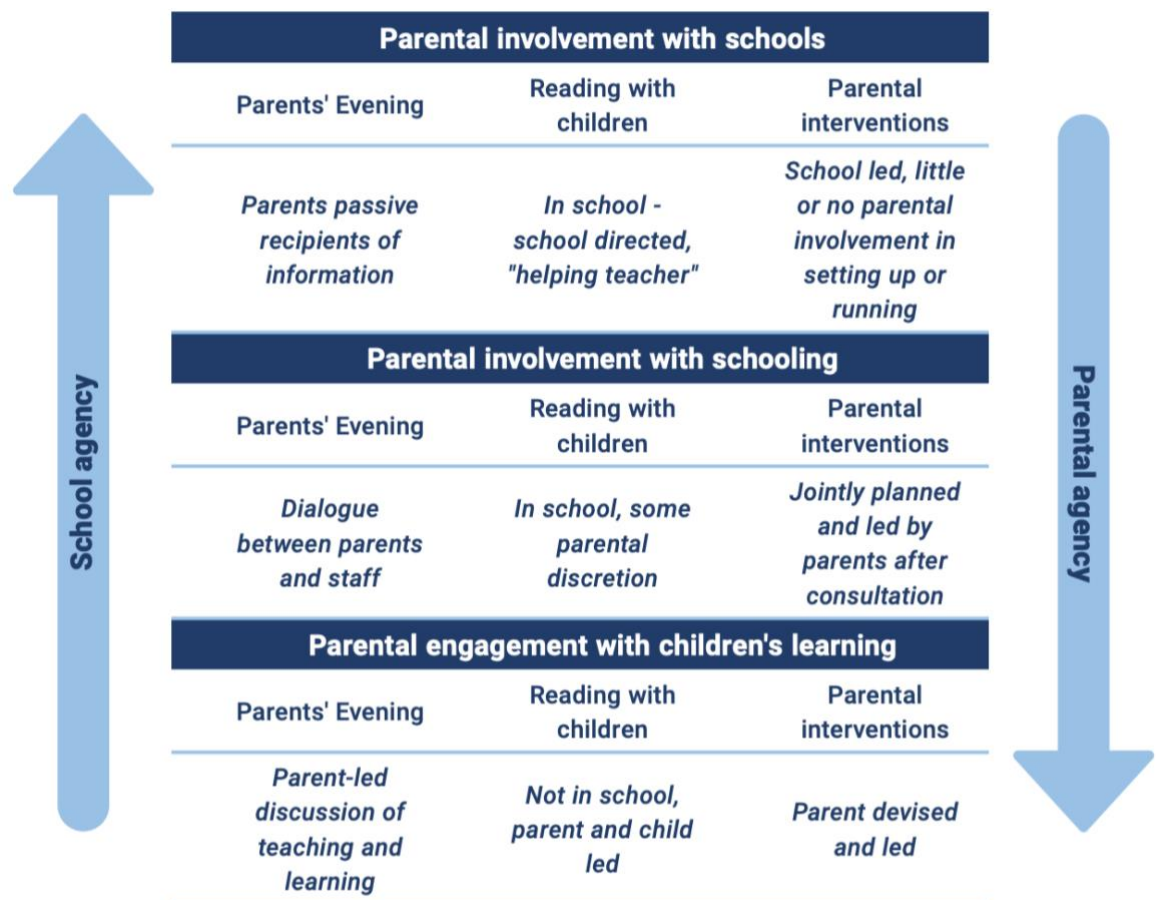


FIGURE 1. A continuum from parent involvement to engagement. (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014)

Goodall and Montgomery's Model acknowledges that children's learning occurs in many contexts outside the school environment, and it presents a dynamic continuum of 3 main points, throughout which parent-teacher interaction dynamics move along concerning children's learning. Leventhal et al. (2020) compiled the information from the Model and clarified that the third point of the continuum – parental engagement, includes an authentic partnership between teachers and parents with shared agency as well as shared responsibility for children's learning (Levinthal de Oliveira Lima & Kuusisto, 2020). The summary of the parental engagement continuum framework is illustrated in Figure 2.:

		<b>Point 1 Parental Involvement with school</b>	<b>Point 2 Parental Involvement with schooling</b>	<b>Point 3 Parental Engagement with children's learning</b>
<b>Characteristics</b>	<b>Communi- cation</b>	Superficial level; flows one-way, from school; regards children's progress and little dialogue	Deeper level; flows both ways; initiated by both; regards children's schooling	Deeper level; flows both ways; initiated by both; regarding children's learning
	<b>Ti- me</b>	Very little, insufficient	More time from school	Sufficient time from school
	<b>Inter- change</b>	Between parents and school	Between parents and school; between parents and children	Mostly between parents and children; between parents and school
	<b>Teachers</b>	Control relationship and give parents important information	Seek information on children's home life; listen to parents and help reframe mindsets regarding learning	Seek information on children's home life; listen to parents and help reframe mindsets; eager to learn from parents
	<b>Parents</b>	Recipients of school and school staff information; schools' and teachers' helpers/assistants	Active contributors to children's academic future	Central figures in children's learning; aware of their role as parents regarding school and home
<b>Examples</b>	Parents' evenings of 10 minutes for each student's parents; parents' attendance to classroom to hear children reading	Teacher-parent conferences with two-way flow of information; parents' assistance in homework at home	Parents' interest in children's learning; open parent-child channels of communication about children's learning and life experiences; parents' attitudes and aspirations on children's learning; parents' providing of multiple learning experiences (e.g. music, dance, scouting)	
<b>Benefits</b>	Starting point to ground a better future relationship; transfer of important information	Fuller picture of the child; better relationship built on trust and dialogue; breaks down barriers for engagement; shared power (partnership)	Raises children's achievement, self-esteem and aspirations; increases children's motivation and engagement in learning	

FIGURE 2. Summary of parental engagement continuum framework (Levinthal de Oliveira Lima & Kuusisto, 2020).

Grolnick and Slowiaczek (1994) conducted a study that aimed to assess a multidimensional representation of parental involvement, which is to understand

what aspects of parental involvement actively affect children. Another aim was to understand through what psychological processes involvement affected children's school performance (Grolnick & Slowiaczek, 2008). As a result, they developed a framework that integrated educational and developmental constructs in the context of parental involvement. Their framework identified three types of parental involvement in childhood education:

- Behavioral – includes attending the school events and PTAs, and modeling the importance of the school.
- Personal – includes the child's affective experience that the parent cares about school, has and enjoys interactions with them around the school.
- Cognitive intellectual - includes exposing the child to stimulating activities such as books and events (Levinthal de Oliveira Lima & Kuusisto, 2020).

Grolnick & Slowiaczek (2008) acknowledge the role of external factors, such as school policies and practices, in facilitating or hindering parental engagement. The framework also highlights the importance of considering children's and parents' developmental needs and characteristics when designing family involvement programs. One of the strengths of Grolnick and Slowiaczek's Model is its emphasis on the multifaceted and dynamic nature of family involvement. The framework recognizes that parental engagement can take many forms, from volunteering in the classroom to supporting learning at home, and that the specific nature of involvement may vary depending on individual and contextual factors.

### **2.3 Epstein's Theory of Family Engagement**

The importance of family engagement in childhood education has been recognized by researchers and educators alike. In this context, the theory of family engagement developed by Joyce Epstein has gained significant attention.

According to the theory of overlapping spheres of interest, children learn more when parents, teachers, and community members collaborate to guide and promote student learning and development (Epstein, 2010a). This theory has influenced policies and practices related to family engagement in schools and has been widely applied in various educational settings. The theory has three

contexts – home, school, and community. These contexts overlap with unique and combined influences on children through interactions with parents, educators, community partners, and students across many contexts. It emphasizes the need of parents, educators, and community partners working together to understand each other's perspectives, set common goals for students, and value each other's contributions to student development. (see Figure 3.):

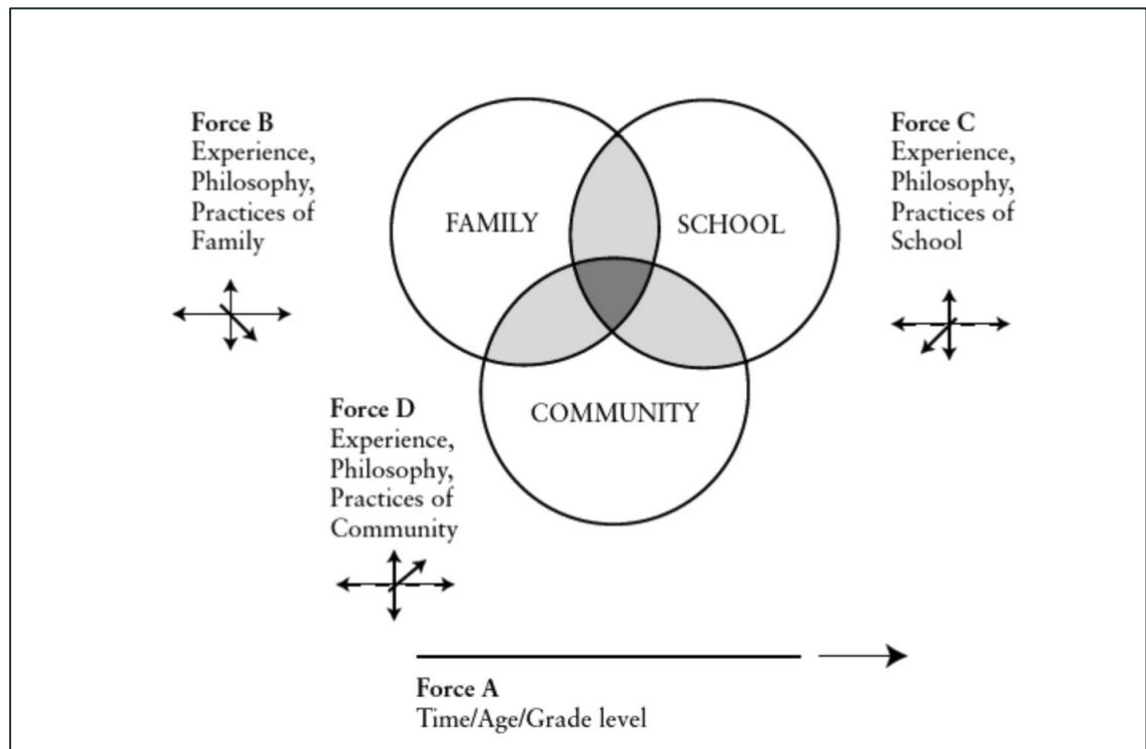


FIGURE 3. Overlapping Spheres of Influence of Family, School, and Community on Children's Learning (External Structure of Theoretical Model) (Epstein, 2010a)

According to the theory, parental involvement is a variable that can be increased or decreased by the practices of teachers, parents, administration, or students. Joyce Epstein and her colleagues at the Centre on Family, School, and Community Partnerships at St John Columbus University have underlined the term "partnership" between schools and families which served as a research backbone for many family engagement programs in the U.S. (K. Mapp et al., 2017). Epstein has developed a six-type parental involvement model, which further accentuated the concept of partnerships between parents and educators and encouraged the school's leadership and teaching staff to play the leading role in involving parents. Partnerships, if practical, educate each other during

open two-way communication. What is more, partnerships always require participation, and participation always requires involvement (Westergård & Galloway, 2010). Cuttance and Stokes (2000) suggest viewing partnerships as:

- Sharing power, responsibility, and ownership, each party has different roles.
- A degree of mutuality that begins with the process of listening to each other.
- Common goals are founded on a common understanding of children's educational requirements.
- A dedication to joint effort in which parents, students, and teachers engage (Cuttance & Stokes, 2000).

Epstein's theory of family engagement is a comprehensive framework that outlines six types of involvement that families can have in their children's education and the various forms of school support that can facilitate this involvement. The Six Types of Parental Involvement (Epstein, 2010):

- Parenting: This involves helping parents to develop skills and knowledge to support their children's learning and development, such as providing a safe and supportive home environment.
- Communicating involves creating effective communication channels between schools and families, such as regular newsletters or parent-teacher conferences.
- Volunteering involves encouraging families to participate in school activities and events, such as volunteering in classrooms or attending school performances.
- Learning at home involves providing families with resources and support to help children learn at home, such as homework help or access to educational materials.
- Decision-making involves involving families in school decision-making processes, such as school governance or policy development.
- Collaborating with the community involves building partnerships between schools and community organizations to support children's learning and

development, such as partnerships with local libraries or youth organizations.

Epstein's framework, along with the types of involvement, additionally provides an attendant set of representative practices and strategies, a set of "challenges" to forms of involvement as well as descriptions of expected outcomes of the six types of involvement for students, parents, and teachers (see Appendix 4).

## **2.4 Garry Hornby's theory on Family Involvement**

From the perspective of educational psychologist Garry Hornby, previous literature on parental involvement could be summed up into six most common types identified by a different set of assumptions, goals, and strategies (Hornby, 2011). The author listed the following six most common models of parental involvement:

- Protective Model – when conflict is avoided by separating professional and parenting functions (Swap as cited by Hornby, 2011).
- Expert Model – when professionals regard themselves as experts on all aspects of child development and education, while parents are viewed as having little credentials (Cunningham and Davis as cited by Hornby, 2011).
- Transmission Model - when parents' help is enlisted to support the goals of the school (Swap as cited by Hornby, 2011).
- Curriculum – Enrichment Model assumes that parents have significant expertise to contribute and that interaction between parents and teachers around the curriculum material's implementation will enhance the school's educational objectives (Swap as cited by Hornby, 2011).
- Consumer Model – parents are regarded as the consumers of the education services while professionals act as consultants (Cunningham and Davis, as cited by Hornby, 2011).
- Partnership Model – is where professionals are viewed as experts on education and parents are viewed as experts on their children, so they share each other's expertise ((Hornby, 2011).



According to Henderson and Mapp ((K. L. Mapp & Henderson, 2002), research has shown consistent associations between family-school partnerships and better academic outcomes for students, including higher test scores, better attendance, and greater engagement in school. By cooperating, families and schools create a supportive learning environment that promotes student success and well-being. Epstein (2011) seconds that when families and schools work together, they can create a comprehensive approach to education that addresses the academic, social, and emotional needs of students and help bridge the gap between home and school, allowing for a more seamless and coordinated approach to learning (Epstein, 2010a). Finally, family-school partnerships can help promote equity and social justice in education by involving families in decision-making and governance at the school level and ensuring that all families' needs and perspectives are represented and addressed (Hornby, 2011).

## **2.5 The Dual Capacity – Building Framework for Family – School Partnerships**

Family engagement has become a vital component of effective educational practice in recent years, with numerous studies showing that it can significantly positively affect students' academic achievement and overall well-being.

According to Mapp and Kuttner, "Over 50 years of research links the various roles that families play in a child's education – as supporters of learning, encouragers of grit and determination, models of lifelong learning, and advocates of proper programming and placements for their child – with indicators for student achievement including grades, achievement tests scores, lower drop-outs rates, students' sense of personal competence and efficacy for learning, and students' beliefs about the importance of education" (K. L. Mapp & Kuttner, 2013). The previously mentioned researchers have developed The Dual Capacity-Building Framework, supported by the U.S. Department of Education, which was formulated using research on effective family engagement and strategies and practices on home-school partnerships, adult education and motivation, and leadership development (K. L. Mapp & Kuttner, 2013). The framework (see Figure 4.) was created to be viewed as a 'compass' that sets the goals and conditions

necessary to chart the path to effective family participation efforts related to student and school performance.

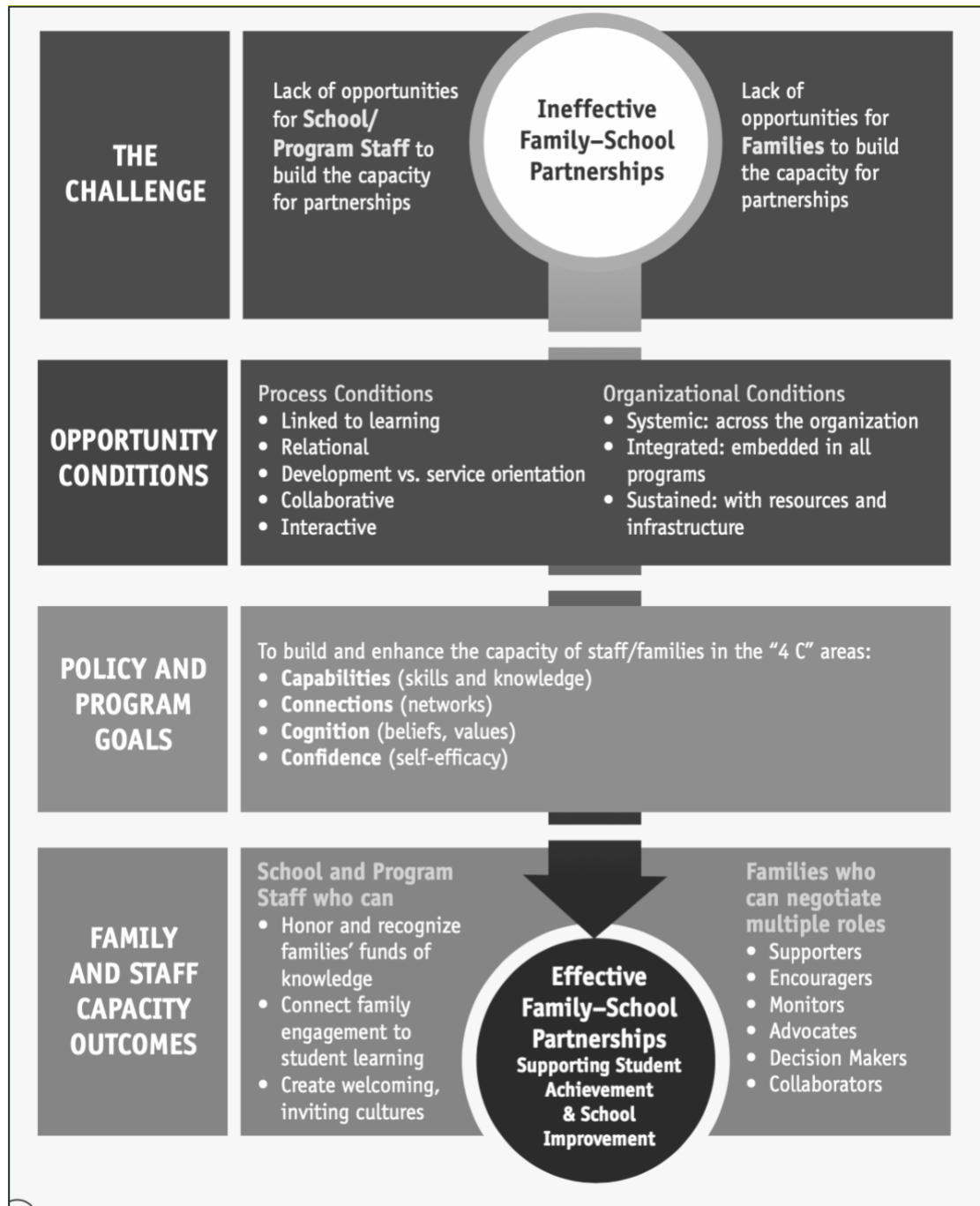


FIGURE 4. The Dual Capacity-Building Framework for Family – School Partnerships (K. L. Mapp & Kuttner, 2013)

The Dual Capacity-Building Framework consists of (see Figure 4):

- A description of the capacity challenges that must be addressed to support the cultivation of effective home–school partnerships.
- An articulation of the conditions integral to the success of family–school partnership initiatives and interventions.
- An identification of the desired intermediate capacity goals that should be the focus of family engagement policies and programs at the federal, state, and local level; and
- a description of the capacity-building outcomes for school and program staff and families.

A common setback from educators is that although they do have a strong desire to engage families from diverse backgrounds and cultures to develop stronger relationships between schools and families, they need to learn how to accomplish it. Personal, cultural, and structural barriers or even negative past experiences lead to mistrust or feelings of unwelcomeness (K. L. Mapp & Kuttner, 2013). What is more, there is a lack of accessible and practical opportunities to build those capacities among local education agencies, as well as insufficient focus on the development of adult capacity, pre- and in-service professional development, workshops, seminars, and workplace training for educators and families; all add up to the unengaged families in student learning.

## **2.6 The Five Essential Supports Framework for School Improvement**

The Five Essential Supports Framework for School Improvement is a research-based approach identifying the critical components necessary for achieving sustained school improvement (Bryk, 2010). One of the essential supports in this framework involved families, which recognizes families' important role in supporting student success and creating a positive school culture. The involvement of families in schools can improve student attendance, academic achievement, and overall well-being while fostering positive relationships between families and educators. The Five Essential Supports Framework for School Improvement is illustrated below in Figure 5 (Bryk, 2010):

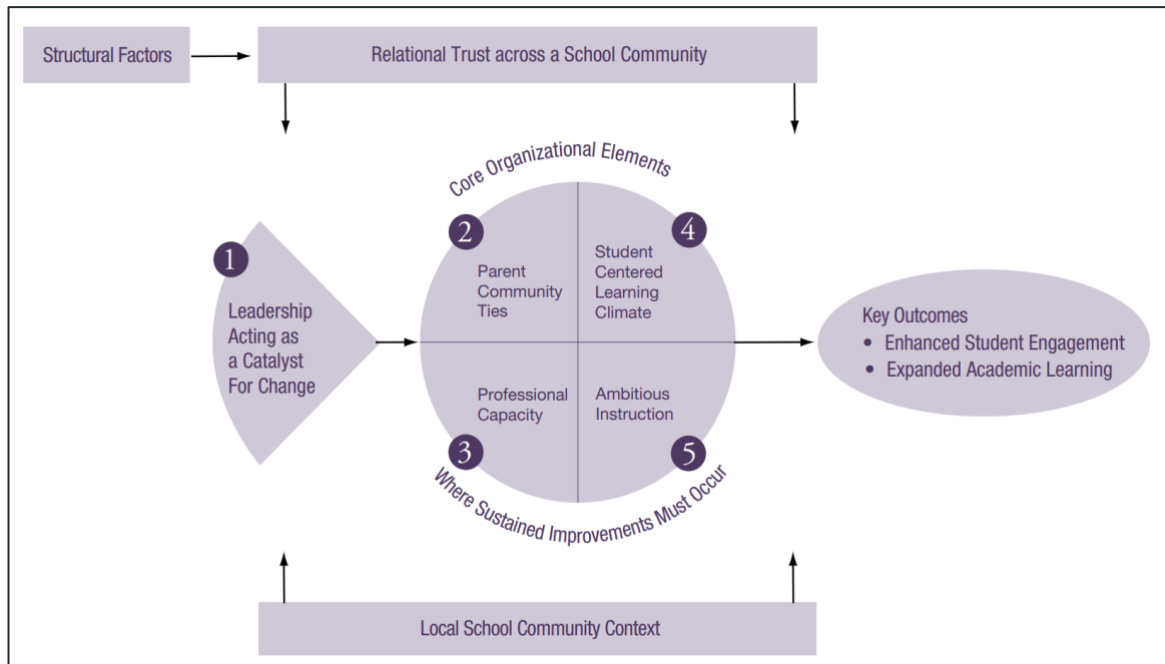


FIGURE 5. A Framework for Essential Supports and Contextual Resources for School Improvement (Sebring et al., 2006)

The Five Essential Supports Framework emphasizes the importance of building a culture of trust, respect, and open communication between families and educators to create effective school-family partnerships. It involves creating opportunities for families to engage in school activities, such as attending parent-teacher conferences, volunteering in classrooms, and participating in school events. Schools can also use various communication tools like newsletters, emails, and social media to keep families informed and engaged in their children's education. Effective school-family partnerships also require educators to recognize and respect cultural diversity and the unique perspectives of families, including providing resources and support for families who speak languages other than English and valuing and incorporating cultural traditions and practices into the school environment. Schools can also work to build partnerships with community organizations to provide additional support and resources to families.

By prioritizing involved families as essential support, the Five Essential Supports Framework highlights families' critical role in creating a positive school culture and supporting student success. By building solid school-family partnerships,

educators can create a supportive and collaborative learning environment that benefits students and families.

### **3 BARRIERS TO FAMILY – SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS**

Despite the increasing recognition of its importance, teachers often need help engaging families effectively. From language and cultural barriers to a lack of resources and negative past experiences, these obstacles can make it difficult for teachers to establish and maintain meaningful partnerships with families. Understanding teachers' barriers to family engagement is essential for developing strategies to overcome them and promoting effective family-school partnerships that can support student success. This chapter will explore some key barriers teachers and school administrators face in engaging families and discuss potential solutions for addressing these challenges.

#### **3.1 Key Barriers to Parental Engagement**

##### **3.1.1 School Policy and Procedures**

Researchers have identified several barriers hindering parental engagement in their children's education. These barriers can be related to the attitudes and beliefs of parents, teachers, and school administrators, school policies and leadership practices, and the social and economic conditions in which families live (Epstein, 2010; Hornby, 2011; Mapp & Henderson, 2002).

One of the critical barriers to parental engagement is a need for more attention and information described and provided to families about their engagement in written school policies and procedures (Sheldon & Epstein, 2005). Many parents may need help understanding how the school system works, their rights and responsibilities, or how they can best support their children's learning. This lack of knowledge can make it difficult for parents to participate effectively in their children's education and create barriers to communication and collaboration with teachers and school staff.

Based on Epstein's (2000) and other theoretical models for parental involvement, feedback from numerous groups of parents, teachers, and other professionals who work in schools, educational psychologist Garry Hornby (2011) suggested a model for parental involvement that was initially developed

in 1989 to provide school leaders and teachers with a framework that would help formulate overall policy and procedures for working with parents. It consisted of two pyramids connected at the base, one representing a hierarchy of parents' needs and the other a hierarchy of parents' strengths or possible contributions. The model's components were outlined, and the knowledge and skills needed by teachers to participate in each type of parental involvement were identified (see Figure 6.):

<b><u>PARENTAL CONTRIBUTIONS</u></b>	
SOME	<b>POLICY FORMATION</b> e.g. PTA members, school governors, parent support/advocacy groups
MANY	<b>ACTING AS A RESOURCE</b> e.g. classroom aides, fund-raising, supporting other parents
MOST	<b>COLLABORATING WITH TEACHERS</b> e.g. home-school reading, maths and behavior programs
ALL	<b>SHARING INFORMATION ON CHILDREN</b> e.g. children's strengths, weaknesses, likes, dislikes, medical details
ALL	<b>CHANNELS OF COMMUNICATION</b> e.g. handbooks, newsletters, telephone contacts, homework diaries
MOST	<b>LIAISON WITH SCHOOL STAFF</b> e.g. home visits, parent-teacher meetings
MANY	<b>PARENT EDUCATION</b> e.g. parent workshops
SOME	<b>PARENT SUPPORT</b> e.g. counselling, support groups

FIGURE 6. Model for Parental Involvement (Hornby, 2011).

Hornby's model of parental involvement provides a valuable framework for understanding the complex nature of family-school partnerships. The model highlights the importance of various factors, such as cultural beliefs and values, school policies and practices, and communication between parents and teachers, that can impact the level and quality of parental involvement in their child's education. Furthermore, the model underscores the need for collaborative partnerships that emphasize shared decision-making and mutual respect between families and schools. However, it is essential to recognize that implementing such partnerships is not always easy, as numerous barriers can hinder parental involvement in education.

### **3.1.2 Educators' Beliefs and Attitudes**

Educational psychologist Garry Horny suggests exploring the barriers to parental involvement by first-hand looking into the attitudes and competencies of professionals needed to work effectively with parents (Hornby, 2011). Research conducted with teachers indicates that one of the most stressful parts of a teacher's work is interaction with parents, and the feeling is mutual. It is, therefore, important to look at those attitudes towards parents that professionals commonly hold. Sonnenschein (1984) argues that certain common attitudes that educators have towards parents, e.g., seeing parents as problems, adversaries, vulnerable, less able, or even as needed-treatment, causal or "needed to be kept at a professional distance", can contribute significantly to stress caused by their relationships with one another (Sonnenschein, as per Hornby 2011).

Opposite to the attitudes listed above, the attitudes that professionals need to work effectively with parents are the ones that could help them develop productive relationships. Humanistic psychologist Carl Rogers (1980) suggested these were genuineness, respect, empathy, and being hopeful but realistic and children's success (Rogers, 2014) :

Along with the attitude to effectively build relationships between teachers and parents, there are specific skills and knowledge that teachers, psychologists,



social workers, and counselors need to have. Relevant skills include organization and communication, essential to maintain contact with parents. Also, interpersonal, listening, assertion, collaboration, and counseling skills for dealing with concerns raised by the parents. Educators and school social specialists must have the specific knowledge needed to work effectively with parents (Hornby, 2011):

1. Understanding the barriers to parental involvement
2. Know strategies and techniques needed to improve the PI organized by schools, e.g., guidelines for meetings and other activities and for organizing parent education workshops.
3. Understand the parent perspective and be aware of family dynamics.
4. Know what they can do to help families and children facing all sorts of difficulties.
5. Know the range of services and resources that are available to parents.
6. Be aware of the beliefs and customs of the ethnic groups they work with to ensure that their working relationships are culturally appropriate.

### **3.1.3 Leadership, Communication and Trust**

Neo-liberal policies allowed parents to participate heavily and actively in their children's education globally; therefore, nowadays, it appears to be commonly expected that parent-teacher relations should be based on trust and collaboration, and the two groups should collaborate for the benefit of the children and the schools (Addi-Raccah & Grinshtain, 2022). In their research, Sebring et al. (2006) have established that one of the barriers to parent involvement and parent leadership "is the sometimes-troublesome relationship between parents and school professionals" (Sebring et al., 2006). Hornby (2011) elaborates further and advocates for the role of in-school psychologists in parental involvement. These roles include facilitating activities such as consulting with families to support their children's learning and behavior at school, assisting schools in developing communication methods with families, and providing in-service training to professionals on involving parents in their children's schoolwork. (Hornby, 2011).

As mentioned in previous sections, one of the most important supports out of *The Five Essential Supports Framework for School Improvement* (Bryk, 2010) is inclusive leadership, which stems from the principals of the schools who shape the "vision-in-outline" for the school and invite teachers as well as parents to shape this vision (Sebring et al., 2006). This type of work requires principals to actively engage parents, community members, and faculty - inspiring and enabling them to assume leadership roles. Hence, it is essential to acknowledge that the work of school leaders acts more like a catalyst for the whole school's improvement. Hallinger and Hecks (1996) concluded that certain mediators have indirect effects on student achievement but are influenced by the leadership of the school, such as school culture, school climate, school goal-setting process, programs and instruction, school policies and procedures, resources, attitudes towards change on the part of teachers, and more (Leithwood & Mascall, 2008). Agile leadership influences the development of the other four core organizational supports: parent-community ties, professional capacity of the faculty and staff, a student-centered learning climate, and ambitious teaching (Sebring et al., 2006).

When a warm, welcoming school culture is noticeable to families, its community encourages and supports family participation at school (Jeynes, 2018). Jeynes (2018) proposes a practical model for school leaders to encourage parental involvement and engagement in their children's education. This model is based on the premise that parental involvement and engagement are crucial factors in academic success and that schools can play a vital role in promoting and supporting parental involvement (Jeynes, 2018). The model consists of the following components:

1. **Communication** is the model's foundation, and school leaders need to establish clear and consistent communication channels with parents to ensure they are informed and engaged in their child's education. It includes regular newsletters, parent-teacher conferences, and open-door policies encouraging parents to communicate their concerns and feedback. Mapp and Henderson (2002) note that parents may feel intimidated or unwelcome in school settings or feel that their voices are not being heard (K. L. Mapp & Henderson, 2002). Schools may also

have negative attitudes or biases towards certain families or communities, which can make it difficult to establish positive relationships and partnerships.

1. **Collaboration** involves working together with parents to identify and address their child's academic and social needs. It includes involving parents in decision-making processes and seeking their input on school policies and programs.
  
1. **Trust and respect** are vital components of any successful partnership, and school leaders need to build trust and respect with parents by being transparent, honest, and responsive to their concerns.
  
1. **Empowerment** involves giving parents the tools and resources to support their child's education. It includes providing them with access to learning resources, training opportunities, and workshops that can help them better understand their child's academic needs.
  
1. **Advocacy** involves promoting parental involvement and engagement in the broader community and advocating for policies that support parent-school partnerships. It includes partnering with community organizations and policymakers to promote school parent engagement.

Each component is essential for building strong partnerships between schools and parents and creating a supportive learning environment for students. By implementing these six components, school leaders can build strong partnerships with parents and create a supportive learning environment that promotes academic success for all students.

School leadership plays a crucial role in fostering effective family-school partnerships that support student learning and well-being. Research has shown that school leaders prioritizing family engagement and creating a welcoming and inclusive school environment can improve student achievement, reduce absenteeism, and increase parent involvement (K. L. Mapp & Henderson, 2002; Sheldons & Epstein, 2005). ). According to Tschannen – Moran (2014), school

leaders are also responsible for nurturing a trusting culture across the organization (Tschannen-Moran, 2014). To enjoy cohesive and cooperative relationships in school, trust must be viewed as an essential and binding element between educators and families. In fact, "trust facilitates communication and contributes to greater efficiency when people have confidence in the integrity of other people's words and deeds" (Tschannen-Moran, 2014). For families to trust educators, school leaders must be attentive to the unique needs and experiences of families, including those from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds, and strive to create an inclusive school environment that values and respects everyone's perspectives.

Finally, schools are mechanisms through which education is realized as a social institution. From the systems thinking perspective, pedagogical leadership is crucial as it is a holistic leadership of people, things, and knowledge that utilizes people's collectiveness, differences, and innovativeness (Chukhlantseva & Lahtinen, 2021). Moreover, such a non-hierarchical type of leadership promotes shared responsibility for the learning process and outcomes throughout the community. It guides the personnel's learning and the whole organizational culture in such a way that the pedagogical perspective is the value basis for all decision-making.

#### **3.1.4 Professional Teachers' Capacities**

*"Schools are only as good as the quality of faculty, the professional development that supports their learning, and the faculty's capacity to work together to improve instruction" (Bryk, 2010).*

The importance of teachers' professional development in family-school partnerships cannot be overstated. To promote effective family-school partnerships, school leaders must understand the importance of building a culture of trust, respect, and open communication between families and educators. They can achieve this by providing ongoing professional development for teachers on effective family engagement strategies, establishing regular communication channels with families, and creating

opportunities for families to participate in school decision-making processes (Epstein, 2010a).

Professional development programs can focus on communication strategies, cultural responsiveness, parent-teacher conferences, and engaging families of children with special needs (Henderson & Mapp, 2002). Through these programs, teachers can learn how to communicate effectively with families, develop strategies to involve families in their child's education and provide support to families to promote their child's learning. Moreover, professional development can help teachers to adopt a reflective and collaborative approach toward family-school partnerships. Teachers can reflect on their practices, learn from their experiences, and collaborate with colleagues to develop effective partnership-building strategies (Epstein, 2010b). Through ongoing professional development, teachers can also keep up-to-date with the latest research, trends, and practices related to family-school partnerships.

In 2018, Epstein (2018) conducted a survey in the US and Europe to understand whether individual nations and their education systems implement teacher training in partnership with families. The analysis of partnership topics is mainly up to individual professors of education. Initial teacher education programs need to be more consistent in whether and which future teachers take comprehensive courses, modules, and classes on school, family, and community partnerships. Many-to-most new teachers feel unprepared to work well with the families of students in the schools where they are placed" (Epstein, 2018).

Research shows that teachers' training has maintained rather a conservative approach regarding teacher's roles. Epstein (2018) has critiqued 'like pre-service education, in-service education on family and community engagement has been side-lined in most schools and across countries' (Epstein, 2018). Grinshtain and Addi-Raccah (2021) have found that "for teachers, collaboration and involvement with external agents, such as parents, reflects a shift in their perceived role, which is not easily incorporated into their work due to the lack of professional training in this context" (Addi-Raccah & Grinshtain, 2022). Moreover, the same study revealed that teachers' relations with parents are

based on their professional competencies, which are directly related to their work with students. In contrast, parent relations are based on estimations of teachers' work efficiency and perceptions of the teachers' power position in school, i.e., influencing decision-making (Addi-Racah & Grinshtain, 2022).

### 3.1.5 Hornby's Model of Barriers to Parental Involvement

Building solid teacher-parent relationships can be challenging, and there are several barriers that can hinder the development of these partnerships. Epstein's framework of overlapping spheres of influences between family, school and community has been broadened and adapted with societal factors to develop a concise model of factors acting as barriers to parental involvement (Hornby, 2011). The illustration of the model is presented in Figure 7. below:

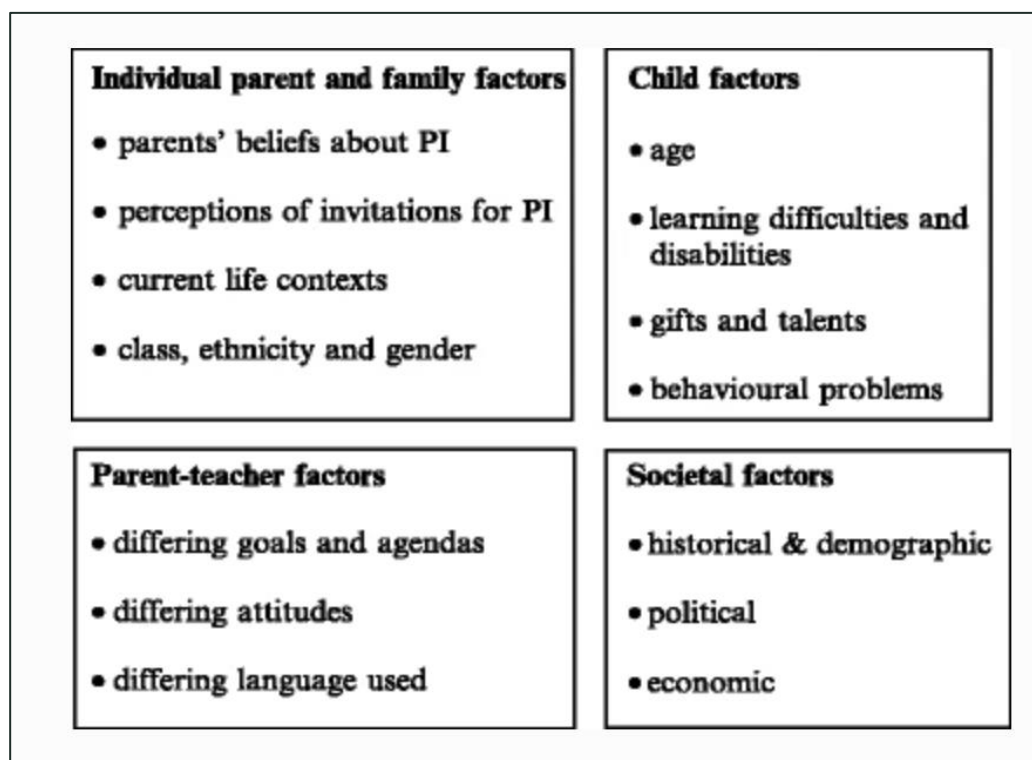


FIGURE 7. Factors acting as barriers to parental involvement (Hornby, 2011)

#### Individual Parent and Family Factors

Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997) suggest that one of the most significant factors contributing to successful student learning and development is how

parents view their role in children's education. Parent's beliefs and perceptions that act as barriers to support and enhancement of children's learning regardless of their socioeconomic status (Hornby, 2011):

1. That they should not be involved or support learning at home and, most importantly, believe that they cannot effectively help their kids
2. Parents who believe their children's intelligence is fixed or schools' achievement is a matter of luck.
3. Parents believe in their ability to help their children. Due to a lack of confidence, having had negative experiences with their children in previous schools or experiencing learning or behavioral difficulties.
4. When parents think their involvement is not valued by teachers and schools, and receive no positive, facilitating attitudes from the teachers.
5. Parents without a university degree might feel a lack sufficient skills and knowledge to engage.
6. Family circumstances e.g., solo parents, those with young kids or large families, as well as work situations that are not valuing flexibility for school-based parent involvement.
7. Parents' low psychological resources or absence of social support networks find engaging difficult.

### **Child Factors**

The children's age can often be seen (by both teachers and parents) as the barrier to parental involvement, especially during the adolescents years. However, research suggests that even though children are less keen to see their parents at school volunteering or participating in field trips due to the normal aspiration to become more independent from their parents, adolescents still value greatly parents' different types of involvement, such as discussions at home, ideas for projects, reflecting on parents' own adolescent experiences, etc. Edwards and Adler (2000) found that children reported far greater parental involvement in learning in a home setting rather than school (Edwards & Alldred, 2000).

According to Eccles and Harold (1993), learning difficulties and disabilities of children are, in most cases, a factor for greater parental engagement in

implementing individual education programs; however, in some cases, when parents have higher than realistic academics expectations or when teachers expect more support from parents at home, it can become a barrier, too (Eccles & Harold, 1993). According to Hornby, parents of academically gifted and talented children tend to lose confidence in the school if it does not sufficiently challenge students academically. It may lead to conflicts between parents and teachers, which can act as a barrier to the effective involvement of parents (Hornby, 2011). Another factor correlating with low parental involvement is students' behavioral problems that make parents reluctant to go into school for fear of getting more bad news.

### **Parent–Teacher Factors**

One part of parents – teacher factors that act as barriers to parental involvement is the perception of different goals and agendas that the parties have for parents being involved in children's education.

Hornby suggests that "from the perspective of their goals, governments and schools may see PI as a tool for increasing accountability to their communities and for increasing children's achievements, or as a cost-effective resource, as well as a method of addressing cultural disadvantage and inequality" (Hornby, 2011). While parents' goals are more likely to be focused on improving their children's learning, "wishing to influence their ethos or curriculum within the school" and wanting to increase understanding of school life (Hornby, 2011). According to Rudney, teachers' goals for parental involvement array from helping students with their homework, providing a nurturing environment, fund-raising, attending school events, and attending parent–teacher meetings (Rudney, 2005).

Some fundamental understanding about education and schooling may differ between parents and teachers. If a dominant attitude by any party is that education is about schooling, then teachers possess the knowledge, skills, and expertise. However, if schooling is perceived as only part of education, then the power and expertise shift toward parents (Hornby, 2011). Therefore, different attitudes on this point will influence how PI is perceived, structured, valued, and implemented.



Another barrier, as defined by Hornby (2011), is the language that describes both the participants and the processes involved as they describe the interactions to some extent. For example, when talking about "parents and professionals," the words describe professionals as more competent than the parents. What is more, the word "partnership," which has a positive meaning, referring to collaboration, in reality, masks "the inequalities in the practice of parental involvement" (Hornby, 2011). Because it is usually the school professionals that create, shape, and lead the partnerships, there is a threat for them to become one - sided with parents being almost employed in such ways that schools' agendas and concerns are met.

### **Societal Factors**

Historical and demographical factors play an essential role as barriers to parental involvement. Historically, schools were established along factory production lines to prepare future labor force; hence, many schools still "bear the hallmarks of the formality and inflexibility," which is counterproductive to forming parent–school relationships that require flexibility (Hornby, 2011). What is more, parents are experiencing much more stress due to longer working hours and increased number of divorces, resulting in increased sole parenting, diminished interest in religious practices, increased community fragmentations, individualism, and competition – all the demographic factors that act as barriers to parents to take on more roles in their children's learning.

At a political level, several factors act as barriers to PI. For example, specific legislation on parental involvement in children's education is absent in Lithuania. Although it is widely acknowledged parents' responsibilities and duties, such as commitment to their child's attendance at school and meeting all basic needs, parents do not have any voice when it comes to the content, load, number of compulsory exams, standardized testing, etc. (Pranevičienė & Vasiliauskienė, 2017). As Hornby elaborates, "Unless government policy on parental involvement is accompanied by appropriate action, such as strategic implementation, information dissemination, and training, it is unlikely to be effective in improving parental involvement" (Hornby, 2011).

Another important aspect related to political factors that affect parental involvement is teacher training. Currently, teacher education does not include courses on working with parents and families (European Commission, 2022). According to Epstein, the importance of such courses has been widely acknowledged, but because government policies do not require these, they are usually not included (Epstein, 2010a).

Finally, the economic factor - closely related to the political one- comes in the shape of funding educational programs, financed only if justifiable. While it is easy to measure the results of national literacy and numeracy tests, programs related to parental engagement are long-term and, hence, usually the first to be cut down if the finances are low (Hornby, 2011). Therefore, this factor is another barrier to parental engagement in children's education.

### **3.1.6 Schools Are Unique Communities**

Schools differ not just in their physical attributes such as location or architectural design; they are all unique in their cultures, how the communities are formed and sustained, and how these communities shape and contribute to the student's learning. In this research paper, a learning culture comprises the actions, interactions, talk, dispositions, expectations, and interpretations of all the participants in that culture. While there are at least three types of communities in schools today – the professional community, the school learning community, and a parent community, according to Epstein and Salinas (2004), a professional learning community emphasizes the teamwork of principals, teachers, and staff to identify school goals, improve curriculum and instruction, reduce teachers' isolation, assess student progress, while a school learning community includes educators, parents and broader community members who share a common goal which is both to improve the school as well as to enhance students' learning opportunities (Epstein & Salinas, 2004). A conscious invitation to the parent community to participate in activities linked to school goals strengthens the reciprocal relational trust, which as a result, contributes as a moral resource for sustaining the hard work of school improvement (Bryk, 2010).

Etienne Wenger (1998), who developed the notion of learning in communities of practice into a significant and influential theory, weaves the processes of learning, knowledge generation, identity, and community into the construct of a community of practice or a learning community (Rawson, 2021). A Waldorf school (which is a relevant commissioner of this research paper) is a classic example of a learning community with many shared experiences, assumptions, expectations, ways of talking, its own narratives, rituals, and ways of being and becoming (Rawson, 2021). Strong parent-community ties are an essential part of Waldorf schools. Parents, of course, have a right to participate in the community life of a Waldorf school and can even take positions of responsibility. In Klaipeda Nature School, this is indeed the case.

### **3.1.7 No" One Size Fits All" Approach**

Previous studies have linked relational trust across a school community, school size, and the stability of the student body to school improvement (Sebring et al., 2006). Researchers Alameda - Lawson and Lawson (2016) investigated the ecology of parent engagement from the point of poverty-related barriers that low-income communities and schools face in the context of family engagement. They suggested that previously known parental engagement models and theoretical frameworks are school-centric since the individuals involved are usually actively participating in school meetings, volunteering activities, and monitoring students' homework at home. However, for various reasons, not all parents possess the required capital to participate in those activities. This social-ecological view extends the study of parent engagement beyond the actions and reactions of individual parents to include analyses of the social networks and interactions between and among parents, teachers, and other school–community agents (Alameda-Lawson & Lawson, 2019).

The conventional parent involvement activities and related partnership models are typically conceived as school-centric, school-directed, and individualistic efforts. These activities are typically school–centric because they are designed to address the specific needs of teachers within that school rather than taking a more holistic approach that considers the broader community's needs. In

addition, these activities are often school directed, which means that the school administration is responsible for selecting and implementing them. This can sometimes result in a lack of input from teachers, who may have different ideas about the support they need to be effective in their roles.

Finally, conventional parental involvement and partnership models are often individualistic in nature, meaning that they are focused on the needs of individual teachers rather than the needs of the broader community, which can sometimes result in a lack of collaboration and sharing of best practices among the teachers. Alameda – Lawson and Lawson (2019) suggest a "collective parental engagement" model illustrated in Figure 8. below:

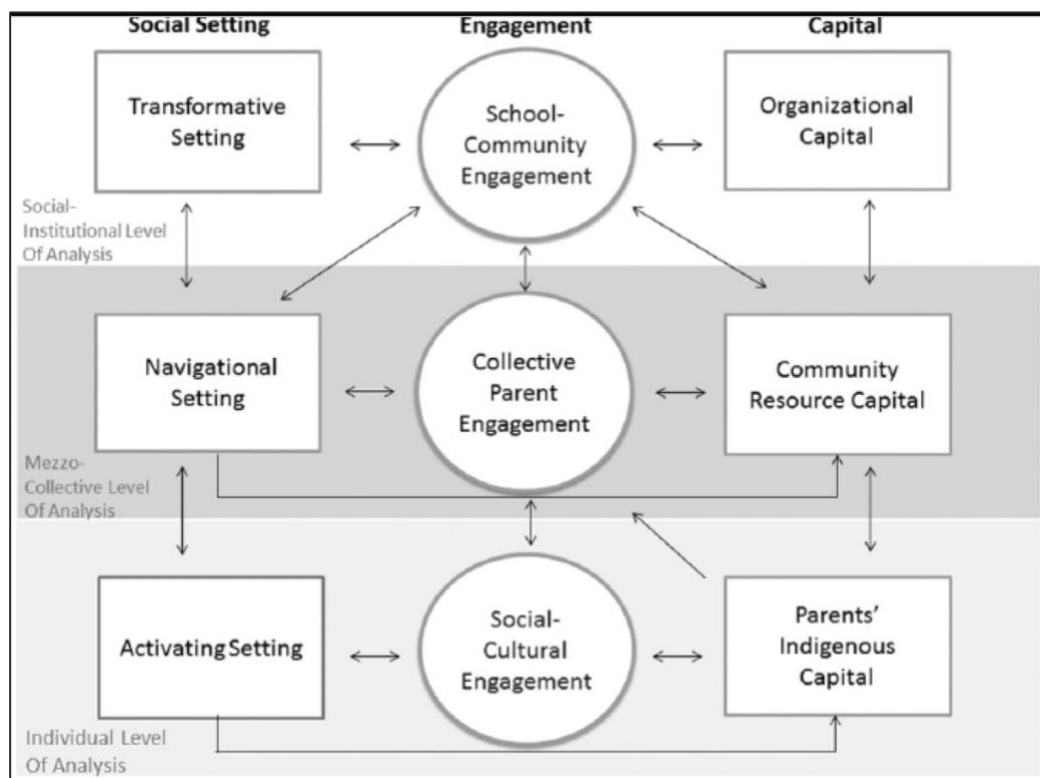


FIGURE 8. Ecology of Collective Parental Engagement (Alameda-Lawson & Lawson, 2019)

The CPE model presented above includes activities that are:

1. Parent-guided, parent- run, parent–directed.
2. School – focused and community–centric.
3. Collectively designed and employed.

It contributes to a formative kind of parent engagement that researchers call "social – cultural engagement" (Alameda-Lawson & Lawson, 2019). In addition to these operational considerations, insights from this study have helped advance understanding of the socio-environmental conditions that may accompany CPE. These are (a) an activating setting that fosters the development of parents' existing strengths, know-how, and socio-cultural resources; (b) navigational settings that facilitate the development of parental social capital networks, particularly those that bridge parental social capital with schools and community social service providers; (c) A transformative settings that strengthen the institutional social capital of schools and their partners, aiming at secondary changes in schools and communities (Alameda-Lawson & Lawson, 2019). (The illustration of the three settings can be found in the Appendix 3.).

## **4 METHODOLOGY**

### **4.1 Methodological approach**

This research seeks to find out how teachers in Klaipeda Nature School could be supported in fostering effective and meaningful school–family partnerships. Klaipeda Nature School is a community school that follows the philosophy of Waldorf education, where school leadership and responsibility are distributed between teachers and community working groups. For such schools to thrive and live up to the essence of Steiner's philosophy, families are expected to play a significant role in the school's existence. Teachers are to have an open and collaborative attitude with families to run the school and enhance children's learning. To assist and help the teachers improve in family engagement activities, it is therefore essential to study their beliefs, attitudes, and experiences towards family engagement. Also, it is primarily important to understand whether the school's policies and procedures are in place to meet the teacher's and parent's needs.

Because this thesis aims to support and help teachers improve their family engagement practices, it was chosen to use qualitative research as a methodological approach. According to Merriam and Tisdale (2015), research focused on discovery, insight, and understanding from the perspectives of those being studied offers the most significant promise of making a difference in people's lives (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Qualitative research is a methodological approach used to explore social phenomena that emphasizes understanding and interpretation of social phenomena through non-numerical data such as interviews, observations, and textual analysis as Creswell (2017) notes that qualitative research design contributes to understanding in depth how people view social challenges (Creswell & Poth, 2017).

Research provides a consistent, positive correlation between schools and parents' partnerships in enhancing children's academic performance, contributing to better school culture, and positively affecting a child's psychological well-being (Epstein, 2018). Interviews were chosen as the most appropriate method to collect information on teacher's beliefs and attitudes on school–parent

partnerships. According to DeMarrais (2004), "a research interview is a process in which a researcher and participant engage in a conversation focused on questions related to a research study" (DeMarrais, as per Merrima and Tisdell, 2015). The theoretical part of this thesis, particularly Hornby's (2011) Model for parental involvement and barriers to parental involvement and Epstein's Framework of Six Types of Parental Involvement, have formed the scaffolding for the interview's semi-structured questions.

## 4.2 Participants

Klaipeda Nature School commissioned this research to investigate teachers' barriers to parental engagement and the school's policies and procedures toward school–parent partnerships. Because this thesis is mainly focused on understanding the perception of teachers and administrators about school-family partnerships, a purposeful sampling technique was used to collect data and information for the study, the principle of purposeful sampling is to select a group of exceptionally knowledgeable persons experienced with the phenomenon of interest, which is school – family partnership in Klaipeda Nature School (Palinkas et al., 2015). 11 teachers are working in Klaipeda Nature School; however, only seven work there full time.

TABLE 1. Summary of participants

<b>Participant Group</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Years of working at KNS</b>
<b>ADMINISTRATOR</b>	Female	1
<b>TEACHER A</b>	Female	3 months
<b>TEACHER B</b>	Female	1 year
<b>TEACHER C</b>	Female	3 years

November 2022 was the first time the researcher contacted the school with the proposal for research in Klaipeda Nature School. The idea was then delivered by the school's then headmaster to the collegial teachers to be discussed. Once the teachers had agreed to participate in the research, it was in March 2023 that the

researcher was ready to start the interviews. Between November 2022 and the end of March 2023, an establisher of the school has stepped back from the principal's role, and another person was appointed to step in. The new person is a member of the parent community and acts more as an administrator rather than an educator in the school and oversees coordinating various activities from student enrolment, moderating teachers' weekly meetings, organizing school events, etc. This person shared the researcher's email about this research project and an invitation to participate in the interviews. Initially, three teachers replied and were happy to meet and participate in the interviews.

### **4.3 Data Collection Methods**

The researcher designed a semi-structured interview to investigate the barriers to parental engagement from the teachers' perspective. The semi-structured interview was guided by more or less structured open-ended questions. Unlike structured interviews, which follow a predetermined set of questions, semi-structured interviews have a set of broad topics to cover. However, the interviewer is free to ask follow-up questions based on the participant's responses. This flexibility allows for a more natural conversation between the interviewer and participant and can lead to unexpected insights and new areas of inquiry (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). A purposeful sampling method was used to understand best the teacher's beliefs, experiences, needs, and current school policy practices used in Klaipeda Nature School (Creswell & Creswell, 2023).

Initially, an email was sent to the current school administrator requesting to forward it to all the teachers and invite them to participate in the interviews. The time and place were agreed upon individually with every teacher by a phone conversation and email, and it was decided, for the convenience of the interviewees, that the researcher would come to school and do the interview in a quiet room. It was also agreed that the interview would not be audio recorded, so the researcher took notes throughout the interview. An observation protocol was used with questions written down and space between them left for the researcher to write respondents' answers, comments, or any other significant information, such as body language or vocal sounds produced by the interviewees. The interviewees were assured of their anonymity, and the researcher clearly stated



there were no right or wrong answers and that interviewees should be safe and comfortable expressing as many personal views as they felt they could at that moment.

As Creswell & Creswell (2023) recommended, the interview protocol was produced and guided the researcher during the interview process (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). The interview protocol is presented in Appendix 3.

To obtain information about the school's policies and procedures regarding school–family partnerships, it was decided to send a list of questions to the school's administrator primarily due to her request. The questions stemmed from Hornby's model of parental involvement discussed in the previous chapters of this thesis and were amended to fit the purpose of the research for Klaipeda Nature School. The researcher used the model as a checklist of questions designed to investigate whether school policies and procedures are in place to meet parents' needs and whether parents' potential contributions are being fully utilized (Hornby, 2011). Some of the teachers could have answered some questions because of the self-governing structure and model of the school; however, because one of the teachers has only been working in Klaipeda Nature School for three months and has not been involved in student enrollment or policy implementation, to understand the current situation the researcher decided to request the administrator to answer those questions. Therefore, the questions were emailed on the 18th of April, and the answers were received on the 27th of April. However, it is important to note that although the current administrator suggested answering the questions as a written response to the email, eventually, she delegated one of the teachers to answer them and send them to the researcher. The list of questions related to the school's policies and procedures concerning parents' needs is shared in Appendix 5.

The questions were designed based on Epstein's theory of family engagement and Six Types of Parental Involvement, and Hornby's (2011) Model for Parental Involvement in which each component of the model is outlined and the knowledge and skills needed by teachers to participate in each type of parental involvement are identified (see PICTURE 9.) (Hornby, 2011).

#### 4.4 Data Analysis

*"You can't assume that a person's words are a transparent window. They're more like the smoky, veiled, dirty window that you're trying to see through"*  
(Preissle, as cited by Flick, 2013)

To analyze the data, the researcher worked with four assumptions in mind, as suggested by Flick (2013):

1. Analysis of the interview data is theoretically informed.
2. There are many forms of qualitative interviews.
3. There is no one right way to analyze qualitative interview data.
4. The criteria for the assessment of quality differ in relation to various communities of practice (Flick, 2013).

Analyzing qualitative interview data is a complex process that requires careful attention to detail and diligence to ensure the accuracy and reliability of the findings. To do so for this thesis, the researcher implemented the steps recommended by Braun and Clarke (2019). First, the researcher reread the interview protocol with all the answers provided by the interviewees, then made notes and identified potential reoccurring themes and patterns. Then, the researcher started a coding process that involved identifying and labeling data segments related to a specific theme. After the themes had been developed, the researcher reviewed them to ensure they accurately represented the data and were coherent and meaningful. Finally, the researcher reported the findings, which involved providing a detailed description of the themes, supporting the findings with relevant quotes from the data, and comparing them to the theoretical literature. Finally, the researcher stated potential study limitations and suggestions for future research (Creswell & Creswell, 2023).

#### 4.5 Reliability and Validity of the Study

Reliability and validity are critical components of any research study, including qualitative interviews. In qualitative research, reliability refers to the consistency and dependability of the research findings, while validity refers to the accuracy

and truthfulness of the research findings. Ensuring the reliability and validity of qualitative interviews is critical to establish the credibility and trustworthiness of the research findings. According to Creswell and Creswell (2023), "validity is one of the strengths of qualitative research and is based on determining whether the findings are accurate from the researcher's standpoint, the participant, or the readers of an account" (Creswell & Creswell, 2023).

The researcher used interview strategy recommendations to prepare for the interview, represented in Appendix 4. A validity strategy of "member checking" was implemented, which means that specific descriptions were read back to participants to ensure they felt that their descriptions were accurate (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). It was done at the end of each interview by repeating the answers back to the interviews to ensure the researcher had understood and marked down the answers correctly since the interviewees declined the audio recording option of the interview.

## **5 RESEARCH FINDINGS**

This chapter presents the findings of the research. The purpose of this research was to understand the perception, experiences, and barriers that teachers and administrators face regarding school-family partnerships and to look into the current school's policies and procedures towards school–parent partnerships. The following sections will present the research findings in Klaipeda Nature School.

### **5.1 Barriers related to school policy and procedures.**

#### **5.1.1 Parental Contributions**

##### Policy formation/ Acting as a resource.

Currently, the school does not have a printed or online document accessible to all the families that clearly states the school's principles or policies. There is no community book or handbook that parents could use as a guide on valid policies in the school. Before joining Klaipeda Nature School, parents usually contact the school's website's phone number, and the school administrator refers them to the teacher, which later organizes a meeting with the family. It usually takes 1-2 meetings before the family decides whether to join the school. During the first meeting, the family is introduced to the concept of Waldorf philosophy; they receive links to a couple of videos about Waldorf School, and they are informed about the school's expectation of actively volunteering and engaging families – as this is one of the fundamental principles for such a communal school to exist. Finally, the school provided a tripartite agreement between the school, parents, and child, which is a formal document required for a family's acceptance to the school.

The parents are informed from the beginning that instead of PTA, there are working groups in school (like financial and strategy, repairs, outdoor renovations, communication, etc.) consisting of one staff member and the rest of the volunteering parents. The parents are expected to join the so-called working groups voluntarily of their free will and according to their possibilities,

competencies, and occupations; however, it is being noticed that only a minority of families join those groups, and there is an ongoing issue of families making false promises before joining the school of possibilities to volunteer and reality. In the beginning, the teachers themselves encourage parents to join the working groups; later, parents encourage each other to rotate in their responsibilities and voluntary activities. Parents do not have a designated space for their needs in the school. However, the staff is welcoming and happy to share the school space for parent meetings.

Parents do not have a community book describing agreements, norms, and school philosophy. However, the community uses the social platform Discord to seek help when needed or request volunteers. Both – teachers and parents use the platform. There is no formal regulation regarding volunteering at the school, and that was mentioned in the interview by one of the teachers as potentially being one of the barriers to parents' engagement – parents join the community school. However, most of them do not contribute their time or resources to its welfare. One of the teachers in the interview mentioned that creating a "community book" with clearly described philosophy and pedagogical principles of Waldorf school, community values, roles of families, and essential principle of volunteering, would help families understand what type of school and community they are about to join and what behavior and level of engagement is expected.

#### Collaborating with teachers.

Student's academic progress is discussed directly in a face-to-face meeting with parents, twice per year in a tripartite meeting with teachers, parents, and the student. There is also an electronic journal, [www.manodienynas.lt](http://www.manodienynas.lt), which teachers use for uploading class and homework assignments, praise, and comments on students' behaviors. Also, before the student is enrolled in the school, parents are asked to fill out a form about the student's learning needs. Later these needs are discussed directly with parents. However, the teachers decide on the goals and teaching priorities for the students, not the parents. However, they are welcome to express their opinion and discuss the teaching plans.

### Sharing information on children/ Involving diverse parents.

When asked how they collect information about students with SEN, the respondent explained that there is no separate form for this purpose. Instead, all parents fill out the same form during the enrollment process. Teachers do not share or discuss this information with each other, but they can access the filled-out form. Each teacher decides how to incorporate parents' insights into their work with SEN children.

### **5.1.2 Parental Needs**

#### Channels of communication/ Liaison with staff

Any information related to school matters is shared via emails and on the social platform Discord. Apart from that, there is no set norm for contacting the teachers; therefore, parents use all communication channels – phones, text messages, emails, private servers on Discord, or face-to-face meeting. Again, no community book would clearly state parents' rights and responsibilities, which acts as a significant barrier and becomes a reason for many conflicts where each party's expectations and needs are not well communicated and met.

#### Parent Education/ Parent Support

Although the official position of the school is not to invite parents to lesson observations, one of Teacher C mentioned that she does invite parents to observe her lessons so *"they could experience what children experience and get a feeling of what it is like to learn in Waldorf philosophy led school"* (Teacher C). Regarding the frequency of meetings between teachers and parents, apart from the two compulsory ones, other meetings are left depending on the actual demand or situational circumstances. Parents are invited to participate once or twice per year in seminars related to Waldorf education; however, as two of the teachers notice, *"the number of attending parents is low compared to the number of students attending this school"* (Teachers A and C). No other parent education opportunities are organized in Klaipeda Nature School, which can be seen as one

of the barriers to having more engaged families. Parent education seminars and workshops can be excellent informational and preventive tools for parents and teachers.

### Encouraging parents to school

Parents are invited to join the working groups, attend two compulsory meetings with the teacher yearly, attend fairs and school events, traditional school community hikes, communal clean-ups, and other events.

## **5.2 Barriers Related to Teachers' Beliefs and Attitudes.**

All three teachers believe parents' participation in children's learning is crucial. However, whether all the parents are capable of being engaged, the teachers expressed their thoughts from different perspectives:

*"I do not think that all parents can be engaged in their children's learning, and I think so because of what I observe. Some parents spend very little time with their children; they take advantage of the school being open until 6 pm so they would have as little to do as possible with their kids' home or schoolwork."*  
(Teacher A)

*"Parents are very different; they come from different backgrounds and understandings about the role of education in their families. They also differ in their personal views, characters, and understanding of how much they should be engaged"* (Teacher C).

*"Parents differ at their level of human consciousness"* (Teacher B).

Such beliefs and experiences by teachers can act as barriers to believing there are ways to engage even the least engaged parents. Two teachers agreed that parental engagement does play an essential role in children's academic success, and one teacher expressed doubt in this belief.

Teachers were unified in expressing their belief about barriers that they believe parents face in becoming more engaged in their children's education. "Lack of time" was the most often answer, and "lack of interest" was second.

*"It is disappointing that some parents show no signs of being interested in their children's learning or the obstacles they face at school. I do not believe that in all cases, parents have no time. They do have time to spend time in beauty salons; their priorities are questionable, not lack of time."* (Teacher A)

When asked what barriers, in teacher's opinion, parents experience when trying to be and stay engaged in children's education, one teacher also mentioned her feeling of a "customer and service-provider attitude":

*"I do feel that some parents in this school look at me as a service provider with expectations that do not match Waldorf philosophy and my perspective of collaborative behavior between myself and parents"* (Teacher A)

Another teacher recalled a meeting with a family and a student, during which parents verbally and out loud expressed their own negative experience with a subject and low results and implied low or no expectations that their child might have a different or better experience than they did. Such parental perception is one of the major factors in parents' being optimistic and feeling empowered to be engaged in their children's learning. More importantly, it has a negative effect on a child's academic success. Teacher B mentioned the term "conscious parenting" when speaking about barriers that parents face:

*"I observe that only a few parents understand what it means to raise their children consciously. There must be a shift in society about how we perceive parenthood and what kind of responsibility it is. It cannot be transferred to schools or teachers in particular since we are all connected, and we are all here responsible to co-create the best environment and experiences for our children"* (Teacher B).

More 'face-to-face' conversations and 'modeling of preferred behaviors in parental engagement' was seen as one of the ways to assist parents with



overcoming their barriers. Only one teacher suggested how the school can contribute; the other two respondents did not express an opinion on that.

*"Parents do not know; they need to be educated about the importance of parental engagement. They should also be able to recognize that behavior in other parents and understand the benefits of that. Unfortunately, most of them do not understand the meaning of their engagement and its implications on a child's success or problems in school" (Teacher B).*

While thinking about what resources, supportive factors, and collaborative efforts teachers see as being critical to enhancing parental engagement at Klaipeda Nature School, teachers elaborated on continuing the compulsory two meetings per year, as well as more open and honest conversations, where parents could share about their challenges and listen to the ones the teachers face. Also, they find collaborative activities such as various school events, fairs, community hikes, and primarily informal gatherings that create positive relationships. One teacher expressed:

*"In my class, some parents do not consciously understand the community school concept. I feel they see me as a service provider, and they take upon the role of clients. I must think of strategies to lure the parents into the school because they refuse to come and, quite often, do not even answer to make text messages or phone calls. It is very disappointing. We have a community hike at the end of the year, and the participation of parents in it is compulsory. My students have legitimate worries that the hike will not happen because a good few parents are not interested in participating". (Teacher A).*

### **5.3 Barriers Related to Leadership, Communication, and Trust.**

The leadership in Klaipeda Nature School is shared among the teachers. There is no school principal, and the establisher of the school has recently removed herself from the leader's position, leaving a volunteer parent to take up a role of a school moderator. She is the primary contact of any new family that wants to join the community school, and then she directs the family toward the appropriate teacher. Teachers attend weekly collegial meetings where they discuss all the matters related to school administration, and they also are a part of "working

groups" where the voluntary participation of parents is expected. As well as leading the school, the teachers are, of course, responsible for establishing the best communication forms that work in every class. Teachers' responses:

*"We gave regular communications via emails and Discord application, informal hikes, events such the Lantern Festival, where all parents have to participate as the event is in the dark and I cannot take responsibility for all the children at nighttime." Parents whose kids have SEN tend to communicate back more regularly. Unfortunately, my class has had a difficult experience with changing teachers. I struggle trying to create a contact with them. Some of them have never met me face to face, and when I call them on the phone and ask them to come and see me at school, I receive the question, 'Is it necessary?'. As if it was my children, not theirs. This is the disappointing part of communicating with some parents." (Teacher A)*

*"Parents of first graders are quite engaged, perhaps because the school concept is still new to the children and exciting. Apart from regular communications via phones and messages, we are always in contact via our social platform Discord. However, the most effective way to create relationships is via informal, open, and honest occasions, face-to-face conversations. For example, I have children who struggle at school, and they have extra task books at home, so I always contact the parents directly via Messenger which tasks need to be completed, or how much reading needs to be done" (Teacher B)*

*"I communicate with parents mostly via emails, text messages, phone calls, the social platform Discord and digital journal. Although I would like a more consistent type of communication" (Teacher C).*

Teachers shared different experiences when asked what behaviors they noticed by parents or students that demonstrate parental involvement in children's learning:

*"I notice that when kids are quieter at school, they can talk and share their experiences with their parents. They do not need to do that with me. Also, when*

*students ask me to mark or send an extra message to an electronic journal for their parents to help them with homework, also, when I give them a task related to their parents, I can tell by their answers whether or not they discussed with their parents or not" (Teacher A).*

*"I can tell whether the parents are engaged by their children's engagement in class activities. When I see that students are bored or unengaged, I can tell that parents have distanced themselves from what is happening at school or with their child's learning process" (Teacher B)*

*"I can tell how much parents have been engaged during the private compulsory meetings twice a year or when they reach out to me to check on double, e.g., whether the student has enough means (like pens, pencils, paper, etc.) for studying. Also, almost half of my students have SEN; I am constantly in direct dialogue with them. I can tell which parents are helping their kids on more challenging assignments after school" (Teacher C).*

Teachers reported needing financial and human resources to help organize seminars and workshops for parents about child development stages. Teacher C reflected that many professionals could come to school, and parents would appreciate somebody unrelated to the school to talk to them about specific and relevant issues. She also feels her class could benefit from a well-organized and led team-building event that "would bring all the students and parents together."

*"We would benefit greatly from having an in-house psychologist or social worker/counselor. However, we are a community school with tight finances which restricts us in many ways. There is a need for educational seminars for both parents and teachers." (Teacher B)*

When talking about the most enjoyable aspects of cooperating with parents, teachers shared their different experiences:

*"It is beautiful when we find an opportunity to notice positive progress, not just see the problems. I feel pleased when I get honest feedback and sharing about parents see their children's progress" (Teacher C)*

*"I love the conversations because, during open conversations, I get to see the fuller picture of the family – the child is just one piece of it. I can make sense of the child better when I know the family closer" (Teacher B)*

*"I enjoy getting the feedback, any feedback at all, of course, positive one is always nice to receive. But I try to model myself the feedback process so that parents know how to give it" (Teacher A).*

The researcher asked the teacher if they had ever experienced a difficult situation with parents that were not engaged in their children's education, and they shared situations where the issue of trust arose:

*"My worst experience was with parents who did not accept that their child has SEN. There was a case where I had to call in a specialist to report directly to the parents because they did not trust my competence." (Teacher A)*

*"We had to say goodbye to one family who was completely unengaged, uncooperative, and lacked consciousness in being parents." (Teacher B)*

*"My student's parents are not active but kind and willing to help if asked. I had a student that was demonstrating quite depressive behavior, the parents not engaged and eventually, they withdrew him from our school" (Teacher C)*

#### **5.4 Barriers Related to Teachers' Professional Capacities.**

Once a month, teachers attend Waldorf seminars for their professional development, and some workshops are related to the theme of parental engagement. Teachers reported having had no pre-service preparation in pedagogical studies related to parent engagement or school-family partnerships, and no in-service workshops are organized dedicated explicitly to the topic of family engagement or school-family partnerships. Moreover, parents are never involved or invited to monthly Waldorf seminars.

Teacher A has had long experience serving in public school, and family engagement was never addressed as something teachers should get acquainted with. This is one of the biggest barriers – teachers not being prepared or expecting that dealing with families would be an important part of their job and a resource to help the students achieve their goals.

## **6 DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The purpose of this research was to understand the perception, experiences, and barriers that teachers and administrators face concerning school-family partnerships and to investigate the current school's policies and procedures towards school–parent partnerships. Broader insight was accomplished by addressing the main research question that guided the research:

### **How to support teachers in fostering meaningful family engagement in Klaipeda Nature School?**

The following sub-questions guided the answer to the main research question:

- What are the current school policies and procedures that support and enhance parent engagement?
- What barriers prevent teachers from engaging families in children's education?

#### **6.1 Sub–Question: What Are The Current School Policies And Procedures That Support And Enhance Parent Engagement?**

The interviews with the teachers and the questions dedicated to the school's administrator about the school's policies and procedures revealed that one of the most often barriers to parental engagement is a lack of information on what Waldorf School is and the exact parents' roles and responsibilities in it. The following section will review the finding and recommendations based on Hornby's model of parental involvement by looking from the perspective of parental contributions and their needs.

Family enrollment is challenging; the teachers reported having to meet anywhere between one to three candidate families; however, after the enrollment, the families failed to commit to their obligations. There is no printed community handbook that parents could take away and study before enrolling their children in Klaipeda Nature School. One of the critical weaknesses is not having "written policies which set out how parents can be involved in their children's education

as well as the procedures through which school and teachers can help parents to accomplish it" (Hornby, 2011). Such a handbook could include a clearly stated school's description, structure, values, community norms, and Steiner's philosophical assumptions that the school is led. Most importantly, it could include testimonies of other families and their experiences of how they contribute, volunteer, and act as ambassadors for the school by modeling the behavior for the new coming families. One of the teachers mentioned that some parents have "a client vs. service provider" approach, which signals that it is not clear for some families the meaning of the concept of "community school" or what Waldorf pedagogy or Steiner's philosophy stands for. Parents must consciously choose such a school to realistically evaluate all their resources (e.g., time, knowledge, volunteering, etc.) that will be available for contribution and, more importantly, meet the expectations of teachers who lead this school.

The handbook could involve specific information about the working groups, their goals, procedures, how long parents are expected to be involved in one group, and the rotation principle from one group to another, allowing new members to join and contribute. It could also have the contacts of personnel listed along with contacts of families who have been with the school already and are willing to share their experience and provide answers to many questions. Empowering the families to act as ambassadors and as models to the new families would remove some of the burdens from the teachers who, in this school, play the roles of educators and administrators.

The parent education organized by the school needs to be more present and seen as the priority. Research revealed a need for parent education in school; however, the most effective parent education is the one that combines guidance about children's development with opportunities for parents to discuss their concerns (Puch & De'Ath as cited per Hornby, 2011). One of the school policies could be to assign a working group of parents dedicated specifically to parents' education which would be responsible for working with other groups of parents and collecting information on the most actual topics that are relevant for parents, looking for workshop leaders, speakers, counselors to visit and help run those activities. What is more, the school's message board, which is hung beside the entrance to the hallway, or the social platform Discord could be encouraged

parents to post and share events, seminars, or workshops organized outside the school on the relevant topics.

## **6.2 Sub–Question: What Barriers Prevent Teachers From Engaging Families In Children's Education?**

### **Barriers related to teacher's beliefs and attitudes**

Teachers agreed that parental engagement plays a vital role in children's successful learning process. However, one teacher expressed doubt about whether all parents can do so. Her response was based on her negative experiences of reaching out to parents and inviting them to visit the school for a face–to–face conversation. Only a few parents were willing to be engaged; some of them did not find the need to come and have a conversation with the new teacher. According to the teacher, "This class is known as the difficult one, and I am already the third teacher to lead it, and it is difficult to do so, especially because I stepped in only in March." Either way, it is essential to keep the belief that all parents can be engaged and not make early assumptions based on very little time. As Turnbull & Turnbull (1986) found out, it is also essential to understand that not just teachers find interactions with parents stressful; parents are often reported to find communications with teachers equally stressful (Turnbull & Turnbull as cited per Hornby, 2011).

The same teacher reported that parents sometimes contribute to children's problems as she gave an example of parents who claimed they had no expectations of their child doing well at a subject because they did not do well at that subject. Although this is a very fair and valid reason that might contribute to students' challenges, as an educator, the teacher could see this as a signal of parents needing education on their attitudes and how they affect children's learning. As mentioned in the section before, if a working group was responsible for parent education, a teacher could use such an example to pitch an idea for a theme on parental attitude seminar or a workshop.



## **Barriers related to leadership, communication, and trust**

"Whatever leadership and management forms are chosen, they have the core function of sustaining the integrity of the school (without which the education has no meaningful application) and enabling and optimizing the learning and development of each individual, starting with the pupils but including the teachers, other staff, and even the parents – though the pupils clearly take priority." (Rawson, 2021).

School leadership in Klaipeda Nature School has practiced on the principles Rawson (2021) described. There is a collegial, non-hierarchical leadership which, in practice, is delegated to small groups by the college of teachers. However, the problem is that procedures must be agreed to and regulated by the teachers' body in written form, which could be conveniently distributed to newly enrolled families to get acquainted with. This draws some speculations and doubts on how things are run in the school, and a problem of trust arises, which was mentioned by Teacher A in the interview. Rawson (2021) shared that trust is one of the most fundamental underlying conditions to have for a successful Waldorf School:

*"What characterizes the quality of leadership in a Waldorf school, and was intended by Steiner, is the commitment to a spiritual understanding of its role. Steiner specifically located the professional ethic of leadership in spiritual context, offering an esoteric image for how this can be realized. Steiner referred to the need for each teacher to undertake the responsibility for the education and that in order to be able to do this, each individual needs to be active in her spiritual development, cultivating what could be called her higher self. All forms of personal ambition, egotism, or self-interest are destructive of the basis on which collegiality is based. This is the precondition for recognizing the spiritual intentions of one's colleagues. Trusting the other calls for a perception of the other as a person with a spiritual core. Collegiality is based on genuine mutual recognition and respect. Only then can the whole be more than its parts and metaphorically be an organ for what is emerging as positive potential for the school." (Rawson, 2021)*

Trust was raised by Teacher A as a potential barrier to parental engagement in her class. Acknowledging that "trust within the school can be fostered and diminished by the leader's behavior" (Tschannen-Moran, 2014) is essential. Since the school's leadership in Klaipeda Nature School is shared between the college of the teachers, it becomes the responsibility of the teacher to overcome the barrier of trust. To build the bridges of trust with families Tschannen – Moran (2014) suggests using the reflection method to detect whether the five facets of trust are currently present in the relationship between the educator and family. The facets of trust are benevolence (and respect), honesty, openness, reliability, and competence (Tschannen-Moran, 2014). It would be highly recommended to consider measuring the trust in Klaipeda Nature School by conveying a survey for students and their families.

Another valuable resource to look into that would help build trust and improve effective communication between educators and families is the method of nonviolent communication, developed by Dr. Rosenberg (2004), which is widely used as a preventive and mediating tool in any conflict. It is based on mutual and compassionate understanding, active listening, hearing, and the "language of the heart" (Rosenberg, 2004). While speaking to Teacher B, the researcher mentioned this method and received a high interest from the teacher, who was willing to look into it and share it with the rest of the community.

### **Barriers Related to teacher's professional Capacities**

Since the teachers have yet to receive pre-serve or in-service preparation on how to enhance parental engagement or cooperate with parents, it is an evident barrier to effective PE practices. There are specific knowledge and competencies that are essential for being able to pursue effective PE. The teachers could educate themselves by reading independently about PE and its barriers and also come up with and share the strategies and techniques needed for improving PE; they also need to understand parents' perspectives and be aware of family dynamics. Alternatively, teacher college could consider having a part-time school counselor who could advise and assist teachers and families throughout the process of cooperation.

### **6.3 Main Research Question: How To Support Teachers In Fostering Meaningful Family Engagement At Klaipeda Nature School?**

This research revealed that overcoming specific barriers is necessary for educators to foster meaningful and reciprocal relationships with the families in Klaipeda Nature School. Since the leadership of this school is collegially shared among the teachers, first and foremost, the teachers must educate themselves about the importance and implications of family engagement strategies and practices and what competencies they need to acquire to be effective in PE. Financial investment and time in professional learning financed by the school should be dedicated if necessary. If absent within the school community, consider employing a part-time counselor to help organize necessary seminars and workshops for educators and families on PE.

With the help of the more experienced families, I strongly recommend dedicating all possible efforts and creating a school handbook that would include information for newly enrolled or those considering enrolling. The handbook should include the following:

1. Description of Steiner's philosophy and pedagogical practices
2. School current norms and values
3. Clearly described leadership roles and practice and their implications in everyday school life
4. What to expect in KNS?
5. Rights and responsibilities of parents
6. Rights and responsibilities of students
7. Concept of Volunteerism in Klaipeda Nature School
8. Concept of working groups – with aims, strategies, membership rules, schedules, approximate time dedication
9. Primary contacts of each working group leader(s) or school administrator
10. FAQ

To receive a complete picture of parental engagement in Klaipeda Nature School, I strongly advise the teacher's college to study the barriers that parents face in PE. This can be done by:

- conducting a survey and analyzing parent's perspectives, looking into what barriers they experience for higher engagement,
- surveying to measure the level of trust within the school community.

The results of these surveys would be precious for the teachers as they would better understand parents' current feelings and beliefs to family-school partnerships and provide guidance on which areas need additional effort and work.

#### **6.4 Limitations**

There are certain limitations to this research project. One of them would be the generalizability of interview findings because of a relatively low number of teachers that had volunteered to participate in the interviews. It might be viewed as a limitation as the sample size is small and may need to be representative of the larger population. Another limitation related to qualitative data analysis is the potential for the researcher's bias and subjectivity in interpreting and analyzing the data collected through interviews. The researcher's personal beliefs, perspectives, and opinions can influence the nature of the questions posed and the responses received, leading to biased or skewed data. There is also a participant's desirability bias, "a tendency to present reality to align with what is perceived to be socially acceptable" (Bergen & Labonté, 2020). This bias can be particularly prevalent in sensitive topics where participants may feel social pressure to conform to expectations.

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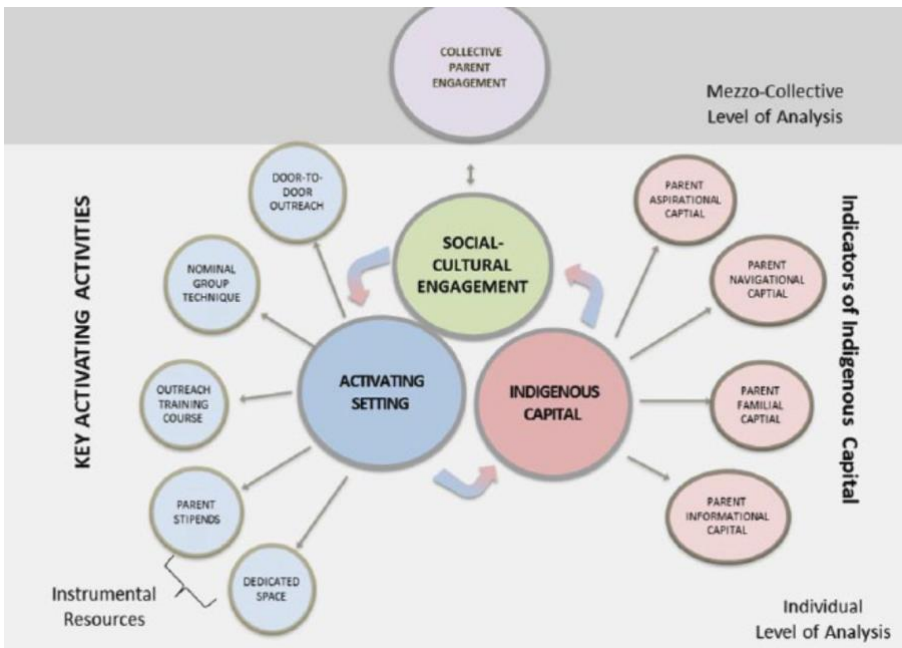
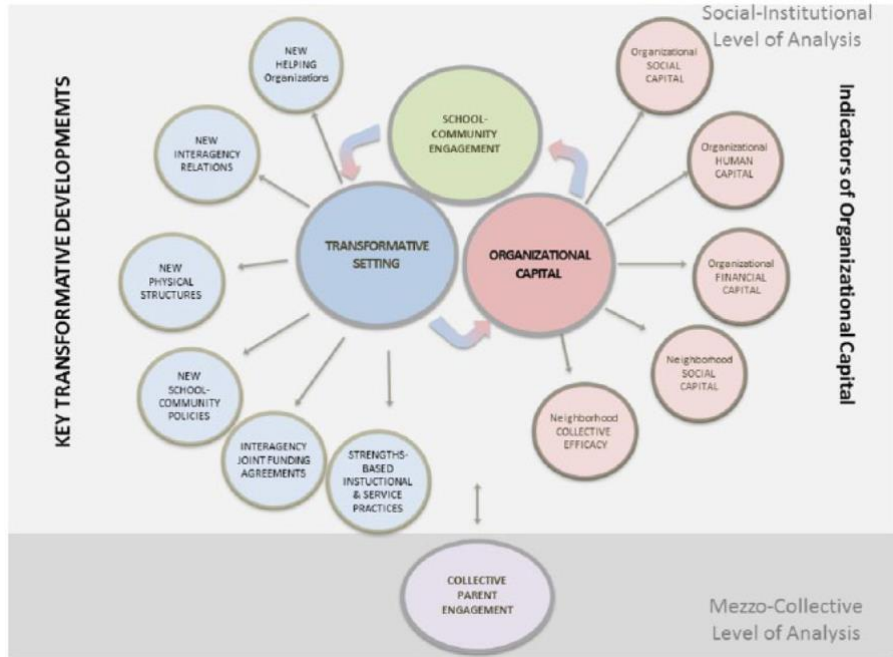
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## 8 APPENDICES

### 8.1 Appendix 1. Ecology of CPE transformative setting

1(2)

Ecology of CPE transformative setting (Addi-Raccah & Grinshtain, 2022)



8.2 Appendix 2. Epstein's Six Types of Parental Involvement

1(3)

<b>Type 1 Parenting</b>	<b>Type 2 Communicating</b>	<b>Type 3 Volunteering</b>	<b>Type 4 Learning at Home</b>	<b>Type 5 Decision Making</b>	<b>Type 6 Collaborating With the Community</b>
Help all families establish home environments to support children as students	Design effective forms of school-to-home and home-to-school communications about school programs and their children's progress	Recruit and organize parent help and support	Provide information and ideas to families about how to help students at home with homework and other curriculum-related activities, decisions, and planning	Include parents in school decisions, developing parent leaders and representatives	Identify and integrate resources and services from the community to strengthen school programs, family practices, and student learning and development
<b>Sample Practices</b>					
Suggestions for home conditions that support learning at each grade level	Conferences with every parent at least once a year, with follow-ups as needed	School and classroom volunteer program to help teachers, administrators, students, and other parents	Information for families on skills required for students in all subjects at each grade	Active PTA/PTO or other parent organizations, advisory councils, or committees (e.g., curriculum, safety, personnel) for parent leadership and participation	Information for students and families on community health, cultural, recreational, social support, and other programs or services
Workshops, videotapes, computerized phone messages on parenting and child rearing for each age and grade level	Language translators assist families, as needed	Parent room or family center for volunteer work, meetings, and resources for families	Information on homework policies and how to monitor and discuss schoolwork at home	Independent advocacy groups to lobby and work for school reform and improvements	Information on community activities that link to learning skills and talents, including summer programs for students
Parent education and other courses or training for parents (e.g., GED, college credit, family literacy)	Regular schedule of useful notices, memos, phone calls, newsletters, and other communications	Annual postcard survey to identify all available talents, times, and locations of volunteers	Information on how to assist students to improve skills on various class and school assessments	District-level councils and committees for family and community involvement	Service integration through partnerships involving school; civic, counseling, cultural, health, recreation, and other agencies and organizations; and businesses
Family support programs to assist families with health, nutrition, and other services	Clear information on choosing schools or courses, programs, and activities within schools	Class parent, telephone tree, or other structures to provide all families with needed information	Regular schedule of homework that requires students to discuss and interact with families on what they are learning in class	Information on school or local elections for school representatives	Service to the community by students, families, and schools (e.g., recycling, art, music, drama, and other activities for seniors or others)
Home visits at transition points to preschool, elementary, middle, and high school; neighborhood meetings to help families understand schools and to help schools understand families	Clear information on all school policies, programs, reforms, and transitions	Parent patrols or other activities to aid safety and operation of school programs	Calendars with activities for parents and students to do at home or in the community	Networks to link all families with parent representatives	Participation of alumni in school programs for students
			Family math, science, and reading activities at school		
			Summer learning packets or activities		
			Family participation in setting student goals each year		

2 (3)

<b>Challenges</b>					
<b>Type 1 Parenting</b>	<b>Type 2 Communicating</b>	<b>Type 3 Volunteering</b>	<b>Type 4 Learning at Home</b>	<b>Type 5 Decision Making</b>	<b>Type 6 Collaborating With the Community</b>
<p>Provide information to all families who want it or who need it, not just to the few who can attend workshops or meetings at the school building</p> <p>Enable families to share information about culture, background, and children's talents and needs</p> <p>Make sure that all information for families is clear, usable, and linked to children's success in school</p>	<p>Review the readability, clarity, form, and frequency of all memos, notices, and other print and nonprint communications</p> <p>Consider parents who do not speak English well, do not read well, or need large type</p> <p>Review the quality of major communications (e.g., the schedule, content, and structure of conferences; newsletters; report cards; and others)</p> <p>Establish clear two-way channels for communications from home to school and from school to home</p>	<p>Recruit volunteers widely so that <i>all</i> families know that their time and talents are welcome</p> <p>Make flexible schedules for volunteers, assemblies, and events to enable employed parents to participate</p> <p>Organize volunteer work; provide training; match time and talent with school, teacher, and student needs; and recognize efforts so that participants are productive</p>	<p>Design and organize a regular schedule of interactive homework (e.g., weekly or bimonthly) that gives <i>students</i> responsibility for discussing important things they are learning and helps families stay aware of the content of their children's classwork</p> <p>Coordinate family-linked homework activities, if students have several teachers</p> <p>Involve families with their children in all important curriculum-related decisions</p>	<p>Include parent leaders from all racial, ethnic, socioeconomic, and other groups in the school</p> <p>Offer training to enable leaders to serve as representatives of other families, with input from and return of information to all parents</p> <p>Include students (along with parents) in decision-making groups</p>	<p>Solve turf problems of responsibilities, funds, staff, and locations for collaborative activities</p> <p>Inform families of community programs for students, such as mentoring, tutoring, and business partnerships</p> <p>Ensure equity of opportunities for students and families to participate in community programs or to obtain services</p> <p>Match community contributions with school goals; integrate child and family services with education</p>
<b>Redefinitions</b>					
<p>"Workshop" to mean more than a meeting about a topic held at the school building at a particular time; "workshop" also may mean making information about a topic available in a variety of forms that can be viewed, heard, or read anywhere, anytime</p>	<p>"Communications about school programs and student progress" to mean two-way, three-way, and many-way channels of communication that connect schools, families, students, and the community</p>	<p>"Volunteer" to mean anyone who supports school goals and children's learning or development in any way, at any place, and at any time—not just during the school day and at the school building</p>	<p>"Homework" to mean not only work done alone, but also interactive activities shared with others at home or in the community, linking schoolwork to real life</p> <p>"Help" at home to mean encouraging, listening, reacting, praising, guiding, monitoring, and discussing—not "teaching" school subjects</p>	<p>"Decision making" to mean a process of partnership, of shared views and actions toward shared goals, not a power struggle between conflicting ideas</p> <p>"Parent leader" to mean a real representative, with opportunities and support to hear from and communicate with other families</p>	<p>"Community" to mean not only the neighborhoods where students' homes and schools are located but also neighborhoods that influence student learning and development</p> <p>"Community" rated not only by low or high social or economic qualities, but also by strengths and talents to support students, families, and schools</p> <p>"Community" means all who are interested in and affected by the quality of education, not just families with children in the schools</p>

<b>Results for Students</b>					
<b>Type 1 Parenting</b>	<b>Type 2 Communicating</b>	<b>Type 3 Volunteering</b>	<b>Type 4 Learning at Home</b>	<b>Type 5 Decision Making</b>	<b>Type 6 Collaborating With the Community</b>
Awareness of family supervision; respect for parents	Awareness of own progress and of actions needed to maintain or improve grades	Skill in communicating with adults	Gains in skills, abilities, and test scores linked to homework and classwork	Awareness of representation of families in school decisions	Increased skills and talents through enriched curricular and extracurricular experiences
Positive personal qualities, habits, beliefs, and values, as taught by family	Understanding of school policies on behavior, attendance, and other areas of student conduct	Increased learning of skills that receive tutoring or targeted attention from volunteers	Homework completion	Understanding that student rights are protected	Awareness of careers and options for future education and work
Balance between time spent on chores, on other activities, and on homework	Informed decisions about courses and programs	Awareness of many skills, talents, occupations, and contributions of parents and other volunteers	Positive attitude toward schoolwork	Specific benefits linked to policies enacted by parent organizations and experienced by students	Specific benefits linked to programs, services, resources, and opportunities that connect students with community
Good or improved attendance	Awareness of own role in partnerships, serving as courier and communicator		View of parent as more similar to teacher and home as more similar to school		
Awareness of importance of school			Self-concept of ability as learner		
<b>Results for Parents</b>					
Understanding of and confidence about parenting, child and adolescent development, and changes in home conditions for learning as children proceed through school	Understanding school programs and policies	Understanding teacher's job, increased comfort in school, and carryover of school activities at home	Know how to support, encourage, and help student at home each year	Input into policies that affect child's education	Knowledge and use of local resources by family and child to increase skills and talents or to obtain needed services
Awareness of own and others' challenges in parenting	Monitoring and awareness of student progress	Self-confidence about ability to work in school and with children or to take steps to improve own education	Discussions of school, classwork, and homework	Feeling of ownership of school	Interactions with other families in community activities
Feeling of support from school and other parents	Responding effectively to student problems	Awareness that families are welcome and valued at school	Understanding of instructional program each year and of what child is learning in each subject	Awareness of parents' voices in school decisions	Awareness of school's role in the community and of community's contributions to the school
	Interactions with teachers and ease of communications with school and teachers	Gains in specific skills of volunteer work	Appreciation of teaching skills	Shared experiences and connections with other families	
			Awareness of child as a learner	Awareness of school, district, and state policies	
<b>Results for Teachers</b>					
Understanding families' backgrounds, cultures, concerns, goals, needs, and views of their children	Increased diversity and use of communications with families and awareness of own ability to communicate clearly	Readiness to involve families in new ways, including those who do not volunteer at school	Better design of homework assignments	Awareness of parent perspectives as a factor in policy development and decisions	Awareness of community resources to enrich curriculum and instruction
Respect for families' strengths and efforts	Appreciation and use of parent network for communications	Awareness of parent talents and interests in school and children	Recognition of equal helpfulness of single parent, dual income, and less formally educated families in motivating and reinforcing student learning	View of equal status of family representatives on committees and in leadership roles	Openness to and skill in using mentors, business partners, community volunteers, and others to assist students and augment teaching practice
Understanding of student diversity	Increased ability to elicit and understand family views on children's programs and progress	Greater individual attention to students, with help from volunteers			Knowledgeable, helpful referrals of children and families to
Awareness of own skills to share information on child					

### 8.3 Appendix 3. The Interview Protocol

1 (2)

#### I. Introduction

The researcher introduced herself and explained the purpose of the research, why it was taking part in the Klaipeda Nature School, why it is important that the interviewees have decided to participate and what benefits they and broader community might gain from it.

Then it was explained what questions there were to be expected, the general themes that they are grouped into and how much time the interview is expected to take.

Finally, the interviewees were asked to ask any questions prior the interview about the process itself.

#### II. The Questions

##### BELIEFS AND ATTITUDES

- a) *How important do you believe parental engagement is to student success?*
- b) *Do you believe that all parents are capable in being engaged in their children's education? Are some more capable than the others? Please elaborate on your answer.*
- c) *Do you believe that parents should help students with their homework?*
- d) *What barriers, in your opinion, do parents experience when trying to stay be and stay engaged in children's education?*
- e) *How do you think school can assist parents with overcoming those barriers?*

##### COMPETENCE / NEEDS

- a) *What resources or support you currently need that would help you engage more parents in children's learning?*

2 (2)

- b) *What formal or informal education have you received related to family – school partnerships or family engagement?*

#### EXPERIENCES/ COMMUNICATION / TRUST

- c) *What are the most common challenges you face in promoting parental engagement in your classroom or school?*
- d) *Have you ever experienced a difficult situation with parents that are not engaged in their children's education?*
- e) *What strategies do you find being most effective in trying to pursue parental engagement?*
- f) *As a teacher, what have you noticed that parents are doing to demonstrate they are involved in their children's' education?*
- g) *Describe ways that you communicate, partner, and collaborate with parents?*
- h) *What are the most enjoyable aspects of working with parents?*
- i) *How do you reach out to parents to speak about their engagement and how often do you do that?*

#### III. CLOSING OF THE INTERVIEW

The researcher thanked each participant for taking the time for the interview and once again assured them of the confidentiality. Finally, it was agreed that the results of the study will be shared when the project is finalized.

## 8.4 Appendix 4. Strategies for Qualitative Interviews

1(4)

**Strategies for Qualitative Interviews**  
 (https://sociology.fas.harvard.edu/files/sociology/files/interview\_strategies.pdf)

**Strategies for Qualitative Interviews**

**A Few General Points**

- Stop and Think: should interviews be included in your research design?
  - Are there alternative ways of answering your research question through documentary review, observation or unobtrusive measures?
  - Be clear about the possible biases and limitations of interviews
- The point of a qualitative interview is to let the respondent tell their own story on their own terms.
- THIS IS NOT A SURVEY! The guide acts as a prompt, reminding you of necessary topics to cover, questions to ask and areas to probe. As such, it should be simple so that your primary focus can stay on the respondent. It's best to memorize your guide!
- How much time will you spend with each respondent? Adjust your guide accordingly (it may take several interviews to judge the correct length).
- Try out a new guide (or parts of it) on friends and get their feedback before using it in the field.

**Should you record and transcribe interviews?**

**PROS:**

- It helps to correct the natural limitations of our memories and of the intuitive glosses that we might place on what people say in interviews
- It allows more thorough examination of what people say
- It permits repeated examinations of the interviewees' answers
- It opens up the data to public scrutiny by other researchers, who can evaluate the analysis that is carried out by the original researchers of the data (that is, a secondary analysis)
- It therefore helps to counter accusations that an analysis might have been influenced by a researcher's values or biases
- It allows the data to be reused in other ways from those intended by the original researcher—for example, in the light of new theoretical ideas or analytic strategies.

**CONS:**

- It introduces a different dynamic into the social encounter of the interview, and recording equipment may be off-putting for interviewees.
- Transcribing is a very time-consuming process. It also requires good equipment, usually in the form of a good-quality tape recorder and microphone but also, if possible, a transcription machine. Transcription also very quickly results in a daunting pile of paper.



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**A Successful Interviewer is:**

1. *Knowledgeable*: is thoroughly familiar with the focus of the interview; pilot interviews of the kind used in survey interviewing can be useful here.
2. *Structuring*: gives purpose for interview; rounds it off; asks whether interviewee has questions.
3. *Clear*: asks simple, easy, short questions; no jargon.
4. *Gentle*: lets people finish; gives them time to think; tolerates pauses.
5. *Sensitive*: listens attentively to what is said and how it is said; is empathetic in dealing with the interviewee.
6. *Open*: responds to what is important to interviewee and is flexible.
7. *Steering*: knows what he/she wants to find out.
8. *Critical*: is prepared to challenge what is said, for example, dealing with inconsistencies in interviewees' replies.
9. *Remembering*: relates what is said to what has previously been said.
10. *Interpreting*: clarifies and extends meanings of interviewees' statements, but without imposing meaning on them.
11. *Balanced*: does not talk too much, which may make the interviewee passive, and does not talk too little, which may result in the interviewee feeling he or she is not talking along the right lines.
12. *Ethically sensitive*: is sensitive to the ethical dimension of interviewing, ensuring the interviewee appreciates what the research is about, its purposes, and that his or her answers will be treated confidentially.

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**The Interview as an Interpersonal Encounter**

- The social skills of empathy, warmth, attentiveness, humor (where appropriate), and consideration are essential for good interviewing.
- Any judgmental attitudes, shock or discomfort will be immediately detected.
- Never answer a question for the respondent.
- One must be completely engaged with the respondent, while at the same time keeping track of the questions one needs to ask.
- Use every active listening technique at your disposal:
  - Repeating back
  - "Wow!"
  - "Tell me more about that!"
  - "That is really interesting."
- Don't be afraid of silence; you can use it to prod the respondent to reflect and amplify an answer
- Don't follow the interview guide—follow the respondent. Follow up new information that he or she brings up without losing sense of where you are in the interview.
- Try not to think about time—relax into the interview.

### Guidelines for Developing Interview Questions

- Questions should be simple. Do not ask more than one question at a time.
- The best questions are those which elicit the longest answers from the respondent. Do not ask questions that can be answered with one word.
- Don't ask questions that require your respondents to do your analysis for you. This is YOUR job.
- Likewise, do not ask for hearsay or opinions on behalf of the group they are a part of "What do people around here think of x?" You rarely get anything interesting.
- Don't be afraid to ask embarrassing questions. If you don't ask, they won't tell.
- Types of questions or other interview talk:
  - *Direct questions:* 'Do you find it easy to keep smiling when serving customers?'; 'Are you happy with the way you and your husband decide how money should be spent?' Such questions are perhaps best left until towards the end of the interview, in order not to influence the direction of the interview too much.
  - *Indirect questions:* 'What do most people round here think of the ways that management treats its staff?', perhaps followed up by 'Is that the way you feel too?', in order to get at the individual's own view.
  - *Structuring questions:* 'I would now like to move on to a different topic'.
  - *Follow-up questions:* getting the interviewee to elaborate his/her answer, such as 'Could you say some more about that?'; 'What do you mean by that . . .?'
  - *Probing questions:* following up what has been said through direct questioning.
  - *Specifying questions:* 'What did you do then?'; 'How did X react to what you said?'
  - *Interpreting questions:* 'Do you mean that your leadership role has had to change from one of encouraging others to a more directive one?'; 'Is it fair to say that what you are suggesting is that you don't mind being friendly towards customers most of the time, but when they are unpleasant or demanding you find it more difficult?'

### Step-By-Step Guide to Writing Interview Questions

1. Write down the larger research questions of the study. Outline the broad areas of knowledge that are relevant to answering these questions.
2. Develop questions within each of these major areas, shaping them to fit particular kinds of respondents. The goal here is to tap into **their** experiences and expertise.
3. Adjust the language of the interview according to the respondent (child, professional, etc.).
4. Take care to word questions so that respondents are motivated to answer as **completely** and **honestly** as possible.
5. Ask “how” questions rather than “why” questions to get stories of process rather than acceptable “accounts” of behavior. “How did you come to join this group . . .?”
6. Develop probes that will elicit more detailed and elaborate responses to key questions. The more detail, the better!
7. Begin the interview with a “warm-up” question—something that the respondent can answer easily and at some length (though not too long). It doesn’t have to pertain directly to what you are trying to find out (although it might), but this initial rapport-building will put you more at ease with one another and thus will make the rest of the interview flow more smoothly.
8. Think about the logical flow of the interview. What topics should come first? What follows more or less “naturally”? This may take some adjustment after several interviews.
9. Difficult or potentially embarrassing questions should be asked toward the end of the interview, when rapport has been established.
10. The last question should provide some closure for the interview, and leave the respondent feeling empowered, listened to, or otherwise glad that they talked to you.

## 8.5 Appendix 5. Questions on School's Policy and Procedures

1(3)

**QUESTIONS ON SCHOOL'S POLICY AND PROCEDURES**POLICY FORMATION

Does the school have a clearly regulated document that reflects the procedure for the involvement of school parents in the process of children's education? Are the rights and responsibilities of parents clearly defined? Is this a handout?

Have parents been involved in the formulation of this policy?

What monitoring procedures are in place to ensure that the policy is implemented?

Is there an active PTA or equivalent at the school? What proportion of parents participate in PTA activities?

How are parents' views sought about school policies or procedures? For example, are questionnaire surveys used?

Is there a room set aside for parents' use?

What means are there for encouraging parents to become members of the PTA?

Who identifies parents that could contribute to the school in capacities such as membership of the PTA ?

ACTING AS A RESOURCE

In what kinds of activities does the school welcome help from parents?

Are parents used to listen to children read or to assist in teaching or in preparing classroom materials?

Who is responsible for ensuring that parents with a particular talent for leadership are identified and encouraged to put their abilities to use? Do all teachers know they can do this?

How are parents informed about the ways in which they can help at the school? For example, is there a parents' handbook or a regular newsletter?

How is voluntary help from parents organized within the school? For example, is a particular member of staff assigned to coordinate the help or is it seen as the responsibility of each teacher?

2(3)

### COLLABORATING WITH TEACHERS

How are the results of school assessments communicated to parents?

Are individual parent–teacher meetings held and if so, how often?

How do parents contribute to the assessment of their child’s needs? For example, by being asked for their observations or by completing proformas or developmental checklists.

What input do parents have in deciding the goals and teaching priorities for their children? For example, do parents discuss with teachers the emphasis which should be placed on developing acad

How are parents encouraged to reinforce school programs at home?

### SHARING INFORMATION ON CHILDREN

How is information on children’s special needs, medical conditions, and relevant family circumstances gathered from parents?

How is relevant information from parents disseminated to all members of staff who work with their children? What systems are used to record, and communicate to teachers, information about such things as children’s special needs and the medication they require?

What use is made of parents’ insights on their children? For example, parents’ knowledge of their children’s strengths and weaknesses, likes and dislikes, or how they respond to different approaches.

What adaptations does the school use to work effectively with diverse parents?

### CHANNELS OF COMMUNICATION/ LIAISON WITH STAFF

How does the school pass on information to parents about their rights and responsibilities and about school organization? For example, is this information sent out in handbooks specifically aimed at parents or by holding meetings at which school policies are discussed?

What are the frequency and purpose of parent–teacher meetings?

What kinds of formal reports are sent home and how often? Are reports sent home termly or yearly?

3(3)

Are home–school diaries used with some children? For example, are they used for children with SEN or for those with behavioral difficulties?

Does the school have balanced procedures for contacting parents?

What guidelines are available for parents on visiting the school to talk over a concern with their children’s teachers?

What channels of communication are there between parents and teachers? That is, can parents choose to phone, write notes to teachers, make an appointment to see teachers, or drop into the school when necessary?

### PARENT EDUCATION/ PARENT SUPPORT

Are parents invited into the school to observe teaching in progress?

When are teachers available to provide guidance to parents?

Are parent workshops organized by the school?

Are parents informed about opportunities for parent education in the community?

How is information about parenting courses made available to parents?

How are parents given opportunities to discuss their concerns on a one-to-one basis?

Are opportunities provided for parents to share their concerns with other parents?

For example, are parents introduced to other parents of children with similar difficulties or given opportunity of attending parent workshops?

Do teachers know where to refer parents for supportive counseling? Is there an awareness of services and groups within the local community that can provide supportive counseling such as social workers or self-help groups?

Are parents encouraged to participate in support groups and parent organizations outside the school?

### ENCOURAGING PARENTS INTO SCHOOL

What activities are used to assure that all parents establish contact with school?

### PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR TEACHERS

What training do teachers get on how to work effectively with parents? Is this done in preservice or in-service courses?

Are parents involved in professional development sessions with teachers?