

QIE REPORTS

THE BENEFITS OF PARENTING EDUCATION IN THE SCHOOL SYSTEM

The impact of parenting education on school culture and school participation

Luminița COSTACHE (coord)
Ștefan COJOCARU(coord)
Ovidiu BUNEA
Daniela COJOCARU

Iași, 2025



THE BENEFITS OF PARENTING EDUCATION IN THE SCHOOL SYSTEM

**The impact of parenting education on school culture and
school participation**



This work was developed by:
Luminița Costache (UNICEF coordinator), Ștefan Cojocaru (coordinator),
Daniela Cojocaru, Ovidiu Bunea

The document can be accessed at www.qie.ro

<https://doi.org/10.33788/qie.25.01>

This research was conducted as part of the project “Technical documentation for the national scale-up of parent education and teen clubs”, implemented by the HoltIS Association with the support of UNICEF in Romania.

Descrierea CIP a Bibliotecii Naționale a României

The benefits of parenting education in the school system : the impact of parenting education on school culture and school participation /

Luminița Costache (coord.), Ștefan Cojocaru, Ovidiu Bunea, Daniela Cojocaru. - Iași : Expert Projects, 2025
Conține bibliografie
ISBN 978-606-8927-76-3

- I. Costache, Luminița
- II. Cojocaru, Ștefan
- III. Bunea, Ovidiu
- IV. Cojocaru, Daniela

316

CONTENTS

THEORETICAL RESEARCH FRAMEWORK	7
School culture and school climate	7
<i>School climate</i>	7
<i>School culture</i>	7
<i>Differences and similarities between school culture and school climate</i>	8
Theoretical models of school culture	10
<i>How do parents contribute to school culture?</i>	11
Barriers to parental involvement	12
<i>Family barriers</i>	13
<i>School barriers</i>	13
Key school culture indicators based on parent education programmes	13
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	15
Research background	15
Purpose and objectives	15
Research objectives	15
Research strategy	15
Data collection methods	16
Ethical considerations	17
Selection of participants	17
Results and discussion	17
THE RISK OF DROPPING OUT	18
Impact of parent education in figures	18
<i>General statistics on participants</i>	18
<i>Statistical data on parent education in Bacău schools</i>	18
<i>Specific statistics on participants from researched schools</i>	24
Family and community factors	24
<i>Parents' precarious financial situation</i>	24
<i>Parents' migration abroad</i>	26
<i>Parents' educational achievement</i>	26
<i>Child neglect and lack of parental involvement in children's school activities</i>	27
<i>Child labour</i>	28
<i>Child abuse</i>	28
Factors related to the school environment	29
<i>Unfriendly school environment. Inappropriate teacher behaviour</i>	29
<i>School safety</i>	30
<i>Lack of interventions to address class and grade failure</i>	30
<i>Excessive bureaucratisation of teaching activities</i>	32
<i>Curriculum and common assessment standards</i>	32
<i>Teaching methods and techniques</i>	33

Student-related factors	34
<i>Children's deviant behaviour</i>	34
<i>Students' lack of interest in school</i>	35
<i>Children's biological and intellectual abilities</i>	36
<i>Adolescence</i>	36
School action	37
<i>The difference between primary school and middle school</i>	38
<i>Criteria used by schools to estimate the risk of dropping out</i>	38
<i>Student safety and protection measures</i>	38
<i>Child discipline</i>	39
<i>Interventions in case of suspected abuse</i>	40
<i>Home visits</i>	40
<i>Working with local authorities</i>	41
LEARNING ENVIRONMENT	42
Teachers' communication with parents	42
<i>Organising parent-teacher meetings</i>	42
<i>Parent lectures</i>	44
<i>Messages sent to parents through students</i>	44
<i>The role of the school mediator</i>	44
Parents' and teachers' perceptions of the school-family relationship	44
<i>Teachers' perceptions of students</i>	45
<i>Parents' attitudes towards school</i>	45
<i>Parent involvement in school activities</i>	47
<i>Parent volunteering</i>	48
STUDENT INVOLVEMENT IN THE SCHOOL'S DECISION-MAKING PROCESS	49
Teacher initiatives	49
<i>Implementation of the school-based curriculum</i>	50
<i>Extracurricular activities</i>	50
<i>Doing School Differently</i>	51
SCHOOL OPENNESS TO CHANGE – INNOVATION	53
Changes resulting from school-based interventions	53
<i>Reducing dropout</i>	53
<i>Improving academic performance</i>	54
<i>Teachers' openness to change</i>	55
<i>Cooperation with parents</i>	56
BENEFITS OF PARTICIPATING IN THE PARENT EDUCATION PROGRAMME	59
Usefulness of teacher training and information sessions	59
<i>Adapting teaching methods and techniques</i>	59
<i>Learning new practices</i>	59
<i>Encouraging students</i>	60
Parents' perspectives on parent education	60
<i>Desire to attend parent education sessions</i>	60
<i>Building a support group</i>	61

<i>Parent's self-control</i>	<i>61</i>
<i>Child freedom</i>	<i>61</i>
<i>Communication with the child.....</i>	<i>62</i>
<i>Awareness of parental roles.....</i>	<i>62</i>
CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....	64
Parent education as an ongoing practice in schools.....	64
Increasing participation in the Parent Education Programme	65
Understanding the importance of parent education.....	66
Research limitations	66
References	68

THEORETICAL RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

School culture and school climate

In contemporary literature, school culture and school climate are similar concepts (Freiberg & Stein, 1999; Hoy, Tarter & Kottkamp, 1991; Maslowski, 2006; Owens, 2001; Van Houtte, 2005). The terms *school culture* and *school climate* are often used synonymously. But are there any differences between these constructs? What is the nature of their relationship? Loup (1994) believes that “definitions of culture have historically been fraught with conceptual complexity and confusion” (p. 63). Van Houtte’s research (2005) provides clarity on these terms and what they each cover. Schoen and Teddlie’s (2008) efforts to conceptualise the construct of school culture and to understand its relationship to school climate led to a new model of school culture. The authors proposed this new model in response to calls for conceptual clarity. The new model is different from Van Houtte’s model (2005) since Van Houtte describes school culture as a component of climate, while the authors argue that climate can be more accurately understood as a level of school culture. Other remarkable research studies support Houtte’s claim that “culture is a component of climate”. Schoen and Teddlie’s (2008) intention is not to refute these authors’ assertions, but to come up with a plausible conceptualisation that seems reasonable, logical, and consistent with the way in which many authors define culture. Initial efforts to conduct a literature review led to considerable confusion in understanding the difference between the constructs of school culture and school climate. For example, Loup (1994) believes that “research on organisational climate, particularly in schools, has emerged from studies of culture or ethos of organisations and has been characterised by different conceptions of what constitutes climate” (p. 66). Schoen and Teddlie (2008) sought to provide a conceptual definition of culture that “explained the difference between culture and climate”.

School climate

Perry (1908) describes the “common spirit of the school” as the school atmosphere that is reflected in the school’s reputation among students, teachers, and students’ parents. He defines formal and informal school activities as traditions, ceremonies, programmes, magazines, plans that contribute to the common spirit of the school. Teddlie and Stringfield state that “school climate refers to a number of variables in the school social environment including (...) student perception of teacher push, student academic norms, teacher ability, teacher expectations for students, teacher-student efforts to improve, parental concern for quality of education, perceptions of present school quality, and efforts of the principal to improve” (Teddlie and Stringfield, 1993: 18- 21). Creemers and Reezigt’s (1999: 35) school climate model includes the physical environment of the school (buildings, corridors, etc.), the social system (the relationships and interactions between people in the school), an orderly school environment, and expectations regarding teacher behaviour and student outcomes. Hoy et al. (1991) claim that schools and classrooms are more than the sum of their effectiveness factors; schools have their own personalities. They encourage the use of metaphors (such as healthy schools) to describe the school climate.

School culture

Waller (1932) was the first to use the term ‘culture’ to describe the life of schools, noting that schools have their own identities, with complex rituals and staff relations, a set of personal values, mores, irrational sanctions, and moral codes (Maslowski, 2006). School culture consists of the shared beliefs and values that bring a community together (Deal & Kennedy, 1982, 1983). School culture is the lens through which participants see the world and themselves (Hargreaves, 1995). School culture is made up of “unwritten rules and traditions, norms and expectations that permeate everything: the way people act, how they dress, what they talk about, whether they seek out colleagues for help or don’t, and how

teachers feel about their work and their students” (Deal and Peterson, 1999: 2-3). While these definitions are useful and provide a general idea of school culture, Schoen and Teddlie (2008) find their characteristics ambiguous; the concept of culture is defined in broad, non-specific terms. The ambiguity noted in the definitions of culture may be due to the intangible nature of this concept, which makes it difficult to define or directly observe (Halsall, 1998; Stoll & Fink, 1996).

Differences and similarities between school culture and school climate

Numerous researchers have associated the terms *school culture* and *school climate* – or organisational culture – with school effectiveness or school improvement. Both concepts have been studied as mediating variables that can ultimately affect student outcomes (Deal and Kennedy, 1983; Deal and Peterson, 1999; Sarason, 1990; Stoll and Myres, 1997). Some researchers have identified school culture and school climate as critical to school improvement (Stoll & Fink, 1996). Nevertheless, there is an obvious need for conceptual clarity when examining the ways in which the terms ‘school culture’ and ‘school climate’ are used across various disciplines. Climate and culture are very similar concepts, although they emerge from different traditions and research communities. Hoy et al. (1991) argue that the school and organisational climate are typically viewed from a psychological perspective, whereas school culture is viewed from an anthropological perspective. Freiberg (1999) believes that both traditions, the psychological perspective (with the validation of measuring instruments) and the anthropological perspective (with its dependence on data like discussions, student drawings, teacher and student diaries, interviews, ambient noise) have their merits.

Several organisational studies distinguish between climate and culture, defining climate in terms of behaviour and culture in terms of values and norms (Heck & Marcoulides, 1996; Hoy, Tarter & Bliss, 1990). Schoen and Teddlie (2008) note that the definitions of climate are more specific and explicit, while the definitions of culture tend to be more general and holistic. The authors believe that this is due to the research orientations that underpin the definitions of culture. Research on school climate involves quantitative analyses, while school culture research is qualitative (Hoy et al., 1991; Owens, 2001). The literature review leads to these four generalisations:

- The term ‘climate’ is most commonly used in quantitative research (for example, by school effectiveness researchers), while the term ‘culture’ is frequently used by those who employ qualitative methods (anthropology-oriented educational researchers);
- The types of variables examined by school effectiveness researchers who study school climate (Levine and Lezotte, 1990; Teddlie and Stringfield, 1993) and by anthropology-oriented educational researchers who study school culture (Deal and Kennedy, 1982; Deal and Peterson, 1999; Sarason, 1990) overlap considerably;
- There is significant overlap between the definitions of school climate and those of school culture used by different researchers, especially when they belong to the same culture;
- The terms ‘school climate’ and ‘school culture’ are often used interchangeably and synonymously in educational publications (Levine and Lezotte, 1990: 9-10).

Many climate-related variables seem to reflect things that have also been studied when defining culture. For example, could perceptions of academic failure or teacher hesitancy also be seen as manifestations of shared beliefs that bring a community together (Deal and Peterson, 1999)? One potential explanation for the similarity between these two concepts, which has led to this confusion, is the fact that climate and culture were not actually separate constructs, but rather components of the same construct that were explored separately by various research communities. J. van Maanen (quoted in Cameron and Quinn, 1999: 17) explains that a major problem in the organisations that need to change their cultures is that “no key elements or dimensions have been identified, and no common perspective is available to even help the conversation get started. Change doesn’t occur because it is difficult to know what to talk about and what to focus on.” The framework presented above, which is still under development, is useful to those who study the internal characteristics of schools, as it

provides a common language to discuss and compare school culture. This is essential if one wants to test the validity of the claim that school culture is crucial to school improvement. The model provided by Schoen and Teddlie (2008) is not the only valid way of understanding school culture, but it does offer a tool for understanding the key elements of school culture, which may be essential for promoting and improving academic achievement.

School culture is one of the key drivers of educational change and innovation. It is an important characteristic that influences teachers' behaviour and attitudes (Hopkins 2001; Seashore, 2009). Attitudes are crucial for innovation, school improvement (Kruse and Seashore Louise, 2009) and student achievement (Kruger et al., 2007). Therefore, building a strong school culture has become one of the goals pursued when modernising education and reforming schools. According to recent studies, culture means sharing and learning the symbolic system of values, beliefs and attitudes that shape and influence perceptions and behaviours (Bodley, 1994; Geertz, 1993). Berry et al. (1992) view culture as "the shared way of life of a group of people". Culture influences people's social behaviour and interests, as well as their interactions with others. While cultural factors typically include values, assumptions, and expectations, "the variance and invariance of human behaviour and mental processes under diverse cultural conditions are both objects of cultural studies and they form the collective property of a group" (Bodley, 1994; Ho and Wu 2001:4).

School culture is a concept that describes the organisational culture of a school. Organisational culture refers to accepted values, underlying assumptions, and expectations present in the organisation (Cameron and Quinn 1999; Schein, 2004). School culture refers to *how people perceive, think, and feel about school-related matters* (Erickson, 1987). It is viewed as a holistic entity that influences all those who are involved in schools (Maslowski, 2001), it is the way "we do things around here", and it is frequently defined as the "norms, values and cultural artifacts that are shared by school members, which influence their functioning at school" (Maslowski, 2001). School culture is closely linked to the health and sustainable development of schools and to the objectives of school and education systems. *Interactions among groups and individuals* are important dimensions of school culture. Prosser (1999) claims that this concept describes "not only the particular patterns of perception and behaviour but also the system of relationships between those relationships." Hargreaves (1995) notes that teachers are encouraged to experiment and collaborate more with their colleagues in a school culture that drives and promotes innovation to ensure effective teaching and learning.

Theoretical models of school culture

The model of culture (Schoen & Teddlie, 2008) describes school culture as comprising four different dimensions: professional orientation, organisational structure, quality of the learning environment, and student-centred focus.

1. PROFESSIONAL ORIENTATION	2. ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE
Activities and attitudes that characterise the current level of professionalism	The style of leadership, communication and processes that characterise the way the school conducts its business
3. QUALITY OF THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT	4. STUDENT-CENTRED FOCUS
The merit of the activities in which students are engaged	Collective efforts and programmes offered to support student achievement

Table 1: Dimensions of school culture (Schoen & Teddlie, 2008)

The first dimension – *professional orientation* – concerns teachers’ professional lives. This dimension includes indicators of school staff’s individual or collective participation in professional development and student learning activities. Professional orientation covers what has been referred to as “professionalism” (Louis, Kruse et al., 1995), “professional learning community” (DuFour and Eaker, 1998; Newmann and Wehlage, 1995), “norms of collegiality” (Little, 1982), “teacher professionalisation” (Darling-Hammond, 1990), “collaborative cultures” (Lieberman, 1990), “organisational learning” (Argyris and Schon, 1976), and “learning organisations” (Senge et al., 2000).

Organisational structure considers the factors that affect the way in which the school conducts its business. This includes the type of leader involved in leadership activities, vision development, the formulation of goals or action plans, the degree of consensus and commitment around organisational goals, school policies, internal accountability, communication styles and relationships with school, the use of time, space and other resources, and communication with people outside school.

The third dimension of school culture concerns student learning and the way in which students apply the knowledge they acquire at school. Observations of school functions aim to document and describe the extent to which pupils are involved in challenging activities and experiences on a daily basis. The intention here is not to determine how teachers teach or whether students are involved in different tasks, but rather to assess the intellectual rigour of all classes in the school (Newmann and Associates: Newmann & Wehlage, 1995). High-quality learning environments are those that provide opportunities for students to interact with each other, with teachers and with people outside their class and to use the information they learn at school in the real world (APA, 1997; Newmann and Associates, 1996).

The last dimension of the model assesses the extent to which students’ individual needs are included in the school’s programmes, policies, rituals, and traditions. The literature (Levine & Lezotte, 1990; Teddlie and Reynolds, 2000) indicates that schools are only effective if parents are actively involved in various ways. This dimension examines the nature and extent of parental involvement, student support services, and differentiated instructional strategies (Gregory and Chapman, 2002) based on students’ unique interests and skills. This dimension also looks at the extent to which the knowledge to be acquired is disaggregated and analysed at the level of each student and the way in which student knowledge is used to inform instructional decisions. These approaches influence students’ sense of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997; 1999) and can impact student knowledge.

Dimensions 1 and 3 are more concerned with the individual experiences of teachers and students, while dimensions 2 and 4 focus more on the functions of the school as an organisation. Moreover, the first two dimensions deal with the experiences of the school, while the last two dimensions focus more on the experiences of students and parents. Depending on the type of participation considered, parent participation can serve as an indicator in any dimension.

How do parents contribute to school culture?

Parental involvement contributes significantly to improving student outcomes. The effective involvement of parents helps teachers develop their perceived ability to help students succeed in school (Dauber & Epstein, 1993). The benefits for students and parents create benefits for teachers. For example, teachers who engage parents in their activities feel much more confident in their teaching abilities (Hoover-Dempsey, Walker, Reed & Jones, 2002). Moreover, teachers who use parental involvement strategies improve their relationships with parents and receive stronger support from them. Parental involvement helps teachers to better understand students' needs, interests, and skills. School-family collaboration strengthens the 'connection' between the expectations of the school and those of the family, and clarifies their roles in supporting student achievement (Walker & Hoover-Dempsey, 2006). These benefits are summarised in Figure 1.

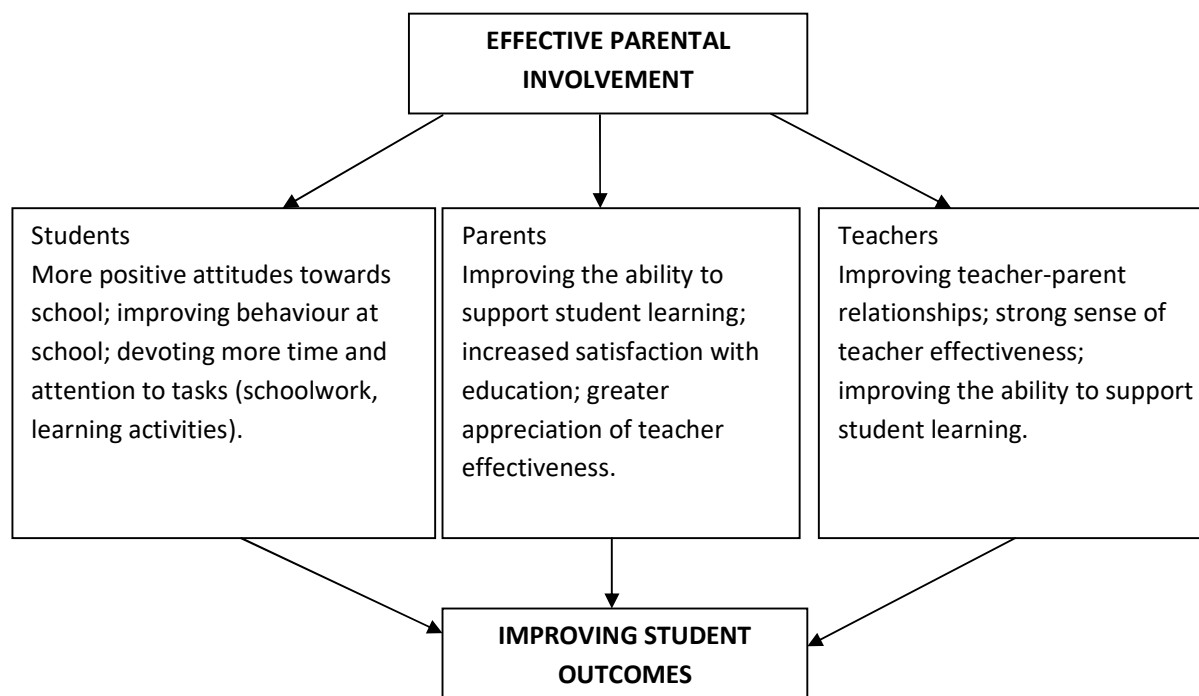


Figure 1: Benefits of effective parental involvement for students, parents, and teachers (Walker, & Hoover-Dempsey, 2006)

There are many models explaining why parents get involved, what they do during the activities, and how their involvement can make a difference. Epstein's typology of *school-family interactions* (1986; 1992) is the most famous and influential guide to parental involvement for educators and policymakers. The five levels of parent-family involvement are: (1) basic obligations for families and schools; (2) parents' involvement in school; (3) parents' involvement in helping students with homework; (4) participation in school decision-making processes; and (5) collaboration with community organisations. All these levels are key components of an effective school-family partnership, as each can have a strong impact on

student outcomes. The following model provides important entry points into the process of parental involvement.

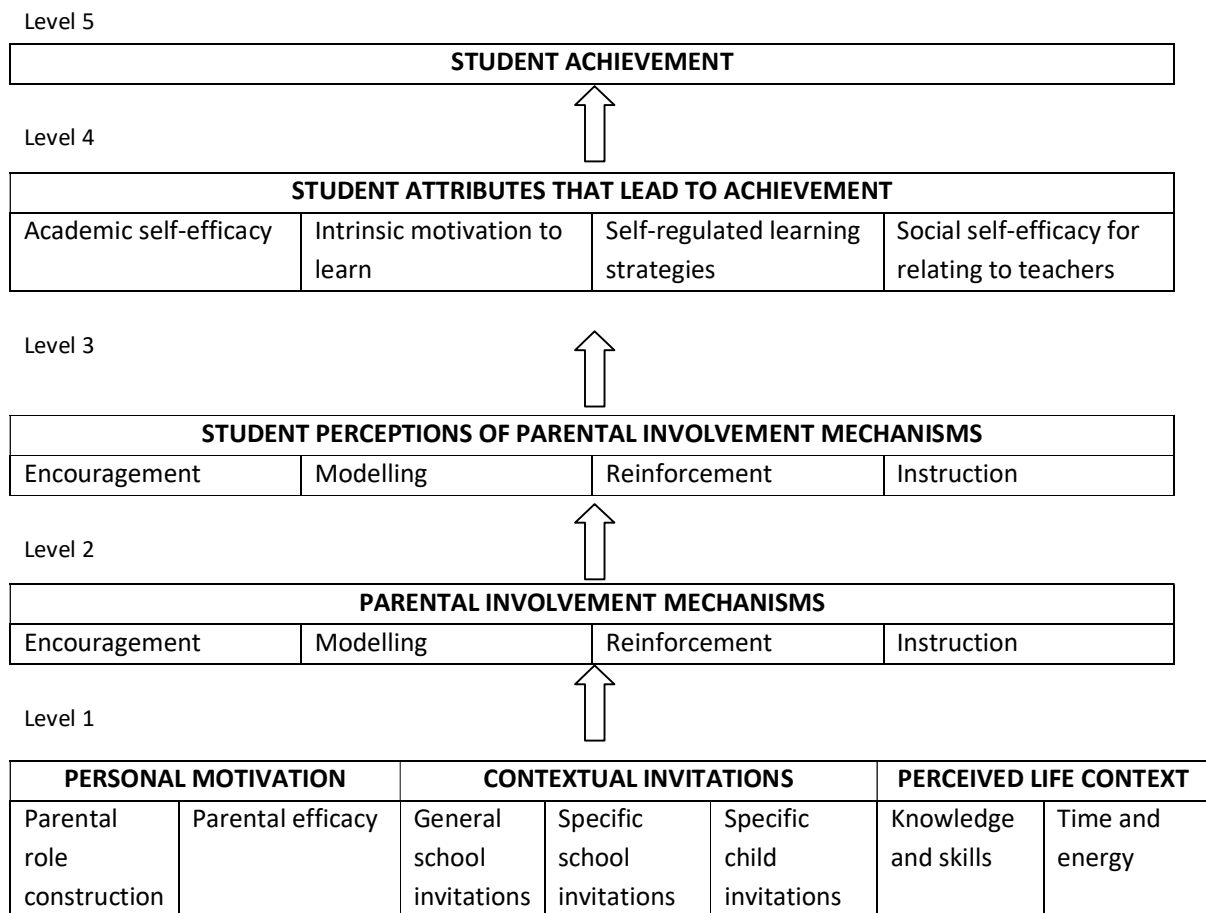


Figure 2: Model of parental involvement, Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler (2005)

For example, Level 1 suggests that parents are motivated to get involved for three main reasons. Firstly, they should be involved (parental role construction) and their involvement has a positive impact on children's learning process (efficacy). Secondly, contextual motivators invite them to get involved: general school invitations or the school climate makes it clear that parents are welcome in the school and that they are important players in students' learning. Specific teacher invitations provide help and flexible ways for parents to get involved; specific child invitations show what students want or if they need parents' involvement. Thirdly, parents' specific life context (knowledge and skills, time and energy, family culture) suggests the way in which teacher and school invitations can be tailored to the strengths of families. Knowledge and motivating factors are particularly important because they are social constructs, and they each influence not only parents and families but also schools and teachers.

Barriers to parental involvement

In building the family-school partnership, many teachers and parents face significant barriers. These barriers may be related to parents' circumstances (practical or psychological barriers within families), to teacher involvement practices, as well as to family traditions (Walker & Hoover-Dempsey, 2008).

Family barriers

Numerous families face barriers to effective involvement in their children's education due to difficulties caused by low income, poverty and limited educational skills. These difficulties can often make families feel inadequately prepared for interacting with the school or helping their children learn at home (Drummond & Stipek, 2004; Fantuzzo, Tighe & Childs, 2000). In addition, parents may be faced with practical difficulties: childcare responsibilities, poor access to transport, inflexible working hours, which limit their availability for interacting with the school. Despite these challenges, many low-income parents still "make it work" (Weiss et al., 2003). Parental involvement may also be hampered by psychological barriers: negative perceptions of school history, memories of poor academic performance, inappropriate treatment at school, their mindset and school authority can make parents feel intimidated to get involved (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). Families may also encounter barriers related to the different expectations of parents and students or to teacher behaviour. These cultural barriers may arise from language differences that are not addressed by the community or by the support services of the school; they may also be due to the family's limited understanding of school values and practices and to the school's limited understanding of family values and practices (Delgado-Gaitan, 2004; Garcia Coll et al., 2002).

School barriers

Like parents, teachers also face practical, psychological, and cultural barriers to school-family communication and parental involvement. While teachers clearly support parent involvement, the practical barriers that they encounter in schools and in their personal lives can limit their ability to promote parents' involvement (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2002). Poor support from the school management (lack of support from colleagues; a principal who does not understand the critical elements of the family-school relationship) can discourage teachers from investing time and energy in the school-family partnership. Even teachers who see parents as a key factor in supporting students may avoid parental involvement because of psychological and cultural barriers. They may experience a lack of confidence in their abilities to teach or work with parents, a fear of being criticised by them, or a lack of knowledge about strategies that could provide opportunities for parents to engage in the most effective way possible (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2002). In conclusion, without positive feedback on the usefulness of their efforts, teachers may give up on involving parents in school activities.

Key school culture indicators based on parent education programmes

School culture provides a good framework for studying school effectiveness (Van Houtte, 2005). Parent education programmes can be a starting point for supporting not only parents but also teachers. The indicators presented below are based on the school culture model (Schoen and Teddlie, 2008). Thus, the indicators were developed to assess the impact of parent education on school culture and school participation using the four dimensions: professional orientation, organisational structure, quality of the learning environment and student-centred focus.

Table 2: Indicators of school culture dimensions

1. PROFESSIONAL ORIENTATION	2. ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE
1.1. Teachers' openness to innovation (number of teachers participating in training programmes) 1.2. Teachers' common goals 1.3. Teacher effectiveness 1.4. Teachers' attitudes towards parental involvement	2.1. Leadership style 2.2. School policies, procedures, rules, routines, traditions, values 2.3. Internal accountability rules 2.4. Implementation of external policies

1.5. Teachers' attitudes towards change 1.6. Collegiality and teamwork 1.7. Support for teachers 1.8. Daily teacher involvement in reflective practices and tailored professional development	2.5. The shared vision of the school 2.6. Formal problem-solving and conflict resolution mechanism at school level 2.7. Communication among educational stakeholders
3. QUALITY OF THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT	4. STUDENT-CENTRED FOCUS
3.1. Involvement of all students in school decisions 3.2. School curriculum tailored to students' personal interests 3.3. Nature of teacher relationships 3.4. Communication between school and community 3.5. Parents' attitudes towards school 3.6. Participation in extracurricular activities 3.7. Opportunities for students 3.8. Student achievement (number of children improving their academic performance) 3.9. Students' school attendance (number of absences, number of dropouts per class)	4.1. Teacher-student-parent relationship 4.2. Student relationships 4.3. Parent involvement in school activities (number of parents engaged in school activities) 4.4. Instructional strategies based on students' unique interests and skills 4.5. Support services and programmes available to students and parents 4.6. Rewards for students

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research background

Previous research conducted by HoltIS with the support of UNICEF in Romania illustrates the importance of parent education in changing parents' attitudes and behaviour towards children (Cojocaru & Cojocaru, 2011a; 2011b). The parents who have benefited from parent education courses mention the fact that they have improved their relationships with their children, they encourage their children to communicate, they pay more attention to children's needs, etc. In order to support and strengthen child and parent participation, we thought that the intervention had to cover the whole school so that parent education could be strongly integrated into the school culture, supporting not only children and parents but also teachers. Involving teachers in the promotion of parent education aimed at familiarising them with child participation practices (HoltIS, 2019b) and with a positive approach to children's behaviour (HoltIS, 2019a). Thus, the research was carried out in six schools from the county of Bacău. The data collected in the field indicate that, during the research period, several types of interventions were implemented in the selected schools in parallel with the Parent Education Programme (HoltIS, 2019a-2019o): *Quality Inclusive Education* (with HoltIS, the Institute of Education Sciences, Împreună Agency, Step by Step as partners), Second Chance Education, as well as other extracurricular activities carried out with the help of non-governmental associations and foundations (Save the Children). In this context, our aim was to analyse the main factors and the types of interventions that contributed to improving school culture and school participation, while determining the impact of parent education on the participants.

Purpose and objectives

The purpose of this research is to assess the impact of the Parent Education Programme on school participation and school culture.

Research objectives

- Analyse the usefulness and impact of parent education on school culture and school participation;
- Identify school culture strategies that can promote parent education as an ongoing school practice;
- Explore the ways in which parent education influences teachers' attitudes and behaviour towards parents and children.

Research strategy

Research design is an integral part of the research intervention logic, which is used to analyse the way in which different parent education contexts influence children's school participation and school culture, focusing on several variables:

- Number of parent educators (schools with more than one active parent educator);
- Schools in which one or more groups of parents attend parent education courses;
- Teacher training and information sessions on child participation and the positive approach to children's behaviour (sessions with the school's teachers);
- Three schools from urban areas and three schools from rural areas.

This type of intervention aims to bring about social change based on the interests and needs of the target group, while analysing the effects of the interventions implemented in schools. Thus, data were collected on the impact of parent education in the researched schools, following the intervention aimed

at parents and teachers. At the same time, in order to get a clearer picture of the environment (school culture and climate), qualitative data were also collected, focusing on the risk of dropping out, the learning environment, student involvement in the school's decision-making processes, the school's openness to change and innovation, etc.

Data collection methods

The data collection process included focus groups and individual interviews with teachers, parents, parent educators and principals from the following schools: Octavian Voicu Middle School - Bacău, Constantin Platon Middle School - Bacău, Middle School No. 2 - Târgu Ocna, Middle School No. 1 - Sănduleni, Berești Tazlău Middle School, Găiceana Middle School.

In each of the schools included in the research, parent educators planned parent education sessions with groups of 10 to 12 parents. They also held two curriculum-based parent education sessions, namely *Child Participation* and *A Positive Approach to Children's Behaviour*. Thus, data were collected through six focus groups with parents, six focus groups with teachers, five interviews with parent educators and two interviews with principals. The focus groups were led by two HoltIS facilitators and had 7 to 10 participants, on average. The discussions were held in schools, in a room provided by the principal, and they were recorded with the consent of the participants. Principals attended only two of the focus groups held with teachers. The focus groups and interviews lasted on average between 60 and 90 minutes, which was also indicated in the consent forms signed by those who attended the meetings. Data access was facilitated by preliminary phone discussions with the parent educators to clarify the data collection process and agree on the dates of the meetings.

Table 3: Subjects involved in the data collection process

Code	Data collection method	Subjects	Area
FG1	Focus group	Parents	Urban
FG2	Focus group	Parents	Rural
FG3	Focus group	Parents	Urban
FG4	Focus group	Parents	Urban
FG5	Focus group	Parents	Rural
FG6	Focus group	Parents	Rural
FG7	Focus group	Teachers	Urban
FG8	Focus group	Teachers	Rural
FG9	Focus group	Teachers	Rural
FG10	Focus group	Teachers	Urban
FG11	Focus group	Teachers	Rural
FG12	Focus group	Teachers	Urban
S1	Interview	Parent educator	Urban
S2	Interview	Parent educator	Urban
S3	Interview	Parent educator	Rural
S4	Interview	Parent educator	Rural
S5	Interview	Principal	Rural
S6	Interview	Parent educator	Urban
S7	Interview	Principal	Urban

Ethical considerations

Interview and focus group participants were asked to give their written consent to participate in the discussions with the interviewers by means of a consent form, dated and signed by each subject, respecting the principle of confidentiality and with the assurance that the information collected would only be used for scientific purposes. The focus groups and individual interviews lasted on average between 60 and 90 minutes and were recorded with the consent of the participants. After collecting the data in the field, they were accurately transcribed and the research database was created. The names of the respondents were replaced with fictitious names to guarantee their anonymity. Also, the schools were photographed with the consent of school principals.

Selection of participants

Focus group participants were selected by the parent educators from the schools included in the research. The focus groups with both parents and teachers had on average 7 to 10 participants. All subjects – parents, teachers, parent educators and principals – participated voluntarily. The schools and participants included in the research were selected based on the criteria presented below.

Criteria for selecting the schools to be included in the research: the parent educator's availability and openness to organise parent education sessions; the quality of the activities carried out (ability to mobilise parents and teachers, deadline adherence, communication with the HoltIS supervisor); schools with only one or two parent educators; schools from rural and urban areas.

Criteria for selecting interview and focus group participants: participation in parent education sessions; availability to attend our meetings; teachers' schedules.

Results and discussion

The impact of parent education in schools is analysed based on the model of school culture (Schoen & Teddlie, 2008), which was documented prior to data collection in the field. This theoretical model comprises four school culture dimensions: professional orientation, organisational structure, quality of the learning environment and student-centred focus. The theoretical tool was used to define indicators that could assess the impact of parent education on school culture and school participation and was adapted to the situation on the ground.

The indicators derived from the theoretical model of school culture (Schoen & Teddlie, 2008) allowed us to analyse the cultural profiles of schools, to identify the factors influencing school participation and to measure the impact of the Parent Education Programme alongside other interventions carried out in the schools, which were identified during field data collection. We also examined teachers' collaboration with parents, parental and community interest in school, perceptions and behaviours related to child participation and the positive approach to children's behaviour, as well as teachers' flexibility and openness to change.

The analysis of school culture (Van Houtte, 2005) provides a suitable framework for studying school effectiveness and school improvement. Based on the data collected, we can say that each school is unique and has its own school culture. Nevertheless, we find common features that influence school participation: communication with parents and the community; relationships between teachers, parents and students; parent involvement in school activities; dropout causes and risk factors; measures and actions to improve student attendance; practices and methods used by teachers; etc.

THE RISK OF DROPPING OUT

Children from vulnerable and disadvantaged families face the risk of dropping out. This is often preceded by other negative phenomena to which the child is exposed: abuse, neglect, child labour. These are due not only to families' precarious circumstances but also to cultural patterns, educational lacks and the ways in which parenting skills are used (Cojocaru & Cojocaru, 2011). To change a child's situation, it is necessary, on the one hand, to support parents in fulfilling their parental roles as promoted by children's rights and, on the other hand, to strengthen the trust and cooperation between the school and the family. Thus, the Parent Education Programme also aimed to involve teachers in promoting parent education and familiarise them with child participation practices and a positive approach to children's behaviour.

Impact of parent education in figures

The Parent Education Programme was implemented in 85 schools (middle schools, high schools and kindergartens from Bacău County). In 45 of these schools, parent educators organised two training and information sessions for teachers, covering two very important topics: child participation and a positive approach to children's behaviour. Also, in the participating schools, parent educators delivered parenting courses that consisted of five, seven or ten sessions. We can mention some of the topics discussed with the parents: *stress management; how to communicate effectively with your child; how to be a reliable partner for your child; children's participation in the family; child abuse; a positive approach to children's behaviour; etc.*

General statistics on participants

The figures presented below show the total number of Parent Education Programme participants in the selected schools from Bacău County. These general statistics on participants are facilitated by the online platform www.qie.ro, which allowed us to constantly monitor the number of participants and the scheduled sessions.

Statistical data on parent education in Bacău schools

We decided to carry out our documentation work in Bacău County, as this is a county that has developed best practice models in the fields of education and social services. The *Quality Inclusive Education* model was launched by UNICEF and developed in partnership with the Ministry of Education, Bacău County Council, Bacău County School Inspectorate, the HoltIS Association, the Institute of Education Sciences, *Împreună* Agency, the Step by Step Foundation, and the School of Values. This model was preceded by experimental projects initiated by UNICEF, namely *Educational Priority Areas* and the *School Attendance Initiative*. In Bacău County, a total of 557 teaching professionals (teachers, principals, school counsellors, etc.) participated in parent education training; out of these, 382 parent educators have already held parenting classes in schools, and the others will do the same in the coming period. Thanks to the projects implemented with UNICEF support, Bacău County has become a special place for the development of parent education. At the same time, Bacău County reports a significant percentage of fathers involved in parent education courses, namely 22.5 per cent.

The data is summarised below:

Table 4: General statistics on parent education in the schools of Bacău County

No.	Category	County total
1.	Total number of teachers trained in the field of parent education	557
2.	Total number of parent educators active in schools (who organised at least one parent	382

	education session)	
3.	Number of parent groups set up	1,081
4.	Total number of parent education sessions (regular meetings with the same group of parents)	8,087
5.	Total number of participating parents	12,310
5.1.	Of whom, women (77.5 per cent)	9,540
5.2.	Men (22.5 per cent)	2,740
6.	Total number of impacted children (children whose parents attended parent education sessions)	19,568
7.	Number of parent support group meetings	1,634
8.	Number of teachers attending parent education sessions as participants	1,182
9.	Number of schools organising parent education courses	85

Source: www.qie.ro

The following table provides additional data for each school that held parent education courses, parent education sessions for teachers and parent support groups.

Table 5: Statistical data on parent education in the schools of Bacău County

No.	School	Community	APE	GoP	PES	PP	IC	SGM	PT
1	Middle School No. 1, Sănduleni	Sănduleni	9	36	267	414	612	57	45
2	'Alecu Russo' Middle School, Bacău	Bacău	12	32	238	358	475	66	35
3	Middle School No. 1, Târgu Ocna	Târgu Ocna	11	31	220	329	504	47	27
4	'Octavian Voicu' Middle School, Bacău	Bacău	9	30	215	314	446	30	35
5	Berești-Tazlău Middle School	Berești-Tazlău	8	28	178	287	456	33	24
6	Pârjol Middle School	Pârjol	7	27	173	262	382	39	25
7	'George Apostu' Middle School, Stanișești	Stanișești	8	26	161	272	320	43	28
8	'Constantin Platon' Middle School	Bacău	8	26	197	335	423	43	25
9	'General Nicolae Sova' Middle School, Poduri	Poduri	7	25	166	249	444	40	31
10	'Ștefan cel Mare' Middle School, Buhuși	Buhuși	8	24	181	266	435	30	21
11	Middle School No. 2, Târgu Ocna	Târgu Ocna	7	24	153	232	320	31	59
12	Technological High School, Răchitoasa	Răchitoasa	7	24	204	321	544	42	27
13	Horgești Middle School	Horgești	7	23	166	220	597	27	37
14	Asău Middle School	Asău	9	22	180	248	418	36	36
15	Oituz Middle School	Oituz	8	22	172	254	427	35	30
16	'Ștefan cel Mare' Middle School, Zemeș	Zemeș	6	22	159	255	484	43	37
17	'Alexandru cel Bun' Middle School, Berzunți	Berzunți	6	21	158	257	390	38	22
18	'Scarlat Longhin' Middle School, Dofteana	Dofteana	8	21	148	225	370	22	24
19	Strugari Middle School	Strugari	4	21	134	206	419	28	35
20	'Petru Rareș' Technological High School	Bacău	7	21	170	263	427	35	25
21	'Ion Rotaru' Middle School, Valea lui Ion	Valea lui Ion	5	21	158	233	301	30	20
22	Călugăreni Middle School	Călugăreni	6	20	146	236	355	31	11
23	'Mihai Eminescu' Middle School, Lipova	Lipova	8	20	149	245	448	34	37
24	Ungureni Middle School	Ungureni	6	20	157	244	499	30	35
25	Middle School No. 1, Balcani	Balcani	5	19	137	218	341	26	24
26	Bogdănești Middle School	Bogdănești	4	19	143	222	307	28	24
27	'George Enescu' Middle School, Moinești	Moinești	6	19	142	230	384	28	27
28	Găiceana Middle School	Găiceana	4	18	132	218	398	31	23

29	'Costache Negri' Middle School, Negri	Negri	4	18	117	192	333	27	19
30	'Dr. Alexandru Şafran' Middle School	Bacău	4	18	148	237	334	28	22
31	'Alexandru Sever' Middle School, Moineşti	Moineşti	5	18	142	225	409	23	21
32	'Răducanu Rosetti' Middle School, Căiuţi	Căiuţi	4	18	137	217	281	33	25
33	'Gheorghe Nechita' Middle School, Motoşeni	Motoşeni	4	17	115	204	311	28	16
34	'Mihail Andrei' Middle School, Buhuşi	Buhuşi	6	17	126	204	352	25	15
35	Middle School No. 1, Blăgeşti	Blăgeşti	6	16	132	197	288	21	25
36	Coloneşti Middle School	Coloneşti	3	15	122	187	373	28	23
37	Middle School No. 1, Dealu Morii	Dealu Morii	4	15	112	183	248	24	17
38	Middle School No. 1, Gura Văii	Gura Văii	4	15	122	188	297	28	28
39	Middle School No. 1, Sărata	Sărata	4	15	104	159	352	22	18
40	Urecheşti Middle School	Urecheşti	3	15	112	187	291	26	33
41	Letea Veche Middle School	Letea Veche	6	14	105	174	251	25	13
42	Scorţeni Middle School	Scorţeni	4	14	120	185	314	27	12
43	Middle School No. 1, Slănic-Moldova	Slănic-Moldova	3	14	112	177	344	22	24
44	Vultureni Middle School	Vultureni	5	14	97	159	326	23	18
45	Băcioiu Middle School	Băcioiu	5	14	112	182	377	20	23
46	Middle School No. 1, Slobozia	Stanişeuşti	7	13	90	112	187	24	0
47	'Ion Borcea' Middle School, Racova	Racova	3	11	81	137	191	16	0
48	Frumoasa Middle School	Balcani	5	11	90	120	178	14	1
49	Centre for Adolescents, Bacău	Bacău	5	10	100	149	216	16	0
50	Middle School No.1, Turluianu	Bereşti-Tazlău	5	10	76	99	177	12	0
51	Corbasca Middle School	Corbasca	5	10	70	90	162	10	0
52	Hăghiac Middle School	Dofteana	5	10	80	84	136	17	0
53	Cucuieţi Middle School	Dofteana	5	7	60	68	138	7	0
54	'Ion Ghica' Economic College	Bacău	6	6	53	62	70	1	0
55	'Dimitrie Cantemir' National College	Oneşti	6	6	51	61	56	0	0
56	'Stefan cel Mare' National Pedagogical College	Bacău	5	5	53	64	65	1	0
57	'Gheorghe Vrânceanu' National College	Bacău	5	5	52	65	77	0	0

58	‘Alexandru Vlahuță’ Technological High School, Podu Turcului	Podu Turcului	5	5	51	59	59	5	0
59	‘Grigore Cobălcescu’ Technical College	Moinești	3	4	31	48	26	0	0
60	Middle School No. 10, Bacău	Bacău	4	4	22	31	35	0	0
61	‘Ion Borcea’ Technical College	Buhuși	3	3	30	38	39	20	0
62	‘Tristan Tzara’ Middle School, Moinești	Moinești	3	3	4	11	17	1	0
63	‘N. Vasilescu - Karpen’ Technical College of Communications, Bacău	Bacău	3	3	20	24	24	1	0
64	‘Alexandru cel Bun’ Middle School, Berzunți	Berzunți	1	2	10	13	14	11	0
65	‘Vasile Alecsandri’ National College	Bacău	2	2	22	24	23	0	0
66	‘Alexandru Vlahuță’ Technological High School	Podu Turcului	2	2	20	29	34	10	0
67	‘Nicolae Iorga’ Middle School, Bacău	Bacău	2	2	20	29	0	11	0
68	‘Mihail Sadoveanu’ Primary and Middle School	Bacău	1	1	8	11	11	0	0
69	‘Nicolae Iorga’ Primary and Middle School	Bacău	1	1	8	15	27	0	0
70	Răcățoiu Middle School	Răcățoiu	1	1	7	12	37	0	0
71	‘N.V. Karpen’ College, Bacău	Bacău	1	1	10	12	12	0	0
72	‘Gheorghe Asachi’ Technical College	Onești	1	1	11	12	13	0	0
73	‘Anghel Saligny’ Technological High School	Bacău	1	1	12	10	10	1	0
74	‘Dumitru Mangeron’ Technological High School	Bacău	1	1	10	12	12	0	0
75	‘Grigore Antipa’ Technological High School	Bacău	1	1	10	20	0	0	0
76	Onești Technological High School	Onești	1	1	10	10	23	0	0
77	‘Henri Coanda’ Theoretical High School	Bacău	1	1	10	10	0	0	0
78	‘Ștefan Luchian’ Middle School, Moinești	Moinești	1	1	10	10	10	0	0
79	Solonț Middle School	Solonț	1	1	10	11	18	0	0
80	‘Miron Costin’ Middle School, Bacău	Bacău	1	1	10	17	0	0	0
81	‘Pinocchio’ Kindergarten, Bacău	Bacău	1	1	4	10	10	2	0
82	Fântânele Middle School	Fântânele	1	1	5	10	11	0	0
83	Luncani Middle School	Luncani	1	1	6	10	10	10	0
84	Middle School No. 2, Mănăstirea Cașin	Mănăstirea Cașin	1	1	10	10	10	10	0
85	‘Lizuca’ Full-Day Kindergarten, Bacău	Bacău	1	1	11	21	23	1	0
Total			382	1,081	8,087	12,310	19,568	1,634	1,182

Source: www.qie.ro

*Notes:

APE - Active Parent Educators, who delivered parent education courses

GoP – Groups of Parents who attended parent education courses

PES – Parent Education Sessions (meetings with parents)

PP – Participating Parents (parent education courses)

IC – Impacted Children (children whose parents attended parent education courses)

SGM – Support Group Meetings (groups of parents who completed parent education courses)

PT – Participating Teachers (who attended the two appreciative parenting sessions held in the school)

Specific statistics on participants from researched schools

We conducted our research in the following schools to assess the impact of parent education on the participants. The table below includes specific statistics on participants from the researched schools.

Table 6: Number of beneficiaries in the researched schools

No.	School	Community	APE*	GoP	PES	PP	IC	SGM	PT
1	Middle School No. 1, Sănduleni	Sănduleni	9	36	267	414	612	57	45
2	‘Octavian Voicu’ Middle School, Bacău	Bacău	9	30	215	314	446	30	35
3	Berești-Tazlău Middle School	Berești-Tazlău	8	28	178	287	456	33	24
4	‘Constantin Platon’ Middle School	Bacău	8	26	197	335	423	43	25
5	Middle School No. 2, Târgu Ocna	Târgu Ocna	7	24	153	232	320	31	59
6	Găiceana Middle School	Găiceana	4	18	132	218	398	31	23

Source: www.qie.ro

***Notes:**

APE - Active Parent Educators, who delivered parent education courses

GoP – Groups of Parents who attended parent education courses

PES – Parent Education Sessions (meetings with parents)

PP – Participating Parents (parent education courses)

IC – Impacted Children (children whose parents attended parent education courses)

SGM – Support Group Meetings (groups of parents who completed parent education courses)

PT – Participating Teachers (who attended the two appreciative parenting sessions held in the school)

Family and community factors

The teachers who attended our meetings believe that the risk of dropping out comes from a number of family and community factors and causes. Teachers point out that this is a risk that tends to occur in financially challenged families with low levels of education and that it is preceded by negative phenomena to which the child is exposed, such as abuse, neglect, child labour.

Parents’ precarious financial situation

According to teachers, parents’ precarious financial situation is the main reason why children drop out of school. Due to their living conditions, parents adopt parenting practices and behaviours that have a negative impact on school participation, with children copying their parents’ parenting style. Teachers believe that the educational projects carried out in poor communities have no impact unless they are doubled by major social projects.

“Well, they don’t have [financial means - A/N], but they sometimes work in the village for more educated people, although there aren’t many [parents - A/N] like that, they are very poor. You don’t have time, but if you could go to this place – I was speechless, I was so impressed – it’s somewhere on the hill, outside the village. You know that poor people settle right outside the village, and I was there last year, I went there to get the children for the Second Chance [Education programme - T/N]. I was deeply impressed. So there were three families in one room, each on a sort of bed – you couldn’t call it a bed – in a small room like that. They had no toilet, no electricity, no water, just like in primitive times. And they are terribly poor, those children... So the mother had 12 children, the girls are in their twenties now and they already have six kids. And how could they study, where could they write when they have no stove, no light? How could they write? Who could help them? They do the same thing, and it goes on and on. That’s the problem. There’s no point in running a

hundred and one projects and a thousand and one tests if we don't start from the root [cause – T/N], right?" (S2, parent educator)

According to teachers, school participation is influenced by the community in which students and their families live. In poorer communities, most parents live on welfare and are heavy drinkers.

"Others are jobless or they live on welfare, so they don't get unemployment benefits. Just a few of them have pensions." "I have maybe three working mothers, the others..." "Many have left. Usually the mothers, mostly the mothers..." (FG9, teachers)

"Poverty". "That's what it is. It all comes down to family income, and most of them live on welfare. Because of poverty, they drink and so on... They are poor, but they drink." "Drinking is a big problem, so is poverty. These are the issues here." (FG11, teachers)

Teachers report cases where, without parental support, children are forced to miss school even if they are able to cope with school demands.

"It hurts the most when you see a good child, with a lot of potential, disengaging from school, not necessarily because they want to. In fact, I have a case right now, a little girl who goes to work with her parents because they have no one to leave her with." (FG10, teachers)

As reported by teachers, parents' lack of financial resources is the main barrier to children's development and education. Although they do not guarantee academic success, material resources are important for carrying out school activities and meeting school demands.

"In conclusion, the lack of financial resources affects your whole life, your education, your work, because if you are a child from a poor family now... How was it like in the past? You studied, you studied well, you'd progress, you'd go to... Now, if you don't have the means to do your PowerPoint project, you don't have Internet access to get informed, you don't have this, you don't have that, it constrains you and you can no longer..." (FG11, teachers)

"Reading comprehension, practical math, reasoning activities... We've had pretty good results for a rural school. I guess that's why we're in a good position. Nationwide, rural children are probably more disadvantaged. Not everyone has a tablet, two or three of them may have one, but in the city, a lot of them have tablets, they have phones... And they learn about certain systems, certain mechanisms, they think, and things happen. Here, children play with sticks and live their childhood..." (FG9, teachers)

As it emerges from teachers' statements, children from financially challenged families are more likely to drop out of school. However, there are some exceptions, children who manage to rise above their circumstances and do well in school (Muntean, Roth & Iovu, 2010). This happens when the child is supported by teachers, but it is not enough to improve their situation.

"There are children who come from such families [poor families - A/N] and they do well in school. They want to somehow rise above their circumstances because they can easily see that what is happening in their families is not okay and they want to have a better future. But these cases are rare." (FG7, teachers)

Parents' migration abroad

Teachers mention parents' migration abroad as a demotivating factor for children's education. According to them, children are left unsupervised, ending up in a placement centre or being left in the care of relatives. The most noticeable effects of parental migration are children's school problems.

"...Many children are in a precarious financial situation. Many of them have their parents abroad and [are - A/N] left behind. Children whose parents are away have big problems. Not to mention social housing, the Roma, the placement centre. We are an inclusive school, with a lot of problems raised by students and their parents, and you sometimes don't even know how to solve them, what you can do to see all that work pay off." (FG7, teachers)

Parents' migration abroad affects school participation. The absence of a parental model to guide the child's values has a negative impact on the child's health and mental development. Children shut down, they become more withdrawn and have poorer academic results.

"... [Children - A/N] shut down, they don't communicate and do worse in school when one of the parents is away. I try to talk to them and reassure them as much as possible, but I don't force them to say certain things and I always encourage them, [their parents - A/N] leave so that they can have a better future." (FG9, teachers)

As it emerges from teachers' statements, *parents' migration abroad* or *parents' absence from children's lives* has a negative impact on students' behaviour, but when children are left in the care of close relatives who are involved and interested, they go to school and manage to do their homework on their own. There are differences in how relatives take on parental responsibilities in the case of deceased parents compared to when children are left behind by migrant parents. This may be due to *border uncertainty and its effects on the child(ren) and their relatives*; in the case of parents working abroad, the relatives who look after the children do not assume strong parental responsibilities, whereas in the case of deceased parents, the relatives (grandparents, uncles, aunts, etc.) who take care of the children devote themselves to raising and educating them.

"I can tell you that she's an excellent grandmother, sending her children to school. When I started working with the child in the prep year, I thought that I would not be able to get anything out of that child after his father's death. Now he's one of the best students and he does his homework on his own in the second grade, he comes to school without his grandmother waking him up, [when - T/N] his grandmother is out running errands, the child comes to school." (FG10, teachers)

Parents' educational achievement

Parents' educational achievement is another factor influencing the risk of dropping out of school. Parents with low levels of education do not think that school participation is important, while teachers encourage students as best they can. For this kind of parents, parent education is a very important type of family intervention. The role of parent education is to make parents aware of their responsibilities, support them in fulfilling them and make them understand the need to respect children's right to education. Parent education can contribute to reducing intergenerational vulnerabilities, especially as parents interact with each other during parenting classes and build a motivating vision for school investment.

"This year, I have this family and [the child - T/N] is indeed at risk of dropping out. But I think that parents' poor education is a serious problem; the child's mother can't read and she thinks that the child doesn't have to go to school and learn. I've encouraged the child

since the mother has no money – ‘I can buy you a notebook, a pen, if necessary’. We can support them morally, financially, however we can... for eight grades, on average. But there are also parents with no education, with four years of schooling, with two years of schooling, and few, very few who completed a vocational school or high school.” (FG8, teachers)

“If you step into their world and spend time with them, [you’ll see that - T/N] school is almost entirely excluded from their reality. They don’t think that... the child has to be neat, clean, educated. When they attended Parents’ School, they found a different way of looking at school, at a child’s opportunities.” (FG10, teachers)

Child neglect and lack of parental involvement in children’s school activities

The risk of dropping out is also present when children are neglected by their parents. Without adequate parental control, children are more likely to drop out of school and engage in behaviours that are inappropriate for their age (Wright et al., 2013). Parental neglect leaves its mark on the child’s personality and affects school participation. Parent education increases parents’ awareness and acceptance of their children’s needs and helps to build an environment that fosters child development.

“There are also [dropouts - A/N] in middle school. I think there are fewer in smaller grades. There are a few cases in middle school. In general, I’d say that [dropout occurs A/N] when a child feels they have no one. It is pointless for them to come to school and for me to ask them and try to do the right thing in school if no one has set the table for them in the morning, if when they come home from school in the afternoon, no one asks them anything or the house is empty or they just throw their backpack somewhere or who knows if they will still see their parents in the evening.” (FG8, teachers)

Parents’ precarious financial situation is often accompanied by child neglect. Living in unsafe conditions and stressing about the future are associated with less favourable child development outcomes and poor academic performance (McLoyd, 1990; 1998). Parents’ concerns are generally related to providing for tomorrow, with a rather low interest in children’s education.

“On the other hand, just like the teacher has said, there are parents who work only in agriculture. They go and work in the village as day labourers and they come home in the evening at nine o’clock, hungry, tired, exhausted. They make something to eat, they drink a bottle of beer and go to bed, without worrying about the child.” (FG11, teachers)

“They live on agriculture, that’s what this is about. If you have no salary, you have to find a way to make money. And when the mother comes home tired in the evening, she doesn’t have time to take care of them anymore and leaves them alone. They come from a rural environment, and you can see that they are dirtier, more neglected, without their homework.” (FG8, teachers)

Child neglect is also due to the fact that parents are not responsible for sending their children to school. Although the primary responsibility for a child’s upbringing and development lies with the parents (Law No. 272/2004), parents are not informed about their duties or held accountable. Sending a child to school is not seen as an obligation and depends on the will of the parents.

“Plus they don’t take responsibility for the child’s duty to go to school every day. So if it rains outside, [you don’t know whether - T/N] they will send them to school today, and you wait because you have an evaluation meeting, you have an inspection, you have no attendance and so on. So it’s a huge stress for us.” (FG9, teachers)

Teachers also mention preschoolers who do not attend preschool. Kindergarten children's attendance is essential for their education and development (Leseman et al., 2001) and helps them adjust to primary school. It is easier to attract young children to school, but it also depends on their parents' attitudes and sense of responsibility.

"Honestly, maybe for the little ones. On the one hand, the teacher can attract the child more easily, but, unfortunately, they depend on their mother. If their mother doesn't wake them up and take them to school because she feels sorry for them and [she thinks - T/N] they are too young to go to school in the prep year, what can you ask of a 6-year-old child? To run away from home and come to school when no one sends them?" (FG10, teachers)

Child labour

The way in which parents perceive children's right to education and the importance of daily attendance influences parenting practices and parents' decisions about their children's future. As indicated by the teachers who attended the training and information sessions, another reason why children drop out of school is parents' perception that child exploitation is normal. Teachers believe that it is very difficult for children who are in these situations to recover without the intervention of the community, the social worker and the school. Parent education informs parents about the importance of education for children, as well as about the risks exploited children are facing.

"The fact that children are exploited is disturbing, or at least it bothers me (...). An older child has to stay home and miss school to raise the younger ones. Their mother and father have countless children and the child accumulates absences to raise them... I don't agree with that... It is difficult for such a child to catch up. You cannot bring them back to school without the help of the community, the social worker and the colleagues. There are children who take a leave of absence, they can easily complete eight grades, but they are exploited and they have poor or no attendance, some drop out of school." (FG9, teachers)

Child abuse

As most of our research participants reported, when parents are in a precarious situation, if they drink and are disinterested, child abuse can also occur, and for these children, school often becomes *"an oasis of calm"* (S2, parent educator).

"...his father got drunk again at Christmas and took him and his brother – who's about three years younger, I think he's in second grade – out in the snow in their panties. Their neighbours took them. He was beaten, battered, and I asked him what had happened to him. 'I fell from a tree.' 'What kind of tree now, in winter?' 'I climbed a cherry tree.' 'What cherry tree? Your dad beat you'." (S1, parent educator)

Cases of abuse can be detected based on children's behaviour. Children who live in an unsafe and tense environment risk replicating the practices they see their parents use in their families. We see cases of physical, emotional and even sexual abuse. Teachers claim that, although the students are helped by the psychologist, it is not enough to improve their situation in the long run.

"But, you know, those from the homes [Roma children - A/N], in general through their behaviour... We can't intrude, they might tell us directly, but we can say that they are emotionally, verbally, maybe even physically abused by the way they behave during classes or in the classroom. They start screaming in the classroom. When there were cases, yes, I raised the issue; if the parents are jobless or the children come from the social centre. It's very difficult for them and [it's - T/N] a trauma that they got there, and who knows how they got there, [they were - T/N] removed from their families. They behave in a very

aggressive or inappropriate manner towards their classmates, and this proves that they haven't had an easy childhood..." "[The psychologist - A/N] talks to them and things get better, but only as long as they see her. Yes, there is some short-term progress, let's say, for some of them, but it goes away very quickly." (FG7, teachers)

Child abuse usually occurs in broken families. It reduces children's trust in adults and their willingness to communicate their feelings. One of the objectives of parent education is to inform parents about the effects of child abuse, which is also a topic included in the parent education sessions attended by the parents.

[I had this case of - A/N] "an eighth-grade girl exposed to domestic abuse. She came from a broken family, the mother remarried and the girl was abused by her [mother's - T/N] partner... And the younger brother was also beaten... scared, terrified. Very scared. Eventually, the word got around the village, the social worker found out. The girl moved to her biological father with her brother and I think the investigation is still ongoing; statements were given, a policeman came, statements were given, but the girl was very, very withdrawn. She didn't have many visible marks, but she was very withdrawn, she didn't say much." (FG9, teachers)

Factors related to the school environment

One of the fundamental objectives of schools is to create and maintain a safe and trusting environment for students. The school environment is influenced by teachers' relationships with students and parents, by the established order and discipline, by the interventions and programmes implemented in response to students' interests and needs (Skiba et al., 2004). As indicated by the parents and teachers who participated in our research, a number of factors related to the school environment also contribute to the risk of dropping out.

Unfriendly school environment. Inappropriate teacher behaviour

Some of the parents attending the parent education sessions in Bacău County mentioned the inappropriate behaviour of certain teachers. Such behaviour creates an unfriendly school environment for both children and parents. Students who do not feel safe at school are more likely to miss classes and engage less in school activities (Boyd, 2004; Hernandez & Seem, 2004). A notable effect of the unfriendly school environment reported by parents is the feeling of fear among students. To protect their children, parents decide to move them to another school, a decision which is also based on previous experiences; this happens especially with children attending schools in urban areas, as they have more opportunities to transfer.

"[The child - A/N] is afraid of him. This teacher is one of the reasons why children are leaving this school. It's bad that the school is losing children because of this character. There is someone (...) who had their daughter here and moved her to another school precisely for this reason. They complained to the principal. I didn't even think about moving my child to another school until I found out that he was going to be her Romanian teacher in the fifth grade. Then I said that was out of the question. I went through this once with my oldest son, I don't want to go through it again and traumatise my daughter as well. It's not okay." (FG1, parents)

"I'm telling you that I had my little boy here for a year and then I transferred him. That was one of the main reasons why I did it. I'd bring him in the morning and the Romanian teacher would greet us in the hallway on the hall monitor's chair, with a cigarette in his hand. That seemed out of place to me and I couldn't accept it." (FG1, parents)

"There was the case of a Romanian teacher, here at the school, who had – and still has – an inappropriate attitude towards students, bad language, intimidation of children." (FG1, parents)

In these cases, although the parents reported the inappropriate behaviour to the school and to the school inspectorate, their actions had no tangible results.

"It was brought to their attention, but it seems that...". "Nothing... we even informed the Inspectorate. They came, they asked us for all kinds of..., they made us fill out a form asking us about our problems with the school. I wasn't the only one who wrote about this, but it seems that... nothing. No results. I was confident. I said that it's... You hear it from someone, then you hear it from someone else, and yet you don't take any action, you don't do anything? You smoke with students in the bathroom? Well, what kind of an example are you setting as a teacher? I have nothing else to complain about because I don't know." (FG1, parents)

School safety

The safety of children remains parents' main concern. Parents' perception of a safe environment for children is an important aspect of school culture (Cohen et al., 2009), contributing to the ethos of culture (Teddle & Reynolds, 2000). Parents are particularly concerned about older students in the school who engage in inappropriate behaviour and pose a threat to younger children.

"I think the most discussed issue is children's safety. The conflict between older kids and younger ones. Manipulation. Older children threaten, scare, beat the little ones and so I think this is the most important issue." (FG1, parents)

School safety is also affected by the presence of Roma children. The parents who attended parent education sessions mentioned the issue of Roma children who bullied other children to obtain certain favours, with the latter sometimes refusing to go back to school. These problems can be solved when parents step in and talk to the Roma students.

"I also had some problems with that guy from the fifth grade... the boy from... he was always picking on him. If he went to the bathroom to get some water – 'What are you doing here, what...' He really didn't want to go to school anymore. Until my husband came and talked to him and told him: You have no reason to tease him. I won't do anything to you now, but you have no reason to pick on him, because he hasn't done anything to you." (FG4, parents)

"My boy was bullied by a Roma child. He'd wait for him in the street after school, asking him for money. 'I'll beat you up if you don't give me money'." "Some are very respectful, few of them, some of them are [respectful - T/N]." (FG6, parents)

Lack of interventions to address class and grade failure

In the researched schools, the risk of dropping out is also linked to repeated class failures, which often lead to grade repetition. Without school and family support, children become discouraged and are at a greater risk of dropping out of school.

"In general, [they drop out - A/N] when they start middle school, in the fifth or sixth grade. If they get to seventh grade, they're close to graduation and it doesn't happen anymore, but the fifth and sixth grades are hard transitions. They repeated a grade in primary school, and now that they are being held back for the second or third time, I can see that they are discouraged." (S5, principal)

This highlights the importance of after-school programmes, especially for children who have no support at home. The activities that children attend after school provide various developmental and socialisation opportunities that can influence the way in which children experience self-esteem and autonomy (Dunn, Kinney, & Hofferth, 2003). Homework support is the biggest benefit for children attending the day care centre.

"[Attending the day care centre is - A/N] Very good. A child who goes to the day care centre changes over time; they become tidier, they do their homework, even if they do it with the help of someone there, it's not exactly their work, but it's useful. It's a good thing that they go to the day care centre. It's a shame that they can't work with more children, especially that they often have no one at home to support them. At least there is someone there to supervise them [and help them with - T/N] the concerns they may have at this age." (FG8, teachers)

"They also do their homework [at the day care centre - A/N]. There is real progress. It is to our advantage that they get homework support, they come, and those [the students - A/N] who want to do some extra work have the opportunity to do that and be supervised." (S5, principal)

These programmes require financial resources, which is often a barrier to interventions. One solution that has been suggested is to continue after-school activities for a fee charged to the parents who choose to use these services.

"At the local level, there is no budget to cover the costs incurred there [by the day care centre - A/N], the utility bills that must be paid, the employees that are needed. In the future, a fee-based contract will be proposed to parents who want to leave their children after school so that they can go to work..." (FG3, parents)

According to the parents who attended parent education sessions, the children were very happy with the activities they carried out at the day care centre. They were relaxed because they could play and get help with their homework. Another argument highlighting the importance of these after-school programmes is that parents feel overwhelmed by the subjects taught in school and they find it difficult to help their children with their homework.

"I've explained [to the class teacher - A/N] that I can't teach her, I don't know what kind of math... it wasn't like that when I was in school." "At least division was easy." (FG2, parents)

Teachers also point out that parents have difficulty helping their children with homework. They are sceptical about parents' abilities to help their children with homework, despite their willingness.

"If the parent comes and tells you: 'Teacher, I want to ask you something! I have a difficult exercise: $a+2=4$. Sir, the world has gone crazy! How can you add a letter to a number?' They don't get the point. What can you tell them? You realise what their level or perspective is. Or

I gave him [the student - A/N] three statements to do at home and he said, 'Neither my mother nor my father and my grandmother knew what they meant!' And they're all respectable people. That is the problem." (FG11, teachers)

Excessive bureaucratisation of teaching activities

Teachers from the participating schools mentioned the excessive bureaucratisation of teaching activities to the detriment of the time devoted to children. The time that teachers spend justifying their teaching activities limits their practical activities with students.

"We are tired of documents, papers, statements and things like that... We are experts in making binders with all sorts of documents. That is a waste of time. It's useful for those who have other interests, but not for the ordinary teacher who has to work. During that time, I'd rather talk to two students, discuss something or come up with another test that I can use at the end of class or a five-minute game at the beginning of class when they look out the window and don't pay attention to me. If we have to write papers, statements... Every single day!" (FG7, teachers)

Curriculum and common assessment standards

At parent-teacher meetings, parents raise the issue of the curriculum that is too demanding for students. The principal tries to talk to the parents and convince them that the curriculum does not depend on the teachers, but the issue raised by the parents is only discussed and not resolved.

"Yes, another issue that parents often raise is the curriculum, which they find too demanding. I've told them that the curriculum doesn't depend on the principal, on the teacher. It is designed by experts who believe that children should have certain knowledge at this level... So another problem is the curriculum. At the parent-teacher meetings to which I was invited and that I attended after the lecture, this was the main issue – curriculum overload." (S7, principal)

Teachers, too, admit that the curriculum is difficult. According to them, classes with large numbers of students and eighth-grade examination subjects limit the adequacy of teaching methods and techniques.

"On the one hand, you are asked to use a differentiated approach, meaning that you have to recognise progress – they don't know how to write, but they have learned two letters in one year. You pass them, but at some point, you come up against a threshold, a standards-based exam. They will automatically get a 1 because they won't be given preferential subjects. Then there's another problem. The thing about differentiated teaching is that it is usually suitable for small classes. If you have a class of more than 20 students, like it happened in the past, now the numbers are shrinking, it is more difficult to teach in a differentiated way..." (FG11, teachers)

Teachers recommend structuring the curriculum according to the level of the students. The complexity of the curriculum may act as a barrier to differentiated instruction, making it quite difficult to adapt the information to each class.

"There should be a different curriculum for children who cope and for those who don't cope. We should teach in a differentiated manner and a different curriculum should also be available. We can't do it on the spot in the classroom..." (FG9, teachers)

Differentiated instruction is discouraged by annual inspections and reviews of teachers' activities. The requirements that teachers have to meet according to the curriculum limit the use of practical exercises with students.

"Last year, we had inspectors coming to class, they observed and graded us. When an inspector comes to my class – when they came to class last year, to three classes – in order to give me a grade, they ask me to show them the curriculum, my (annual, semi-annual, unit) planning, worksheets and so on. They check how well I managed to pass that knowledge on to the child. They don't ask me about skills. They check my work, they take the notebooks, all the documents, they ask and talk to the children. 'By the end of fifth grade, the student should know how to do this and that.' All this comes from the knowledge that I have to pass on to the student. [I'd like - A/N] to be allowed to focus for a few hours on something other than the transmission of knowledge. To do some practical exercises. To improve a particular skill that they have acquired through knowledge. If I just have to pass on knowledge like 'numbers, centres and percentages', well, when can I enhance their skills? There are classes where you teach one hour a week to thirty students that are very different. From one student who is very good to half of them who can't read or write. Can I do other things as well?" (FG7, teachers)

Due to the level of the students and the requirements that have to be met, the curriculum is not always followed. We came across one school where the fact that teachers focused on following the curriculum, although the curriculum standards were too high for their classes, created a tense relationship between students and teachers.

"The only problems we have between teachers and students, constant problems, concern the mathematics teacher who, although she attended courses, although she participated in many project activities that were non-formal, that were different... Well, if she has to do her maths lesson according to the curriculum, she will do it even if she is talking to herself. The children get bored, she insists, she shouts, things get worse between them. She is usually the only one who has problems. I tried to explain to her: 'Madam, don't stick to the curriculum anymore. I'll take responsibility for it, I'll give you written permission. Do it for them, based on how much they can handle, less, slowly.' 'No. What if someone comes in, what will I do then? I have to follow the curriculum!' We are all here. None of us follow the curriculum." (FG10, teachers)

Teaching methods and techniques

Teaching methods are essential to help students understand and deepen their knowledge. Some parents who attended parent education sessions claim that teachers' instructional methods are outdated and unattractive to students. In their opinion, a teacher has to constantly adapt to new demands and learn different ways to engage students in the educational process.

"Ask what the teacher should do. The teacher should learn every day, they should learn to adapt. Many teachers who get tenure stop taking courses, they stop reading books, they use obsolete methods and don't learn new methods. They want education to be attractive, to attract them, and you have to make that happen... You have a computer, a tablet, a TV, sources of information everywhere and you choose the old teaching method, it's boring. The child doesn't feel like learning anymore. You have to compete, you as a teacher, with everything around you, with everything that shines." (FG1, parents)

Some teachers' statements also reflect parents' accounts. They claim that their older colleagues find modern information tools more difficult to use.

"What you valued is gone now. I adapt differently. I'll solve the problem on the phone before you even pull out your dusty notebooks. So you have to give up. And they don't understand that, at a certain age, they don't understand that they have to adapt. You didn't grow up with this! And I understand that you don't understand! I understand and respect you: you have your own values!" (FG11, teachers)

A principal also criticises the methods used to communicate information to students, suggesting that teachers need to get more involved and adapt their methods so that they are understood by all students.

"Some colleagues get a perfect evaluation..., but I've told them that the problem is not only the evaluation, how you pass on the knowledge, but how you communicate the information, how you make the student understand. Because it's also my fault. If I don't get good results in the assessment, isn't it also my fault as a teacher? So, we're perfect during the evaluation, we're experts, but when it comes to passing on knowledge, we're not? Try talking about it, explaining every word, explaining what substitution means, what that means. Those terms have to be explained and repeated with them so that they understand." (S7, principal)

Student-related factors

In our research, the data obtained from the interviews with parents and teachers indicate that the risk of dropping out is also linked to factors related to students, adolescence, students' attitudes, and children's biological and intellectual abilities.

Children's deviant behaviour

Some family risk factors, such as the lack of parental attachment or the use of inappropriate discipline methods, increase the likelihood of children developing problematic emotional behaviour (Loeber & Farrington, 1998). Students who have discipline problems and are subject to restrictions will usually begin to exhibit more serious and frequent behavioural problems (Dishion & Andrews, 1995). Students who are neglected by their parents are the most prone to behavioural problems. These children become violent, start stealing and have inappropriate attitudes towards their peers.

"Yes, those that I told you about, who are left by their parents and in a way abandoned, I don't know, but I think 'abandoned' is kind of the right word, because if they left and they left them in someone's care, it is as if they are... those are the ones who have problems. They've recently started stealing. We had that in school, well, they skipped school, they went and took a jar of honey... no one is supervising them, so to speak... the policeman said it was too much fuss over a jar of honey, but Mrs. L didn't see it that way, she was older. However, children are more violent, I mean, some of them get verbally and sometimes physically violent." (S3, parent educator)

"Violence is another problem that I don't know if anyone can solve at the moment. Especially verbal violence. Well, they are very violent children. They fight and push each other, they just don't know how to play, they bump into each other... But it can get, let's say, much more serious..." "There are children who steal, jump up and down and so on." (FG9, teachers)

The parents who attended parent education sessions mention the inappropriate attitudes of older students, who intimidate younger ones. Older students' behaviour is supported by children of the same age, while younger students criticise their attitudes.

"Bad attitudes. The older ones, they do all sorts of things and..., the language and they pick on the younger ones. While older kids support each other's bad attitudes, I mean, 'if I act like a bad boy, the others will look up to me', the little ones criticise that. That's why the ladies said that, in this class, they immediately criticise anyone who doesn't have the right attitude. For older kids, it's the other way round. 'Well done, look how cool you are! You swear and listen to manele [music - T/N]!'" (FG1, parents)

When talking to students with behavioural problems, they justify their behaviour by saying that they do not like the school they are attending. In such cases, the teacher uses different methods to make students responsible and convince them in a directive way that their behaviour is inappropriate, without understanding what causes and fuels students' problems.

"Even today, when you came, there was a student in 5B. They were throwing biscuits at each other during the break, not just him, he started it. A student you can't reason with, I called him here, in my office, a few times; I talked to him, I offered him Eugenia biscuits, a pen, sweets, a notebook, and I told him a lot of things: it's up to you, think of yourself, don't bother your classmates and your teachers because things won't go well for you. He blames it on the fact that he doesn't like this school. I told him: if you want to go to another school, I'll sign for you to go." (S7, principal)

As we can see from teachers' statements, there is little focus on identifying environmental variables that cause and maintain such student behaviour. Our field data are consistent with other research showing the importance of defining expectations, specific rules (Becker, Madson, Arnold & Thomas, 1967), as well as consequences for breaking the rules (Fisbein & Wasik, 1981). Many schools are unable to identify, adopt and support policies, practices and systems that can effectively cover the needs of all children (Mayer et al., 1995). Based on teachers' accounts, we can say that school policies do not include a consistent strategy for addressing challenging student behaviour.

Students' lack of interest in school

Children from broken families are more likely to develop behavioural problems and show less interest in school (McLoyd, 1998). Students start to lose interest after fifth grade, which is also due to the fact that school subjects are more difficult in middle school.

"The biggest problem is that today's children, I think, are not interested in school. They don't treat school like they used to. I have been a schoolteacher for 30 years and I can make a comparison. So they lose interest after fifth grade, meaning that they don't attach the same importance to learning. There's probably a bit too much content to learn. I have a child in seventh grade, and if I were in seventh grade, I don't think I'd be able to cope although I'm very resilient. But he writes every day until 12 at night, he is a very hardworking kid. Every day, he has the portfolio, homework, an essay" (S2, parent educator).

Students' lack of interest is influenced by their parents' attitude towards school. According to the parents who participated in parent education sessions, parents do not attach any importance to education because they, too, did not attend school.

"Because the parents didn't go to school. They believe that if they didn't go, [their children - T/N] shouldn't go either. Lack of interest in school." (FG5, parents)

Parents' lack of interest in school demotivates students to learn, and the grades they get from their teachers do not encourage them to attend school. Children are primarily influenced by the family environment in which they live. Parents' behaviour and attitudes towards school are unconsciously picked up by children.

"Another one sees this [lack of interest in school - A/N] in his mother and father. He's not really interested in learning, his parents are not interested in his grades, and then he comes to school, but he doesn't really care if he gets a 2 or a 3. The grades don't motivate him at all and you don't motivate him by giving him a better grade, because he won't start learning, he's not used to learning. If you give him a bad grade, he becomes indifferent and automatically..." (FG11, teachers).

Children's biological and intellectual abilities

We also see teachers who encourage children with disabilities and help them fit in at school. Teaching is adapted to students' intellectual abilities, and the passing grades and the ways in which teachers involve students encourage children to participate in school activities.

"We had a child with Down's syndrome. What to do with him, where to take him? No one had integrated him... So that child didn't know anything, but you couldn't fail him. I tried so hard to make the teacher understand the difference between a child who comes to school every day, has common sense, and tries to respect school property and a capable child who studies hard. The latter can really get an 8, the former may get a 5 or a 6, but I'm constantly motivating him. I have his psychoeducational sheet in case the school inspector comes and asks me: 'Sir, how come you gave a 6 to this child who has a disability and a 9 instead of a 10 to this bright child?'... So that's how I think it should be." (S6, parent educator)

Adolescence

Adolescence is a time when students begin to experience a stronger sense of autonomy and want to be independent, which is most clearly reflected in children's academic performance and behaviour. There is a strong need to intervene in the school environment when students' interest in school shows a rapid decline. A positive approach to student behaviour and child participation are topics that encourage students to get involved in school activities.

"They already start feeling things in the seventh and eighth grades. They begin to fall in love and then they prefer to become, as one of them told me, 'Madam, I'm a macho!' They start to feel free, they want to be independent, and they sometimes get into trouble. We have a few more serious cases in the eighth grade, children that we keep on a tighter leash... We have a child who was held back last year, after being top of the class until sixth grade." (S1, parent educator)

When parents feel that they are losing control, they turn to teachers to help them manage the tensions that arise in the parent-child relationship. Parent education offers parents strategies for managing conflicts and techniques for exerting a positive influence on children's behaviour.

"There are also times when the parents feel that they no longer have authority over their child. They come to school and tell you: 'Madam, do something because I don't know what to do with them anymore'. This is due to a lack of communication. The child obviously takes

advantage of every situation, they see that... or they don't listen to anyone. It's obviously more difficult to get them on the right path." (FG8, teachers)

Adolescence is a difficult time for parents. Understanding the child's needs, allocating special time for children and parents' willingness to listen can help the parent become a reliable partner for their child, a topic which is also covered by the parent education sessions attended by the parents.

"I go by the motto 'Small children, small problems. Big children, big problems. The boy is already a teenager, so there are conflicts. It's very difficult, very difficult. Adolescence is terrible... Their independence. They are truly convinced that they can do things, that they are independent, that they can be independent, which is totally... [inaccurate - A/N]. I think that the age of 15-16 is very similar to the age of 2, when they feel that they can walk alone and [they say - T/N] 'leave me alone, take your hands off me' and you see them falling on their noses. That's exactly how it is now. 'Leave me alone, take your hands off me' and you see them running into walls. They're saying 'no' all the time. 'No, I can do it. I know it, I'll do it! You don't know, you don't...' They begin to lose respect for their parents." (FG1, parents)

Parents are concerned about how their children behave and react, especially when it comes to choosing the right school after they finish middle school. Appreciating the child and encouraging them to follow their passions make them more confident in their own strengths.

"Yes, because he's exuberant and very emotional. When he's hurting, he's really hurting, when he's happy, he's really happy. And I dread that moment, because it could be a big shock for him and he might not be able to recover quickly enough to go somewhere else. Military high schools are tough. Even his father has been as clear and realistic as possible, telling him how things are and what to expect there. But this is his passion, this is what he wants, we support him. Let's hope he won't fail..." (FG4, parents)

Adolescence is seen as a challenging time, especially for mothers who find it difficult to communicate with their children about sex education. Parents appreciate the help and the involvement of teachers who manage to speak openly with students about these matters.

"Parenting is something you learn as you raise your child. As they grow up, you get other problems. Especially that we're approaching that challenging age. I'm lucky that the first one [to reach adolescence - T/N] will be my girl. I might have some problems with the boy, but I hope I'll be able to handle it. We'll take things as they come. We don't anticipate scenarios and all sorts of..." (FG6, parents)

"And the teacher involves them in all kinds of things and talks to them very openly. Many times, she even took over some of my parenting duties. She talked to my child about things that I should have talked to her about... things about sex life, for example. I thought that she was too young to hear about those things, but, in fact, it was the right time. Had it been up to me, I would have still waited a few more years." (FG1, parents)

School action

Our research also aimed to identify any actions taken by schools to address the factors and causes associated with the risk of dropping out. Next, we want to illustrate school actions and their impact on school participation.

The difference between primary school and middle school

The factors influencing school participation presented above highlight the poor student attendance in middle school compared to primary school, which is also emphasised by the teachers and parents who attended the meetings.

"In our school, they drop out after seventh or eighth grade. There are no dropouts in primary school, even if parents... because we see parents that migrate for work, they leave for two or three months, they come back, but they come and catch up, they don't drop out. Dropout occurs in the seventh and eighth grades." (S1, parent educator)

"This year, we have focused more on 5th-8th grades, because that's where the problem is." (S3, parent educator)

"They drop out in 5th-8th grades..." "Many of them drop out." (FG3, parents)

Criteria used by schools to estimate the risk of dropping out

According to teachers, the risk of dropping out becomes noticeable when the student accumulates about ten absences. As a first action, teachers contact the family to find out what is going on, and if the parents have no reaction, they start to negotiate directly with the child to complete the academic year.

"At ten [absences - A/N], we start to think about it and, how should I say, [take - T/N] action. The first action is that we inform the family. If the family has no reaction, we go on the field, that is the procedure. We go, we go at least towards the end of the semester when they stop coming, it gets warm, they sometimes go with their families to work and they take them too, or the family leaves and has no control over them anymore. And then we say 'come and sit the exam', 'come and take the test', we start negotiating with the child, 'come in on Monday so I can give you a grade in physics', 'come in on Tuesday so I can give you a grade in mathematics', 'let's take the Romanian test'." (S4, parent educator)

Student safety and protection measures

Clear rules and procedures set by teachers and parents lead to a safer school climate. Closing the school perimeter during school hours and installing video cameras to monitor the activities make parents feel more reassured about the safety of their children in the school environment.

"Yes, a discussion and a decision that we made. I don't know if it's the best example, but it concerned certain things, I mean, school starts at 08:00, of course. It was a good thing for parents and they appreciated it. Also following the discussions, we close the school until 12:00, a quarter to 12:00, when primary school classes end, and after lower secondary school classes, at 1 or 2 p.m. So things like that." (S7, principal)

"They used to go out in the schoolyard during breaks and things would get out of control. The older kids would go out, smoke, skip school, and then the decision was made to close the school... Well, there are parents waiting for the little ones at the school entrance, at the gate. I haven't heard about such problems anymore. My children are in eighth and fourth grades and I haven't heard about that anymore." (FG1, parents)

Parents say that not all of them agreed with the closure of the school perimeter, but this measure helped reduce inappropriate student behaviour and the number of absences.

"... They no longer get out during breaks. All students stay inside and it is much easier for the teacher on duty to monitor the situation. Truancy has decreased a lot. It's a harsh measure and many parents didn't agree with it: 'Why lock the school? If there's an earthquake, God forbid!' A council was set up – who has to open the doors and what happens in case of an emergency. Each member knows what to do, they have the key to unlock the door in case of a misfortune, but skipping school, smoking and bullying have stopped." (FG5, parents)

Installing surveillance cameras helps record the events that happen in the school environment. Children's reports of certain actions that take place in school make parents complain about the school staff's inappropriate behaviour towards children. The conflicts and misunderstandings that arise are solved with the help of surveillance cameras.

"Look, I'll give you a simple example. I've told you that school opens at 07:30, 08:00 and it closes at 12:00. A parent called 112 complaining that a student, their child, was grabbed by the neck by the man whose job is to stand at the door and let the children out – he comes in at 11:45 to let them out. That never happened. Luckily, there were these cameras, as one of them is pointed at the back door of the student exit, and that didn't happen. So they called 112 based on what the child had said, that he had grabbed him by the neck. No such thing. The cameras showed clearly that, indeed, he pushed him back, as they need to stay back, they are small children. And we ended up with the gendarmes. 'Come, sir, something happened here'. No such thing. There have been other big and small incidents, parents who take their children at their word. Things are different when you talk with the whole class, with all the students, things are different." (S7, principal)

Child discipline

Schools generally take a reactive approach to discipline problems – implementing a consequence after the problem has occurred (Suhai & Horner, 2002). The consequences that are commonly used include verbal reprimand, suspension, lowering the conduct grade. The logic behind these consequences seems to be that "by experiencing these consequences, students will learn the right way of behaving and be motivated sufficiently to comply with the expectations of the school" (Colvin, Kameenui & Sugai, 1993: 364). These consequences may stop the problems in the short term, but they do not reduce the likelihood of these problems recurring in the future (Sprague et al., 2001), as also indicated by teachers.

"Well, a verbal reprimand, then a written reprimand resulting in a lower conduct grade, their transfer to a parallel class in the same school, a three-day suspension from school, provided that, while suspended, the student will do other activities according to their schedule, under the supervision of a teacher. There is no exclusion from the education system, because schooling is compulsory. There is no disciplinary transfer to another school unless the parent agrees to transfer the student if they think that there is a group of students in that class who are having a negative influence on them, because that's what they say, the others are to blame, not their own children. So that's all we can do. The parent cannot be held responsible for their children's attitudes and behaviour either; you can only talk to them and explain that what their child is doing is wrong." (FG7, teachers)

Children who are neglected by their parents use this to their advantage and know that they cannot be punished for their actions. Punishment may be temporarily effective in stopping inappropriate behaviour, but its negative impact on the child's emotional health makes it an inadequate tool for parents and teachers (Sanders et al., 1999). In order to stop children's undesirable behaviour, teachers recommend insisting on holding them accountable.

"... we have taken measures before. We didn't go as far as the fines that the city hall is supposed to give, but never does because they can't pay them. I think we should insist more on accountability, because they [students - A/N] say 'there'll be no consequences for us', 'my father is not at home, my mother is not at home, what can they do to me?'" (S3, parent educator).

In the case of violent and delinquent children, the most common action is to cooperate with the community police. Students are questioned, an investigation is conducted into the acts committed, but there is little chance that these acts will not be repeated in the future.

"Violence is another problem that I don't know if anyone can solve at the moment. Especially verbal violence. Well, they are very violent children. They fight and push each other, they just don't know how to play, they bump into each other... But it can get, let's say, much more serious..." "There are children who steal, jump up and down and so on. The community police, or whatever they're called, is brought in, but no concrete action is taken. So the policeman comes, the school board talks to them [the student - T/N], they call them out in front of the whole school, then they go home." (FG9, teachers)

"... there is a kiosk next to the school and two or three students forced their way in and took some sweets and other things. When this was discovered, they started an investigation; the police came and the children were questioned with their parents because they were minors; it is stealing, after all." (S7, principal)

Interventions in case of suspected abuse

Child abuse can be detected if the child is carefully observed and supervised by teachers. The following example shows that teachers' timely intervention can reduce child abuse and neglect (Olds et al., 1999) and help address violence against children.

"I found out about an abuse and I reacted, things got ugly then. There was this other child, I called her [and told her – T/N] to come back from Italy, I brought her home. I told her, 'If you don't come home in a week, I'll call the Child Protection and they'll take your child.' She had left him with his father (...), his father got drunk again at Christmas and took him and his brother – who's about three years younger, I think he's in second grade – out in the snow in their panties. Their neighbours took them. He was beaten, battered, and I asked him what had happened to him. 'I fell from a tree.' 'What kind of tree now, in winter?' 'I climbed a cherry tree.' 'What cherry tree? Your dad beat you.' I called the mother – as far as I understand, they had some conflicts and they even got divorced. And I called her and told her 'If you don't come...', and she came back from Italy, both she and her mother came. I told her that I would contact Interpol to bring her and that I would place the child in public care. I would make a statement that he was beaten and molested and they would take him. She came home and sorted things out. She filed for divorce and placed the child in the care of some relatives." (S1, parent educator)

Home visits

To complete the academic records of children with poor attendance, teachers try to engage students by visiting their parents at home. While visiting students at home may seem effective at first, it does not increase school participation. Home visits may reduce the number of absences, but they do not improve students' daily attendance (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002).

“Not to mention what happens in the summer with the resits. The principal and the subject teacher go around the village to gather [the students - A/N] and bring them to school so that they can pass the grade.” (FG9, teachers)

“They have no control over them, but after visiting [the child at home - A/N] the mother came to school willingly.” (FG8, teachers)

Parents’ reactions and feedback discourage teachers from visiting children at home. Parents often take teachers’ visits personally, so teachers don’t want to cause uncomfortable situations.

“But, for example, I can’t visit the children at home. We used to do home visits. We don’t [anymore - T/N], because we end up in a situation where... they feel that we go there because we expect them to give us something, so you want to avoid that situation and not create any...” (FG9, teachers)

Working with local authorities

School culture is also influenced by the external context in which the school operates. Interactions with local authorities and their support help to increase school participation. Teachers appreciate the cooperation and involvement of the social worker, who manages to get the students who do not attend school to take their exams.

“[The social worker - A/N] is fully involved, even on weekends, on Saturdays and Sundays. So if you call her... on Saturday, on Sunday, on weekends, she’s available and she goes there to see what’s going on.” “For example, there was this situation where she got two of my [students - A/N] to sit the exam; they stopped going to school, but they could at least take the exam. She went there with the class teacher and brought them to school to sit the exam.” (FG8, teachers)

Teachers’ satisfaction with the local authorities is also due to the latter’s recent openness to schools. Local authorities encourage school participation by providing the necessary space for extracurricular activities and by financing student transport. Providing school transport for children improves student attendance as early as kindergarten.

“... The mayor said that the door would always be open for our activities, that we could hold them there [at the Cultural Centre - A/N]. There is a big stage, a video projector, excellent conditions. We can hold all the celebrations, all the activities and projects... not to mention the fact that he has tried to make the commune, the community a better place. All the roads are paved now. So now he has opened up a bit and he focuses on the school, on culture, on us.” (S5, principal)

“There is also a lot of traffic in the area, which helps us with student attendance. As soon as student transport became available, children started coming to kindergarten as well.” (FG12, teachers)

LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

The learning environment is influenced by teachers' communication and relationship with students' parents. This chapter aims to explore the tools teachers use to communicate with parents, teachers' perceptions of parents and students, and the extent to which school participation is influenced by parents' involvement in school activities.

Teachers' communication with parents

Communication is essential for building collaborative relationships between teachers and parents. According to teachers, it is beneficial to have teachers that come from the same community as the parents. The proximity of teachers allows them to get closer to the parents and communicate with them more easily.

"In my opinion, yes. I know them [the parents - A/N] much better. For example, I now have, I will have students, children of former students. I feel that I'm closer to them... Since I know them better, I communicate with them differently, more easily." (FG8, teachers)

Organising parent-teacher meetings

Parent-teacher meetings are the main way for teachers to communicate and connect with parents. These meetings are mainly organised on the initiative of teachers and focus on school matters (child discipline, children's academic performance). Communication with parents is not limited to these meetings, as teachers say that they also approach parents on the street, on the bus or in other places where they meet them.

"All the issues [are discussed - A/N]. Mainly, academic performance, discipline, absences..." (FG12, teachers)

"... We communicate with them when they come to parent-teacher meetings. They also stop us on the street. We usually meet on the street or on the bus, so I don't refuse to talk to the parents, no matter where I am, on the street, on the bus, if it's about the child and the school and we can build a relationship. I do that, of course. But, as I was telling you, they don't necessarily have the initiative to talk to the teacher or the principal..." (FG8, teachers)

Teachers send home letters or call parents to invite them to parent-teacher meetings. It is quite difficult to persuade the parents who do not come to these meetings, as they don't respond to the letters they receive and they change their phone numbers frequently.

"I send letters to parents asking them to come to parent-teacher meetings. I'm doing this for the first time in my life with this class... I teach fifth grade, I've got them on the right track, but I was bothered to see how parents reacted to normal requests. Month after month, let's do something, five, three, two, always the same ones. So we send out official letters every month for this or for that, and the children bring them back signed, proving that they have read them... and they still don't come." (FG9, teachers)

"... I send an information letter to the parents if I don't manage to contact them. Some of them don't have phone numbers, or if they do, they use pre-paid phone cards that they change frequently. If they give me a phone number today, it may not be valid two days later." (FG8, teachers)

Teachers hold parent-teacher meetings according to the needs and availability of parents, so these meetings do not take place very often. They usually avoid the agricultural season, as most parents use farmwork as an excuse for their absence.

"For example, I hold parent-teacher meetings on Sundays. They will obviously tell me 'I have to work during the week. It's the farming season now'. Or if it's winter, it's raining, with thunder and lightning. So we do it on Sundays. I don't hold it very often, twice a semester at the most... although the new regulation says that we should meet monthly." (FG 11, teachers)

Parent-teacher meetings are normally attended by the same parents, while those whose children are at risk of dropping out of school are rarely present. In the case of retained students or after several interventions, teachers finally get to know the parents who do not come to parent-teacher meetings.

"They don't even come to parent-teacher meetings... there is this mother I met in March, [even though school started - T/N] in early September, with a problem child who got held back. And then, of course, I said 'what an honour' and so on. Although she has two children in the same grade, one is in a different class and a very good student, and this one is like that..." (FG9, teachers)

"And the ones who usually come are those whose children are good and don't have problems at school." "Those who have problems avoid coming. You have to contact them several times, maybe even go to their homes." (FG11, teachers)

Generally, parent-teacher meetings have a 50 per cent attendance rate. Parents' interest in school is decreasing, and parent-teacher meetings are eventually held with the parents who get involved more frequently. Attendance rate is higher in primary school.

"Half of the parents come, half of them don't." (FG1, parents)

"About 50 per cent. In a class, 10 will be suffocating, 10 won't come unless you call them. And if you call them three times, they will come once. There is less interest." (S1, parent educator)

"With the little ones, maybe more than 90 per cent of them come. With the older ones, even if their children are good students, and this is paradoxical, those whose children have problems don't usually come to these meetings, and those whose children are good students do come, and then you don't really have anyone to talk to. Or you talk in vain." (FG10, teachers)

A greater number of parents attend the parenting classes held by teachers, which also influences parents' participation in parent-teacher meetings or other activities initiated by the school.

"The parents who have attended parenting classes are more responsive to the school's requests. They now come to parent-teacher meetings. It's a positive effect. They are more open to teachers and closer to the school." (FG11, teachers)

The parent educator mentions changes in teachers' behaviour and attitudes after attending training courses.

"Working on these projects and attending training courses, how can I tell you, teachers needed that training... teachers got trained and it was easier for them to involve parents in

parent education. Now they come every time we invite them to school... We also set up support groups and the parents were very happy to meet.” (S6, parent educator)

Parent lectures

Another way of communicating with parents are the lectures held by one of the parents in each class. The school counsellor and the psychoeducational counsellor are present at these meetings, but other parents are also invited. These meetings are held before parent-teacher meetings and they usually focus on school-related topics. Later, the parents’ representative will present the topics discussed during parent-teacher meetings.

“Parent lectures are attended by the PA president of each class, and we can also invite other parents, teachers, the school counsellor, the psychoeducational counsellor. Through the parents’ representative of each class, the PA president. And everything we talk about there, what we present to them and the problems and other things that we discuss, I mean, we have certain topics, but besides those there are other discussions, like some students’ behavioural problems and so on, what has been done in school. Parents’ representatives report back during parent-teacher meetings. The same date and time are set for all the meetings that are held by the parents. For example, the parent-teacher meeting is on Thursday at five o’clock. They start with the lecture, which is attended by the parents’ representatives from each class, then they go to the parent-teacher meetings and report what we have presented to them.” (S7, principal)

Messages sent to parents through students

Teachers also write messages on students’ notebooks and expect parents to respond. This method of communicating with parents is not considered effective by all teachers. In particular, teachers do not trust older students and prefer to use the telephone.

“Notes, yes, but I’m not really sure that they will read those notes. Students are quite clever and have found a lot of ways to cheat. You can also expect them to sign their report card and say that their mother signed it. Anything is possible. This is probably not the case with the little ones. The safest option is to use the phone.” (FG11, teachers)

The role of the school mediator

The school mediator is an extremely useful resource, acting as a bridge between the family and the school. Teachers appreciate the involvement of the school mediator, who makes it easier to work with parents who are not interested in students’ academic performance.

“Now there’s a school mediator who goes there, whose job and role are to keep in touch, and who doesn’t teach. We inform them, they notify the parent who comes to school, and we talk about it if the parent agrees.” (FG8, teachers)

Parents’ and teachers’ perceptions of the school-family relationship

School relationships have a strong impact on school connectedness (Rowe & Stewart, 2009). School culture influences stakeholders’ social behaviour and interests and, in particular, the way they interact with each other. Teacher relationships and the interaction with students are critical in any school environment. The school-family relationship is defined by parents’ involvement in school activities, by the teaching methods and practices used by teachers, as well as by what teachers think about students.

Teachers' perceptions of students

Teachers' perceptions of students define their actions and involvement in school activities. Students who have a trusting relationship with their teachers are more motivated to engage in school activities and have the courage to test challenging situations (Noddings, 2002; Loukas & Robinson, 2004). In the researched schools, teachers value their students and are satisfied with the feedback they receive from them.

"I like it when I manage to engage them and when I manage to communicate with them, to make them understand my style, not necessarily my teaching style or what I know, but the way I think, the way I see things, the way I respond through my behaviour and attitude... This is what I like most and this is what I try to instil in them: a certain way of thinking, a certain way of looking at life." (FG10, teachers)

"I have little experience because I've been here for a year. I can say that I've become very close to the children here, especially to the children in my class. I have established a relationship with them that is not good, but very good, [also - T/N] with the children's parents, and I can't wait to see what comes next." (FG8, teachers)

The teacher-student relationship is influenced by teachers' behaviour and attitudes towards students. In the researched schools, some teachers' approach to students is not positive, but prejudiced. The migration of good students to urban areas to continue their education seems to be the main argument used to justify the current school situation. Students who feel discouraged by their teachers are more likely to be confused, give up on their dreams, or lack the motivation to learn (Sherman et al., 1997).

"Think about it. What kind of children are we working with? If we go back 20, 30, 40 years, we see that those who were good students left the village. Some of them came back, but who stayed in the village? Those who failed classes or grades, the mediocre. The top students left to study [elsewhere - T/N] or settled in the city. Who are we working with? With their children's children. So this is their level. They can't be geniuses." (FG11, teachers)

Parents' attitudes towards school

Parents' attitudes towards school also depend on parents' aspirations for their own children. Parental aspirations are associated with students' long-term academic success (Sheridan, 2001). Moreover, parents who have high expectations of their children encourage them to continue their education and take an interest in knowledge (Wood, Kurtz-Costes & Copping, 2011). Parents are aware of their children's abilities, and therefore they want a more rigorous school for their children.

"The child has potential and, as I've noticed that, of course I want more for them, and so I go to a more rigorous school." (FG1, parents)

The parents who attended parent education sessions mention the fact that the school does not implement initiatives to improve the school environment. Parents make comparisons with other schools where teachers put more pressure on parents to help improve school conditions.

"There are schools, I have a child here and another one at a different school. There, they told us from the start that they wanted some kind of desk, some kind of upholstered chair, that they couldn't sit on these ones. 'We need to change this and that.' They give you no choice, there's nothing you can do, you have to pay. Many parents say that this is what they work for, for their child to have a comfortable desk. Well, not here, you see, they've been sitting at these desks for four years, the teacher didn't say anything. You know how things

are, not everyone is doing well financially and they haven't forced us. 'Let's change this or that!' They haven't asked us, but they don't give us anything either." (FG1, parents)

The way students are encouraged seems to be a source of dissatisfaction for the parents whose children have outstanding academic results. Parents do not have a good opinion of the school and have to invest a lot in their children's extra preparation.

"Well, we don't really have a good opinion [of the school - A/N]. I, for one, don't. I think the education system should also do something for our children. Even for those who are good students, who want to learn..." "and they just ignore the good students, as if being a good student is normal and that's all there is to it. They are not stimulated." (FG1, parents)

Motivating students can not only energise them but also guide their learning behaviour. Parents believe that stimulating children in the family environment alone is not enough to achieve high academic performance. They also criticise the school management for not encouraging and valuing students with good academic outcomes. How much families invest in their children's extra preparation also varies according to residential area. While parents in urban areas are able to invest in private tutoring for different subjects (which also reflects a critical attitude towards school), rural parents can afford this to a lesser extent due to a lack of resources or less access to extracurricular activities, and they are also less critical of school.

"The parents are left to take care of them [the students - A/N] on their own. Parents have to take money out of their pockets for their child... To give you my example: I have to work with an English tutor, and do this and that. The school, the education system, why don't they help these children? Give them a scholarship, a... Maybe that's normal, that's how they stimulate children. They go to math or Romanian competitions and when they come back with high grades, you give them a certificate and that's it." (FG1, parents)

"It's not enough to stimulate them at home. 'Well done! I'll buy you this, I'll buy you that.' I think the school should [get involved - T/N] too. The education system, because after all, schools do what they can. The higher-ups should also invest in these children." (FG1, parents)

"Teachers do their best to teach the children, they take care of them. We don't have the money for private lessons. He should learn as much as he can, maybe he'll become someone important." (FG3, parents)

Parents' statements are somewhat confirmed by some teachers' focus on school problems. A problem-centred approach reduces task productivity and confidence in finding solutions. Also, a negative perception leads to difficulties in carrying out the educational process and to a lack of teacher support for students, whereas a positive perception leads to the mobilisation and involvement of teachers (Neagu, 2012: 180).

"... all the energy, my discussions with the colleagues, all our energy goes into helping children with problems. We rarely talk about children who do well, good children who study hard, they are good, diligent children. We talk about problems, discipline issues." (S7, principal)

"But we focus on these and try to solve them, because that's usually where the problem is. If I don't have a problem, I don't have much to worry about. If a student has very good grades and their parents don't come to the parent-teacher meeting, there's no point in calling them every other day, because they have no problems anyway." (FG17, teachers)

Parents are also not satisfied with some teachers' lack of openness. They say that it is quite difficult to work with teachers who are nearing retirement and no longer want to be involved in school activities. The advanced age of some teachers is seen as an obstacle, as they are reluctant to take on new challenges in the field of education and to meet the different needs of children.

"If there is openness... Going back to soon-to-retire tenured teachers in their 50s, there's nothing more you can do with them. There's nothing more you can do, and they don't want to change anything..." (FG1, parents)

"There's not much you can do with the older ones. They don't want to pay attention to the children. They are harsher with them and they always get upset." (FG5, parents)

"The math teacher doesn't really encourage my daughter. Apparently, that's how she is with all the students. She's colder and meaner... age is taking its toll on her. She probably doesn't have enough patience anymore." (FG5, parents)

Parents adopt positive attitudes towards school when teachers manage to engage students in school activities, do not make distinctions between them, or manage to solve situations that overwhelm parents. Teachers' actions also help bring parents closer. On the other hand, parents believe that their participation in parent education courses has made teachers friendlier towards both parents and students.

"They have also brought them to this point where it doesn't matter if someone has a better financial situation, if someone is more... They've got to that point, and they tolerate each other, they understand each other. They've brought them together. And they have brought us, the parents, closer." (FG1, parents)

"I had problems with my little girl, who rejected me and didn't want to see me anymore. I didn't know why until I came to the parenting class and I explained it to the lady. She spoke to her and made her talk until she found out what had happened." (FG2, parents)

"It's okay here, at the school. The lady understands us. The way we dress them, what we give them, she understands us because she can see that everyone gives them what they have." "They make no distinction between children." (FG6, parents)

"We are very satisfied with the school, the teachers, the educators. The staff is good. They are like mothers, especially the teacher... And she was very nice to us during parenting classes. And she seems friendlier to us and the children since we attended those classes." (FG5, parents)

Parent involvement in school activities

The parents who attended parent education sessions appreciate it when they are involved in school activities and respond positively to teachers' initiatives. Parents' involvement improves perceptions of their ability to help their children do well in school (Dauber & Epstein, 1993). Moreover, their involvement in school activities is also an opportunity for them to spend more time with the child, which is something that the parent educator encourages. Parents' involvement in school activities, including in parent education activities, makes them more involved in the community.

"I don't know if this is important, but in first grade, the schoolteacher sent a little note to each parent, saying that they should make a handmade book with their child and that she would display it at the child's school, which was somehow the habitat that each of them had chosen. We found it very interesting, because we had never heard of that before and we were really happy. On such occasions, we spend more time with the child, we learn things from each other; the child asks questions, we answer." (FG2, parents)

"I think we are better parents now. In general, we get involved in the activities that are carried out in our commune, at school, at church, I don't know, anywhere... in the community. There are a few others who couldn't be here today, but we usually get involved everywhere, wherever we are needed... We come whenever the teachers invite us. Those who usually didn't attend parent-teacher meetings are also coming now." (FG3, parents)

"The parenting classes were helpful to me. Now I understand better why and how to spend more time with our children and do things together... now it's easier for me to understand what they have to do in school and I help them if I can." (FG4, parents)

The interviewed teachers generally mention the parents who do not come to school, claiming that these parents only come to school when they are financially motivated. Parents do not take advantage of the help they receive to support the students, so the teachers have to help students with the activities.

"I've never seen them try to talk to us – 'Yes, I'll try to do something' – and see that they are at least getting involved. Not [necessarily - T/N] to come to school, but to at least learn something. Well, on the contrary. At the beginning of the school year, they always get school supplies through a governmental programme, school supply packages are distributed: notebooks, pens, pencils, a sketchbook, and so on. They all get them because they have no income and they qualify for this programme. Today they receive a package that should be enough for the whole semester, and the next day they [the students - A/N] have no notebook, they have nothing, and we have to give it to them." (FG7, teachers)

"I think they set them [the supplies - A/N] on fire. I think they burn them in winter, because they have no other source of heat. And the next day they have nothing anymore, and you have to give them a pencil, a pen." "You give me that if you want me to write!" (FG7, teachers)

Parent volunteering

On teachers' initiative, parents get involved in volunteering, especially after attending parent education sessions. Parents' voluntary participation contributes to developing a collaborative relationship with the school, which is seen as a way for teachers to engage parents more.

"Yes, I want to tell you about the extracurricular activities that are carried out in and out of school, in which the parents are very much involved and in which we manage to engage them a lot. They seem to be more involved after attending the parent education courses. Parents and children love coming here. Volunteering. Parents are even involved in volunteering. We have a school-church partnership. We put together food parcels for the poor and the parents came and helped, both financially and practically." (FG11, teachers)

"It's easier to make the parents get involved with us now... After we finished the parenting classes, we invited them to a [support group - A/N] meeting five months later and they all came. I was impressed... I didn't expect it. And they were very happy to meet again. Parent education is such a good thing..." (FG9, teachers)

"They [the parents - A/N] are happy to come to school. Every time we invite them... But I think that a lot of parents, even grandparents, from our community took part in the parent education activities. It was more difficult to make them come at first, but then they wouldn't leave anymore... that's how much they loved to meet. Now they get involved in many school activities, even those [the parents - A/N] who didn't really come to school." (FG8, teachers)

STUDENT INVOLVEMENT IN THE SCHOOL'S DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

Although parent involvement is fundamental to school improvement, student involvement in the school's decision-making process can create other connections that improve academic outcomes and bring families together. Students can help teachers understand their families' values, beliefs, and life experiences. This type of action contributes to better teaching, curriculum and teacher-student relationships, while improving teacher training (Fielding, 2001; Mitra, 2003). Developing and maintaining a student-centred environment requires different roles and multiple responsibilities from teachers. Such an environment can create positive role models, provide multiple opportunities for school experiences and academic success, and foster school participation. The purpose of this chapter is to explore students' involvement in school decisions, teachers' actions and the way in which parents respond to their initiatives.

Teacher initiatives

The successful implementation of a student-centred learning approach requires adapting the curriculum to students' needs and school culture (Hawley & Duffy, 1997). This includes managing contextual issues and using appropriate tools to support school activities for both students and teachers (Brush & Saye, 1999). The teachers from the researched schools believe that it is quite difficult for students to get actively involved if they are not motivated.

"We can do it if the child wants it. It's very hard if the child doesn't really want it." (FG10, teachers)

Students' involvement in school activities depends on their parents' financial situation. The lack of financial resources hinders students' development, and teachers claim that students cannot excel academically if their basic needs are not met. Teachers' initiatives cannot improve school participation without parental intervention.

"Now, we all know that you need a full stomach if you want to become someone and to do something. When your stomach is full, you can study. If your stomach is empty, you haven't slept, you're not loved, you won't get to the top of Maslow's pyramid. You need to eat something first. For you to eat, your father has to graze the cow, plough the field... What can schools do? We really do everything we can, but more than that..." (FG11, teachers)

In the researched schools, there are also teachers who highlight the importance of improving students' basic education. Providing an education that is relevant to everyday life can make students feel responsible for the society in which they live.

"That's the problem. If we don't focus enough on them now and make them aware that they have to respect three institutions in the community – the school, the church, the mayoralty, and the clinic – everything will go down the drain. We have children who study hard and they are good students, but we also have children who are not good students, but I can at least teach them how to be a pillar of society, how to be nice and respectful, how to collect waste paper in the schoolyard, how to grow a tree, how to plant a tree, how to weed, because we've also had such cases." (S5, parent educator)

Not all teachers are willing to adapt to new educational demands. Teachers may feel threatened by change in a number of different ways. The disruption of well-defined teaching and instructional methods can make teachers feel fearful of the unknown (Fullan, 2001). Resistance to change may also be due to the skills and knowledge that teachers need in order to implement change successfully (Fullan, 2001; Greenberg & Baron, 2000).

"And with the new changes that are messing us up, changes, changes, changes..." (FG7, teachers)

Without positive feedback from parents about the usefulness of their efforts, even teachers who see parents as fundamental in supporting students will give up on involving parents in school activities. Improving school participation is not only possible through teacher initiatives but also requires social interventions. Teachers believe that financial incentives are the only way to motivate parents to come to school.

"There's so much work that needs to be done with the parents in the first place, as they hardly ever come and cooperate. They usually don't come, and some of them have a certain mentality that we can't change even a little bit. That's why I said I didn't want to do it anymore..., it takes too much time. Parents are not responsive, and it's very difficult to change a student who comes to school for four or five hours once a... I don't know how long... and they skip the other classes and go home, always on the street, with the same influencing factors, with the same group of friends. I have all kinds of students and cases. Parents don't come to school, they only come if they get something in return..." (FG8, teachers)

Implementation of the school-based curriculum

The selection of elective courses provides another opportunity for teachers to work with students and parents. Part-time teachers involve students in choosing elective courses, but the final decision is made by children's parents together with the teachers. In general, for eighth graders, their exam subjects are chosen as electives.

"We present students with a range of electives. Usually, teachers without teaching loads propose electives that they present to students. Students present them at home and fill out a form with the electives they want to take." (S7, principal)

"We hold parent-teacher meetings. Parents suggest the elective they would like." (FG9, teachers)

"We hold parent-teacher meetings. We present the offer of elective courses." "Three offers from each teacher. Everyone wants to take electives. Parents also realise that we should choose Romanian, mathematics for the eighth grade; if it were up to the children, we would have to choose physical education." (FG12, teachers)

Extracurricular activities

Extracurricular activities play an extremely important role in schools for teachers, for children and for parents, influencing the school culture. Participation in extracurricular activities helps to increase school commitment and respect for school values, which indirectly leads to an improvement in academic performance (Marsh, 1992: 560). Participation in extracurricular activities has a positive impact on children's development and students' self-esteem (McCarthy, 2000), reducing the risk of dropping out (McNeal, 1995). The parents who participated in parent education sessions appreciate the extracurricular activities carried out in school, which they consider attractive and useful for children.

"They have all kinds of activities that they love. Last week, they decided to make potato salad. It was great... they liked it more than the one we make at home, of course. That one was better! Lots of other things, they do all kinds of useful things..." (FG1, parents)

Parents believe that students' motivation to participate in school activities also depends on the teacher. Teachers' approach and methods are crucial to attracting and involving students in the educational process.

"The schoolteacher knew how to approach them and noticed what they liked..." (FG3, parents)

"I think the schoolteacher's approach is the most important thing, if they [the schoolteacher - A/N] know how... I look at my girl... she's not an A student, but she loves school. So the teacher loves her, she sat with her today – 'we'll see if she'll let me sit with her again tomorrow'. Teachers' charisma is important too." (FG2, parents)

The teachers from the selected schools stress the importance of extracurricular activities, which are seen as a way for teachers to get to know their students better and to get closer to the students and parents.

"I think that, during these activities, children show many more qualities that we may not be able to see in school. We manage to get much closer to them thanks to these extracurricular activities. Then we can have a much closer relationship with both children and parents." (FG10, teachers)

Getting involved in extracurricular activities is relaxing for children. According to teachers, children forget about their problems at home, they play, and are also motivated by their schoolmates' involvement.

"Children follow each other's example and get involved. Like today, with the greening activity. They also want to do it! 'Madam, will you take us too? We want to go too!' Gloves, bags, they get involved. I suppose they forget about their situation, about their problems at home. And this is their place, where they play, they do physical education, they draw, they meet their schoolmates, they play, they go outside. We sometimes do leisure activities like these with them." (FG12, teachers)

Doing School Differently

The activities organised under the Doing School Differently programme offer students the opportunity to participate and get more involved in extracurricular activities. These are more appealing to students than the core subjects included in the curriculum.

"They like it very much. At least in my case, before the Doing School Differently week, they'd always ask me: 'Madam, but when is it? Is it next week? What day does it start?' Honestly, they couldn't wait for the Doing School Differently Week. They knew that they would have activities and that they would no longer have Romanian and math classes." (FG8, teachers)

The Doing School Differently programme is also considered a "waste of time". Financial resources are a barrier to carrying out these activities, which is why teachers are discouraged from planning activities outside the school and limit themselves to activities that can be carried out on school premises.

"[Doing School Differently is - A/N] A waste of time, because if you were to do what you want, you'd have to be able to leave school, which means money to do other things than what you do in school. In our case, everything stops when you ask for money. You can ask them for anything, [but - A/N] don't ask them for money. If you go to a museum in the city, you need money for the bus. You go for a drink, for something, not everybody has money, and then what do you do? Do you split them up? Do you go with some of them and the others stay in school? You have to do something that includes everybody. And we also try to do extracurricular activities, activities in the sports school where everyone comes, either sports or... well." (FG7, teachers)

Teachers use questionnaires to involve parents and students in selecting the activities for the Doing School Differently programme. This strategy of involving parents has led to a change in their attitudes towards this programme and its usefulness.

"At first, parents were sceptical about the Doing School Differently programme, saying that it's not schooling, it's another story. We tried to explain things in the questionnaires, because that's how activities are chosen for the Doing School Differently week. We ask the parents what they would like, what they think we should do in the Doing School Differently programme. We ask the children what they liked, what they want to do during this year's Doing School Differently week, [and - T/N] we collect all the answers per class." (S5, principal)

SCHOOL OPENNESS TO CHANGE – INNOVATION

At the time of field data collection, there were several types of interventions running in parallel with the Parent Education Programme to reduce dropout, reschool parents, fulfil and promote children's rights by improving parenting skills. The interviews and focus groups revealed that the school principal and the parent educator rather than the teachers could provide information about these interventions. This is due to the fact that sometimes the parent educator is also the school principal or the parent educator is the resource person for the programmes implemented in schools. Regarding the openness of the school to the community, we cannot yet speak of a common school vision (a vision shared by the entire teaching staff) about the need to bring the school closer to the community and involve students and parents in the life of the community through support programmes.

This chapter aims to find the types of interventions that were carried out in schools and the impact they had – alongside parent education – at school, family and community levels.

Changes resulting from school-based interventions

Teachers' accounts highlight the fact that the involvement of schools in parent reschooling projects, the training of teachers and parents, as well as the implementation of extracurricular activities have improved school participation. As a result of these interventions, collaboration with parents has changed, dropout rates have been reduced, school participation and teachers' openness to change have improved, partnerships with associations and foundations have been developed. Of all the projects that were carried out, parents most appreciated those that were implemented over a longer period of time, which were considered the most useful.

"The one on school attendance, because it was [carried out - T/N] with UNICEF over a longer period of time. It was [implemented - T/N] last year and again this year. For about four, five years..." (FG3, parents)

"They all help little by little. But they have to be constant, over a long period of time." (FG4, parents)

Reducing dropout

The projects implemented in the researched schools led to a decrease in dropout. The subsidy that parents receive in the *Second Chance Education* programme requires them to send their children to school.

"It [dropout - A/N] has gone down slightly, by three, four per cent, but it's very important. There was a combination of projects, like the Second Chance Education programme in addition to the IES project. I could say that we conditioned them, not necessarily like 'look, since you're coming to school, send your children too, because they'll come and won't give you the subsidy anymore', as they gave them a subsidy, they got 440 lei a month, for 10 months each adult, because they're adults, out of the 25 only 5 are under 25 years old." (S3, parent educator)

The way in which parents in a precarious financial situation perceive the importance of school participation can be changed by organising school trips and extracurricular activities that involve their children and by motivating them through social support.

"They [parents - A/N] are no longer reluctant to send their children to school. 'I don't send my child to school anymore, so what...', but then we tried 'you can't go on without school, they won't give you welfare anymore if you're not schooled', because we had these projects... they couldn't send their children on a trip. We made project-funded trips and they liked them. Or we enrolled them in dance classes, we went to Piatra Neamț, I'd never been there before. We'd take them to competitions, but we'd say to the bus driver 'let's take them to the zoo as well'. We'd also negotiate to let them in for free because they're poor. They were so happy. They went to the schools that had teen clubs. These are the things [we did - T/N]." (S3, parent educator)

The reduction of dropout rates is noticeable in the schools included in the research. Building a new school in the community means less cost and effort for parents and encourages students to continue their studies beyond middle school.

"In the old days, all those who were [students - A/N] had to go to high school at three or four in the morning. It was very difficult for them and they'd drop out of high school. But now that there is a high school in Pipirig, they all finish here; they go to high school and graduate. Well, what can I say, in 2003 we had 40 dropouts per year. In 2003, we had 40 dropouts at the end of the school year. This year, I have two dropouts: a girl who went abroad, we don't know if she will continue her education." (S6, parent educator)

Improving academic performance

School participation can also improve through after-school programmes, which aim to increase student outcomes and complement the information provided by schools (Durlak, Weissberg & Pachan, 2010), being particularly beneficial to children who have no parental support. Teachers claim that they see an improvement in the students who go to the centre, as they become tidier and do their homework.

"[Attending the day care centre is - A/N] Very good. A child who goes to the day care centre changes over time; they become tidier, they do their homework, even if they do it with the help of someone there, it's not exactly their work, but it's useful. It's a good thing that they go to the day care centre. It's a shame that they can't work with more children, especially that they often have no one at home to support them. At least there is someone there to supervise them [and help them with - T/N] the concerns they may have at this age." (FG8, teachers)

Where after-school activities are supported by local authorities and other foundations, parents can also participate with the students. Involving parents in the activities with their children brings them closer to the children and to the school.

"We have another project with Save the Children – the Mobile Clinic and the Mobile School – which also involves parents. There are 30 local families, the parents live on welfare and they [parents - A/N] come to school with the foundation and carry out activities in the After-School Programme, they carry out activities with children. The mayoralty also built an after-school facility, a very beautiful, new and modern building, at the school located in a more disadvantaged area of the village, of the community. And in the afternoon, our schoolteachers get together in groups of three to carry out activities like homework, socialisation, games. And primary school children from the first to the fourth grade go there and do activities for two or three hours in the afternoon." (S5, principal)

Another way to boost school participation is by motivating students. The parent educator mentions the benefit of the implemented programmes, which make it possible to organise trips to encourage children with a precarious financial situation.

“UNICEF, EPA, School Attendance; this year it’s “A Friendly School”, but it had a different name every year. You know, we have grants in this project and this year’s grant covers a trip that we’ll take to Vatra Dornei, to Arieni. I know that because I am in charge of it. The children who are vulnerable [will go on a trip - A/N], so we selected the three best students in the class who are enrolled in the project [to come - T/N] for free, as a kind of reward... So, at the end of the year, we have to fill out a form with certain criteria: that they have no electricity at home, that they are poor, that they are sick... poverty, above all, is the basic criterion.” (S2, parent educator)

Teachers’ openness to change

Teachers’ professional development is essential for improving the curriculum and teaching practice. The attitude towards change is closely linked to teachers’ acceptance of new procedures and policies (Calabrese, 2002; Zimmerman, 2006). One of the main barriers to changing practices is not being aware of the need to change (Greenberg & Baron, 2000) and being used to doing things a certain way. It is easier to use common techniques and practices than to develop new skills or strategies (Greenberg & Baron, 2000). According to parent educators, teachers seem to be quite reluctant to attend training courses. It is the parent educator’s challenge and responsibility to motivate teachers.

“Improving Transition to High School Day by Day, that’s how the school project is called. About ten colleagues, teachers were trained each year in the IES project. And this year, as this is the third year of the project at the school..., the people at the Institute suggested that the remaining colleagues should attend too. And I have to say that we faced a bit of reluctance until we mobilised those who were stuck in their ways, who were locked in their shell, who hadn’t come out of it for a long time and hadn’t had any training. It’s very difficult for them to understand. Look, you have an opportunity, meals were provided, the course was interactive, the courses are wonderful. I attended the IES courses; this is the first year I didn’t attend because I said that everyone should go, not just me. I’m representing the school at the moment, but we’re all here and we’ll succeed together if we’re a team. Otherwise, we won’t succeed.” (S3, parent educator)

Teachers’ reluctance diminishes as they are exposed to new things, become involved, and discover the pleasure and benefit of participating in training. A direct benefit of getting involved in the projects carried out is the relaunch of the school magazine and the fact that teachers are motivated to engage in extracurricular activities.

“We go to Iași. ‘I don’t have time or I can’t’, but when they [the teachers - A/N] saw how beautiful it was... now we mobilise to participate in the competition that they [IES - A/N] are running on the Joy of Learning platform, and we have to upload [the activities carried out - A/N] because, thanks to the project, we have also relaunched the school magazine that we had before but had to close down, and this year, because it takes up a lot of time and what you do in class is not enough, you have to do extra work, a lot of extra work.” (S3, parent educator)

According to parent educators, the biggest benefit is that teachers have become more open to new challenges, thus managing to stabilise the school context. Teacher training resulted in an inclusive school.

"We don't have all-Roma classes. Thanks to the project we implemented under the National Convention, the classes are homogenous and we have both Romanian children and Roma children. Even my son is here in sixth grade, he's not at the Technological High School, which is closer to our home, but we tried to stabilise this school, because many... the shares are 70 per cent Roma and 25 per cent Romanian, and they'd go to high school, to the school you visited, and we risked losing the school. And then we said 'Let's do it! Even if this is a school for Romanians, let's do it for the Roma, as long as they want to learn'. We carried out these projects and through training, how should I say, teachers needed that training. I came here and I said, but it's not possible... And then the training was done, the teachers were trained and the mentality changed. The parents have also been trained and the result is that they have started to communicate, to come to school, to get closer to school." (S1, parent educator)

Another important factor in opening up schools to change is the presence of young teachers. The work of young teachers is valued at school level, which contributes to greater optimism among teachers.

"In a way, we were a closed school, so to speak. Many were local [teachers - A/N], nothing came from the outside, no fresh air, no ideas. For some time now, we've started having young colleagues." (S5, principal)

"... The school is getting younger, at least as far as teachers are concerned. I think very few are in between generations. Many of us, 60-70 per cent, are young people and the rest are older." (FG11, teachers)

The usefulness of training courses is also reflected in parent educators' motivation and desire to continue these types of activities. Parent educators mention the benefits of training for the school and the importance of an intergenerational exchange of experience, capitalising on young teachers' attitudes.

"What could I wish for? There was a time when not a single day went by without a project. Now it's hard with the projects... I want to have access to funds and be involved in something like that again, because it's good for the children, for my colleagues, and for the school. In the end, you get a certificate, experience. Or someone comes along, like you have, and they get really impressed. We also learn from you. In fact, we have learned, because even if we're experienced, we have things to learn from young people and we can look at training differently. Because we reach a certain age at some point, and I'm happy to see that, while we were the generation that kept our heads down so as not to upset anyone, the younger generation now needs certain things – 'you can't make me work here if I don't have internet access'. We were struggling back then." (S4, parent educator)

Cooperation with parents

The implementation of projects in schools and the financial incentives provided to parents led not only to a decrease in the number of absences but also to closer cooperation between the school and parents. The importance of parents' involvement is reflected in their changed attitudes and behaviour towards school activities.

"These projects have helped us a lot... And what can I tell you? We have reduced absenteeism and we have a much closer relationship with parents. Thanks to these projects, we call them to school and they come, motivated by financial incentives, because we've also had such projects, and we communicate with them in a different manner." (S7, principal)

"Since we started implementing projects, they participate, they interact with each other in larger groups, they have to do certain things together [parents and students - A/N]. We see that they are more open and they, the parents, understand the purpose of these activities." (S5, principal)

Teachers mention the difficulty of working with Roma parents and emphasise the importance of social interventions. Involving local authorities and the community and providing employment opportunities contribute to the social inclusion of Roma people.

"Now, it's not easy to work with them [Roma parents - A/N]. It's not their fault, we are all born equal, but there's another problem, we have to live with them. The commune starts with them. If we don't know how to get them on the right track, it's no use going deep into the forest, where it's beautiful, if there's nothing but filth and glue sniffers at the entrance. So the community and the mayoralty have stepped in with all kinds of social projects, with this and that. The mayoralty and the unemployment [agency - T/N] have even retrained them and they send them to work. They worked at the wells and they also worked in the forest..." (S3, parent educator)

Parents' participation in the reschooling programme also contributes to opening up the community. Parents are also motivated to enrol in this programme by the financial support they receive.

"Yes, I'm happy now that the three-year vocational education programme also gives parents who only completed eight years of schooling the opportunity to enrol in the apprenticeship programme, and they get two million if they come every day. If they get pregnant, they can also benefit from prenatal leave. I don't have enough places to meet the demand, as most of them have completed only eight grades. We did the SDP [School Development Plan - A/N] and the IDP [Institutional Development Plan - A/N] and we found that their coming to school also brings a change in the community, because 'Yes, sir, I went to history class. Maybe I didn't take a lot of notes, but I learned something'. The establishment of the vocational school has been very beneficial, because it's about reschooling Romanian citizens, which leads to a different mentality, another way of thinking." (S1, parent educator)

The cooperation with other foundations also aimed to involve parents in extracurricular activities. A benefit of the school's partnership with other associations is the counselling corner set up for students and parents, which helps to strengthen the parent-child relationship.

"Yes, we had a partnership with the staff of the Foundation who did all kinds of activities with the children, from drama to all sorts of games meant to break the ice and discover oneself, in addition to the intervention of the lady from the County Educational Resource and Assistance Centre who comes once or twice a week. We have also managed to set up a counselling corner for children and parents, which I will present to you. You will see it. I say corner because we didn't have a closed space where they could feel comfortable and start a different relationship to bring them closer. So there was HoltIS, I mentioned them. There were the people from the Împreună Agency who already came and did an activity this school year in each middle school class, a counselling activity – "What would you like to be when you grow up?" – and an activity with the parents from the project. They said they would come again this year." (S3, parent educator)

Another way of getting parents involved in school activities is to focus on dropout prevention as early as kindergarten. Allowing parents to come to school with their children encourages the participation of preschool children. This early intervention helps to reduce the risk of dropping out.

"I forgot to mention that the IES people got involved in the project this year. The inspector from the Ministry, from the Preschool Education Department, also came. You'll see, because we've also displayed the activities. And so they say that the intervention should start at the kindergarten, because it's clear that if they don't bring them to kindergarten... You'll see that the Second Chance Education classes are taking place right now. Here, parents come with their children who are two or three years old. We also had classes for the parents who have children in our kindergarten." (S3, parent educator)

Teachers believe that the parent education course is a good strategy for co-opting and involving parents in school activities. The parenting classes have changed the way in which the school cooperates with parents. Teachers highlight the importance of parent education sessions, claiming that the parents were not involved in any activities before this intervention.

"But, you see, it's only now that, thanks to you, a relationship has been established with the parents. The parents have not been involved in any activities until now." ... "I think that some things have started to change with the parents only now when the school got involved, it has attracted them, and we'll probably see the results, I don't know, in another generation. But they have not been very involved until now." (FG7, teachers)

Teachers emphasise the importance of parent education sessions, claiming that before these courses there was a disconnect between the school and the parents. Parent education brings parents closer to school and is necessary throughout teachers' collaboration with the parents. Teachers' appreciation of parent education also comes from its success in bringing at least some of the parents to school.

"Yes, we did that training on how to bring parents closer to school, because there really was a huge disconnect between the school and the parents. And it starts from kindergarten and continues with schoolteachers, teachers, class teachers." (S5, principal)

"At least for some of them, we have managed to bring their parents to the HoltIS courses and to the parent education courses organised by IES, because they also have a parent educator, a teacher, a class teacher, a teacher in charge of the problematic class, let's say, with Roma, most of them are Roma... it has clearly changed, we have brought them closer to school. Well, in every school, as I've told you, 30 per cent are Roma, it's harder to... but I'd say that we have managed to get at least half of them on board." (S3, parent educator)

BENEFITS OF PARTICIPATING IN THE PARENT EDUCATION PROGRAMME

In this chapter, we intend to find out how useful the parent education course is according to the teachers and parents who participated in the Parent Education Programme. The field data collected through individual interviews and focus groups aimed to measure the impact of parent education sessions on participants and the extent to which these sessions responded to their needs.

Usefulness of teacher training and information sessions

The training and information sessions organised and carried out by the parent educator, which touched on two topics, namely child participation and a positive approach to children's behaviour, aimed to improve school participation and ensure that parent education would support not only parents and children but also teachers. Teachers mention the listening skills they use with students, which they have developed thanks to the guides provided during the training and information sessions. Teachers' willingness to listen to students is reflected in students' closer relationship with the school.

"The truth is that I've read them [the two guides - A/N] because these are things I want to know." "The child gets closer to us when we listen to them. They open up, they answer... they are fond of school now..." (FG10, teachers)

Adapting teaching methods and techniques

Teachers highlight the importance of the child-focused topics covered during the training and information sessions (child participation and a positive approach to children's behaviour), which primarily reflect changes in attitudes towards students. To understand the importance of adapting teaching methods and techniques as child development resources, it is necessary to reflect not only on teachers' attitudes towards students but also on students' qualities, needs and interests.

"The biggest gain was in teaching, adapting the curriculum to the needs and interests of the student. Theoretically, we don't have that freedom, but... Also regarding my attitude towards children, the main idea is that students should be involved and do something that will bring them, give them a sense of satisfaction, achievement, success, feeling that they have managed to do something, and that they are appreciated for something..." (FG10, teachers)

"A child participates in the activities according to their development. A primary school child doesn't take part in a general knowledge quiz for 5th-8th graders. Let's find ways to get down to their level." (FG7, teachers)

"The fact that the child's understanding, mentality, behaviour should be considered..." (FG8, teachers)

Learning new practices

The two training sessions aimed to promote the active involvement of children in decisions and actions that affect them, as well as to provide methods for positively influencing and guiding children's behaviour. The use of positive techniques for guiding a child's behaviour has a calming effect on teachers and helps to reduce work-related stress.

"Let's not focus too much on what children don't do and look at what they do right, what they do well and encourage that behaviour. If we notice or have to deal with a child's

negative behaviour, let's try to resolve the conflict without traditional punishment and give them a break. I ended up doing this instinctively because I got tired and then – everyone knows that I have some very naughty boys and I have to yell at them a lot – and then I got tired of hearing "Alex did this or that". And I say "Alex, please go inside" so I can have a break..." (FG10, teachers)

The topics covered during the training and information sessions were relevant and also aimed at promoting a risk-taking environment that encourages teachers to try new ideas and strategies for student engagement (Short & Greer, 2002). By attending programme meetings, teachers have the opportunity to find out about new ways of involving students in school activities.

"I attended only once, but on that occasion, I learned new, non-formal teaching methods that are attractive to children." (FG7, teachers)

Encouraging students

One of the objectives of these training and information sessions was also to encourage students to participate in various activities and decisions, with the ultimate goal of increasing school participation. By reflecting on teaching practices, participants learn how to demonstrate positive behaviour towards students. Besides identifying positive ways to provide encouragement, teachers also focus on revealing students' qualities.

"We've learned that the first thing we have to do with these children is try to bond with them and find methods, procedures, exercises that reveal their qualities. If we make very high demands, they will be disappointed." (FG10, teachers)

"... In the prep year, children don't get descriptive grades, but they get a smiley face as a reward. To tell you the truth, I didn't really use those things, but whatever the child did, no matter what they did, I'd go 'Well done, very good!', even if they didn't write on the lines. 'But you know what? You can do better! Let me show you! Like this!' If you tell them that they've got... the way it is now with descriptive grades. I prefer to give them differentiated homework, maybe each of them can do at least some of it and I don't have to give them an S or an I [sufficient or insufficient - A/N] because they get demotivated. 'I took an S. I took an I, why should I try anymore?' (FG9, teachers)

"I've been in this school for a year. I've got close to the children, the parents. I try to teach through play, just as I learned in your course. I try to use a positive approach to encourage them. During parent-teacher meetings, with the parents, I usually try to praise the child as well..." (FG8, teachers)

Parents' perspectives on parent education

Parents' views on the impact of parent education highlight a number of changes in the parent-child relationship, which is also reflected in the school culture. A child-parent relationship based on trust influences the school climate and has a major impact on children's development. Encouraging children and giving them the freedom to take on new challenges can boost self-esteem, thus improving school participation.

Desire to attend parent education sessions

Some of the parents who attended the parent education course had also attended in previous years, which shows their excitement and desire to be part of these parent education sessions. The appeal of

parent education sessions lies in the fact that they focus on parents' needs and recognise parenting difficulties and challenges.

"I, for one, wanted to see if I really was a good parent or not." "Anyway, they're useful courses. It's a good thing that they are doing them." (FG1, parents)

Building a support group

The purpose of parent education sessions is to engage parents and give them the time and space they need to observe and act more carefully, systematically, and rigorously than they usually do in their everyday life (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1992: 10). The opportunity to reflect on their own situations in a support group helps parents share and improve their parenting experiences and practices (Pfannenstiel & Seltzer, 1985).

"We said some confidential things. We knew each other, but we had our 'secrets'. We opened up. We said things that we knew and that the others didn't know." (FG4, parents)

"And our struggles. Like 'What do you do in this situation? This is what I do. Look, this works in my case. That doesn't work for me'. Each child is unique and you have to take unique measures." (FG5, parents)

"It was a good thing because we could learn new things from each other." "We listened to each other's story, we drew conclusions..." "We can say that there has never been a course like this in the community before." (FG3, parents)

Parent's self-control

For most parents, attending the parent education course improved their mental and emotional state, as the resources provided during the course contributed to a sense of calm, created a good atmosphere and reduced family stress. A number of parents find the resulting state of mental wellbeing similar to the effects of psychological counselling. Parent education sessions have this effect due to open participation and the confidentiality of group discussions.

"That was a relaxing time for me..." (FG3, parents)

"The calm". "I don't shout as much anymore..." "My mom probably can't hear me from her house anymore! It's not that loud anymore." (FG5, parents)

"We have more patience"! (FG6, parents)

"I smile more. I defuse the situation differently. I look at the child and burst into laughter. Now I don't know if that's a good thing or not." (FG1, parents)

"I used [the methods learned in class - A/N]. I used to stress out more, I'd yell at them. I'm calmer now. My son even said to me one day: 'Mom, look how good it is now. You don't yell at me anymore!'" (FG4, parents)

"Yes, exactly, like a psychotherapy session." (FG2, parents)

Child freedom

The parents who attended the parent education courses mention certain changes in parental control. Parents' responses to parent education sessions are reflected in a shift from authoritarian attitudes in their relationships to the provision of support and understanding to their children, especially in the case of young children.

"I've learned, I try not to say 'no' to my child anymore. That stuck with me. I'm not there yet, but I think twice..." (FG1, parents)

"I can say that I've learned to let the child do certain things. I was the kind of mom who didn't... my child had to stay or play in one place. I never let him do anything, because I thought he was too young, I had no experience, [I was - T/N] young, well, the first child. And the course taught me that I could make him do certain things and that it's even constructive. He wanted to, but I didn't let him. I can say that it was useful. It kind of opened up my horizons." (FG6, parents)

Parents' shift from authoritarian attitudes to supportive relationships with their children also allows children to act voluntarily, without the need to impose anything on them. The reward children receive from their parents strengthens children's trust in their parents.

"Let's just eliminate the word 'no'. Let's find ways to get them to do that activity, giving them a surprise, a reward." (FG4, parents)

Communication with the child

Communication with the child is one of the most common issues raised by parents. Parents notice some changes, namely an improvement in their listening skills and their willingness to find time to listen to their children. In the case of parents with multiple children, an interesting aspect regarding the quality of communication is parents' concern to give time and attention to each child so that no one feels neglected. Parents' interest and willingness to listen make children talk about their own experiences.

"I see that he [the child - A/N] got closer [to me - T/N]." "He's happier, he talks about things in a different way." "More open." (FG5, parents)

"I listen to her more carefully. To give you an example, I'm watching TV and she comes to ask me something. Well, when she comes to ask me something, I put the TV on pause and then I talk to her, I talk to her directly, not just to her, to all three of them. And when we're done talking and things are clear, I press 'play'. Before [taking the course - A/N], it would go in one ear and out the other." (FG1, parents)

"We have learned to listen more." (FG4, parents)

Communicating with the child requires reflecting on the child's qualities and needs. Besides finding out children's preferences, parents focus more on getting to know their children.

"We have learned how to communicate differently with children. I don't just tell you and you have to do it. Now you have to listen to them first, what they want and then..." "We have to find a way into their hearts." (FG6, parents)

Awareness of parental roles

One of the purposes of parent education is to make parents understand the importance of parenting in the upbringing and education of their children. Parents realise that their children's future depends on them, and this realisation gained during parent education sessions makes them think about the parenting patterns they pass on to their children.

"These classes, to say a few things about the classes as well... My parents raised me like that, to be a normal mother. I give my child everything they need. Taking these classes made me feel special. And as I stand by my child, I'd say that I'm different. I make a difference and I play an important role for them." (FG2, parents)

“Education begins with the parents. They will behave as they are raised at home.” “The parenting pattern is very important.” (FG4, parents)

Parents recognise how difficult it is to improve parenting practices. In the Parent Education Programme, the improvement in parents’ reflective skills can be seen in their willingness and openness to learn new parenting practices.

“Why not admit that we, the parents, have our own styles, we develop our own styles, but we can do better. And when you find a problem, you can do better... it’s not that you don’t know, you can’t do better because you’re used to doing things a certain way, based on what you’ve learned as a parent.” (FG5, parents)

“We’re used to doing things a certain way and it’s harder to do them differently now, even if we know that we’ve received the right guidance. Managing anger and things like that... I have a problem with that and, having so many children, I lose my temper. But then [I tell myself - A/N] ‘I should have done that’. It’s a good thing that I remember that I should have done that and I’ll try not to blow up again next time.” (FG6, parents)

“There are mixed opinions. And I met people who said ‘I don’t care what they say or don’t say, I will raise my child the same way’. Well, it’s not like that. You don’t raise them the same way, because you learn new things, you talk, you can’t go on like that. I’ve come across such situations.” (FG3, parents)

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Parent education as an ongoing practice in schools

As reported by the participants, the risk of dropping out is preceded and accompanied by a number of factors and causes that have a negative impact on school participation. *Improving school participation requires a holistic approach that focuses on both school and external factors.* Supporting parents in fulfilling their parental roles based on the values promoted by children's rights and *involving teachers* in promoting parent education can significantly increase school participation. The field data collected indicate that schools do not have consistent strategies to encourage school participation. School characteristics and teacher practices are predictive of student attendance. For education to be effective, it is necessary to *involve students in school and extracurricular activities* that give each student the opportunity to enhance their qualities and their cognitive and non-cognitive skills.

In an ever-changing world, teachers have to perform various tasks. *Conventional teaching and learning skills are not enough* for them to succeed in the teaching profession. They need to use teaching approaches and methods that are sensitive to students' social, cultural and ethnic diversity, teamwork, collaboration and cooperation with other teachers. It is important to involve students, particularly those who rarely attend school, but the school staff cannot address failure by focusing exclusively on students. They need to look at problems within the school structure and culture (Mitra, 2003).

A strong school culture is correlated with *students' learning interest, motivation, and attraction to school.* School culture is a relatively stable phenomenon that takes a long time to change. The most important steps towards change are making the school staff understand the importance of change and creating an effective school. However, *school participation problems cannot be solved by teachers alone.*

An important factor in school culture (Schoen & Teddlie, 2008) is *the involvement of parents in school actions.* The intervention on teachers and parents aimed to *improve the relationship between school, parents and students,* with the ultimate goal of increasing school participation. The school perspectives explored to capture the impact of parent education demonstrate that perceptions and attitudes towards students, which are usually "taken-for-granted", give meaning to teachers' activities. They shape school culture, which can be changed through systematic and long-term intervention (Stoll, 1998).

The teacher training and information sessions that focused on two topics – *Child Participation and A Positive Approach to Children's Behaviour* – aimed to promote students' active participation and *present positive ways to guide children's behaviour.* Making the teachers who attended the sessions understand the importance of adapting teaching methods and techniques as child development resources involved reflecting not only on teachers' attitudes towards students but also on students' qualities, needs and interests.

Reflecting on teaching practices and guiding them towards a positive approach to focus on students' qualities had a calming effect on teachers and helped them relieve work-related stress. *The clinical effect reported by teachers* was also noticed by *the parents who attended* parent education sessions. Parents point out changes in parenting behaviour and skills (Cojocaru et al., 2011). Parents' awareness of the parenting style they use with their children is seen in their *willingness to listen and spend time with each child.* Parents' unwanted behaviours are mentioned using the past tense, and new behaviours are described as actions that take place in the present.

The need to intervene in the home environment is also supported by teachers. Addressing and mitigating the factors that influence the risk of dropping out requires a stable partnership between school and family. According to research participants, parent education is a solution that helps improve

school participation. The introduction of parent education programmes in schools offers new perspectives to parents, students and teachers.

As reported by our research participants, parent education helps to rethink unwritten rules, school culture standards, teachers' behaviour and attitudes towards parents and children. Providing opportunities for teachers to collaborate and participate can develop a culture that embraces change. "Participation is a cornerstone of professional and school communities – a stone that we often leave unturned" (Lambert, 2003: 11).

Moreover, parent education *allows us to distinguish the emerging subcultures* (Van Houtte and Van Maele, 2011), meaning that we can talk about the culture of teachers, parents, and students. Parent education provides a framework for reflecting on behaviour and on "what lies behind it" (Van Houtte & Van Maele, 2011). By analysing each group behaviour, *parent education* – as a form of group intervention – *contributes to rebuilding and reshaping the school culture*. However, the circumstances that arise in schools, in the personal lives of teachers, and in families are barriers that hinder parents' involvement in students' education. Many barriers can be reduced or removed with appropriate support and effort to involve parents. Supporting parent education as an ongoing strategy in the school culture requires time and commitment to change deeply rooted perceptions and habits. These statements are also supported by the recommendations made by teachers and parents after participating in the Parent Education Programme.

Increasing participation in the Parent Education Programme

The teachers who participated in the training and information sessions stress *the importance of parent education in solving school problems*. Bringing parents closer to school is a first step in improving school participation. It is also necessary for a larger number of parents to participate in the Parent Education Programme, without setting specific criteria for them, to resume classes among parents after a certain period of time or even to maintain this practice in the community. The need for parent education is even greater as parents realise that they need support in raising and educating their children and want to attend parenting classes. According to teachers, the information and methods provided during the course help parents communicate better with their children and manage difficult situations in the parent-child relationship.

"Let's bring them here [the parents, at the school - A/N] just like you have tried to do... it's a starting point." (FG9, teachers)

"I think it is very good and I think this programme should be expanded to include as many parents as possible. And maybe not necessarily based on certain criteria, I mean, regardless of whether the parent has an education or a job or who..., so all parents should participate in such activities. I was so surprised when I talked to the parents or the parents of other children. They feel the need to be explained, to be told what they should do in certain situations, because today's children are not like they were as children, and they can't understand them very well. If certain situations were explained to them, maybe they would be able to communicate better with them, maybe they would be able to understand them better, especially here in rural areas. So, in my opinion, such activities should be done on a regular basis. And I think it wouldn't be a bad thing for a parent to take the same course twice, because I'm sure that they would learn more the second time than the first time." (FG8, teachers)

The need to include a greater number of parents in the Parent Education Programme and to hold regular classes is also evident from parents' statements. The intervention on a limited number of parents is not enough to improve school participation. The sessions have to be carried out over a longer period of time in order to change old habits and practise new behaviour.

"In my opinion, I think it would be useful to set up other groups with other parents..." (FG3, parents)

"The problem is that the programme included ten parents. This seems a bit too small for a course like this. More parents should be involved." (FG5, parents)

"The frequency. [It should be – T/N] Done much more often. Much more often, with more parents involved. In my opinion, all parents should participate." (FG1, parents)

"It [the behaviour – A/N] hasn't changed yet, but I've learned a lot of new things. I've learned things, but it's very difficult to put them into practice. We have a history." (FG5, parents)

Understanding the importance of parent education

Teachers are optimistic about finding the resources needed to continue the parent education course. When it comes to making parent education an ongoing practice, it seems that the main way to motivate parents to participate is not through financial incentives, but by making them understand the importance of parent education.

"I think we would find [resources to continue the course – A/N]. I'm sure that this course has had a good response, meaning that the participants have spread the word and told those who couldn't attend to come. They said that they learned interesting things. Not necessarily money, I don't think we should motivate them that way. I think they should understand that they come here for their children, and that is the best motivation. I think we should stop bringing them, I mean, 'I'll give you something if you do something in return. Come of your own free will, realise that it's for the good of your family'. I'd say that this is what we should do and not motivate them with all kinds of incentives, which would be a mistake." (FG8, teachers)

The teachers who participated in the training and information sessions mention the importance of parent education as an investment in the child's educational future. Parent awareness is not enough to support parent education as an ongoing practice in schools, but institutional awareness is also needed to make this a sustainable practice.

"... I think we need to understand that education – in the true sense of the word – is needed not only for children but also for parents, and if things improve in this regard, we will certainly gain on all levels. Even if education doesn't produce anything in a material sense, it does in fact produce the very best. I mean, they should think of these children who, for better or worse, will one day be the ones who will move this country forward and who will hopefully pay our pensions one day. I'd say that they should approach problems more carefully. Sometimes, it seems to me that there are people [in the institutions – A/N] who sit in their offices and are cut off from reality, and they are astonished when they are confronted with a situation, as if it were something unprecedented or unheard of. And obviously, you have to persevere and try to get the funds you need for such activities. I'm sure that they will bear some fruit and there will be some change. Maybe a little bit today, a little bit tomorrow, and that way, we will be able to change something for the better." (FG8, teachers)

Research limitations

One limitation is the small number of schools included in our research. On the other hand, the interventions identified when collecting field data limit the ability to accurately measure the impact of parent education on school culture and school participation. We also have to mention the fact that we

did not collect the opinions of parents who did not participate in the Parent Education Programme. Another factor that was not captured in this research is students' perspectives. We prioritised the views of the parents who participated in the Parent Education Programme, those of the teachers from the researched schools, who were trained as parent educators, and those of a limited number of school principals.

References

- American Psychological Association. (1997). *Learner-centered psychological principles: A framework for school redesign and reform* (pp. 1-8), Retrieved January 30, 2006, from <http://www.apa.org/ed/lcd.html>.
- Argyris, C., & Schon, D. (1976). *Theory in practice: Increasing professional effectiveness*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Bandura, A. (1977). Self-efficacy: Toward a unifying theory of behavioral change, *Psychological Review*, 84, 191-215.
- Bandura, A. (1999). *Self-efficacy in changing societies*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Becker, W. C. Madsen, C. H., Jr., Arnold, Carole R., & Thomas, D. R. (1967). The contingent use of teacher attention and praise in reducing classroom behavior problems. *Journal of Special Education*, 1, 287-307.
- Berry, J. W., Poortinga, Y. H. Segall, M. H., & Dasen, P.R. (1992). *Cross-cultural psychology: Research and applications*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bodley, J. H. (1994). *Cultural anthropology*. Tribes, states, and the global system. Mountain View, CA: Mayfield Pub. Co.
- Boyd, K. S. (2004, August). *The association between student perceptions of safety and academic achievement: The mediating effects of absenteeism*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Sociological Association, San Francisco, CA.
- Brush, T., & Saye, J. (1999). *Instructional tools for student problem-solving: The Decision Point project*. Paper presented at the annual conference of the Association of Educational Communications and Technology, Houston, TX.
- Calabrese, R. L. (2002). *The leadership assignment: Creating change*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
- Cameron, K. S., & Quinn, R. E. (1999). *Diagnosing and changing organizational culture based on the competing values framework*, Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.
- Cohen, J., McCabe, E. M, Michelli, N. M & Pickeral, T. (2009). School Climate: Research, Policy, Teacher Education and Practice. *Teachers College Record*, 111(1), 180-213.
- Cojocaru, S., Cojocaru, D. (2011a). *Optimizarea strategiilor de recrutare a părinților și de consolidare a practicilor parentale dezvoltate în timpul cursurilor de educație parentală [Optimizing strategies for parent recruiting and strengthening parenting practices developed during parent education courses]*, Bucharest.
- Cojocaru, S., Cojocaru, D., (2011b). Naturalistic evaluation of programs. Parents' voice in parent education programs. *Transylvanian Review of Administrative Sciences*, 34E, 49-62.
- Cojocaru, D., Cojocaru, S., Ciuchi, O.M. (2011). Conditions for Developing the National Program for Parent Education in Romania. *Revista de Cercetare și Intervenție Socială*, 34, 144-158.
- Colvin, G., Kameenui, E. J., & Sugai, G. (1993). School-wide and classroom management: Reconceptualizing the integration and management of students with behavior problems in general education. *Education and Treatment of Children*, 16, 361-381.
- Creemers, B. P. M., & Reezight, G. J. (1999). The role of school and classroom climate in elementary school learning environments. In J. Freiberg (Ed.), *School Climate* (pp. 30-47), London, Falmer.
- Darling-Hammond, L. (1990). Teacher professionalism: Why and how. In: A. Lieberman (Ed.), *Schools as collaborative cultures* (pp. 25-50), Bristol, PA: Falmer Press.
- Dauber, S. L., & Epstein, J. L. (1993). Parents' attitudes and practices of involvement in inner-city elementary and middle schools. In N.V. Chakin (Ed.), *Families and schools in a pluralistic society* (pp. 53-71), Albany: State University Of New York Press.
- Deal, T. E., & Kennedy, A. (1982). *Corporate cultures: The rites and rituals of corporate life*, Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.
- Deal, T. E., & Kennedy, A. (1983). Culture and school performance. *Educational Leadership*, 40(5), 140-141.
- Deal, T. E., & Peterson, K. (1999). *Shaping school culture*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Delgado-Gaitan, C. (2004). *Involving Latino families in schools: Raising student achievement through home-school partnerships*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- Dishion, T. J., and Andrews, D. W. (1995). Preventing escalation in problem behaviors with high-risk young adolescents: Immediate and 1-year outcomes. *J Consult Clin Psychol*, 63, 538-548.

- Drummond, K. V., & Stipek, D., (2004). Low-income parents' beliefs about their role in children's academic learning. *Elementary School Journal*, 104, 197-213.
- DuFour, R., & Eaker, R. (1998). *Professional learning communities at work: Best practices for enhancing student achievement*. Bloomington, In: National Educational Service & Association for Supervision & Curriculum Development.
- Dunn, J.S., Kinney, D.A., & Hofferth, S.L. (2003). Parental ideologies and children's after-school activities. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 46, 1359-1386.
- Durlak, J., Weissberg, R., & Pachan, M. (2010). A meta-analysis of after-school programs that seek to promote personal and social skills in children and adolescents. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 45, 294-309.
- Epstein, J. L. (1986). Parents' reactions to teacher practices of parent involvement, *Elementary School Journal*, 86, 277-294. doi: 10.1086/461449.
- Epstein, J. L. (2001). *School, family, and community partnerships: Preparing educators and improving schools*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Epstein, J. L., & Sheldon, S. B. (2002). Present and accounted for: Improving student attendance through family and community involvement. *Journal of Educational Research*, 95, 308-318.
- Erickson, F. (1987). Conceptions of school culture: An overview. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 23(4), 11-24.
- Fantuzzo, J., Tighe, E., & Childs, S. (2000). Family involvement questionnaire: A multivariate assessment of family participation in early childhood education. *Journal of educational psychology*, 92, 376-376. doi: 10.1037/0022-0663.92.2.367.
- Fielding, M. (2001). Students as Radical Agents of Change. *Journal of Educational Change*, 2(2), 123-141.
- Fishbein, J. E., & Wasik, B. H. (1981). Effect of the good behavior game on disruptive library behavior. *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis*, 14, 89-93.
- Freiberg, J., & Stein, T. A. (1999). Measuring, improving, and sustaining healthy learning environments. In J. Freiberg (Ed.), *School Climate* (pp.11-29), London: Falmer.
- Fullan, M. (2001). *Leading in a culture of change*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Garcia Coll, C., Akiba, D., Palacios, N., Bailey, B., Silver, R., DiMartino, L., et al. (2002). Parental involvement in children's education: Lessons from three immigrant groups. *Parenting: Science and Practice*, 2, 303-324. doi: 10.1207/S15327922PAR0203_05.
- Geertz, C. (1993). *The interpretation of cultures*. London: Fontana Press.
- Greenberg, J., & Baron, R. A. (2000). *Behavior in organizations* (7th ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Gregory, G., & Chapman, C. (2002). *Differentiated instructional strategies: One size doesn't fit all*, Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- Halsall, R. (1998). *Teacher research and school improvement*, Philadelphia, Open University Press.
- Hargreaves, D. (1995). School Culture, school effectiveness and school improvement. *School Effectiveness and School Improvement*, 6(1), 23-46.
- Hawley, C., & Duffy, T. (1997). *Design model for learner-centered, computer-based simulations*. ERIC Document Reproduction Service # ED 423 838.
- Heck, R. H., & Marcoulides, G. A. (1996). School Culture and performance: Testing the invariance of an organizational model, *School Effectiveness and School Improvement*, 7, 76-96.
- Hernandez, T. J., & Seem, S. R. (2004). A safe school climate: A systems approach and the school counselor. *Professional School Counseling*, 7, 256-262.
- Ho, D. Y. F. & Wu, M. (2001). Introduction to cross-cultural psychology. In L. L. Adler & U. P. Gielden (Eds.), *Cross-cultural topics in psychology* (pp. 3-13), Westport, CT: Praeger.
- Holtis (2019a). *Parenting apreciativ, vol. 1, Cum să fii un părinte înțelept* [Appreciative Parenting. How to be a wise parent], Iași: Expert Projects.
- Holtis (2019b). *Parenting apreciativ, vol. 2, Cum putem rămâne relaxați în contexte stresante* [Appreciative Parenting. How to stay calm in stressful situations], Iași: Expert Projects.
- Holtis (2019c). *Parenting apreciativ, vol. 3, Cum să comunici eficient cu copilul tău* [Appreciative Parenting. How to communicate effectively with your child], Iași: Expert Projects.
- Holtis (2019d). *Parenting apreciativ, vol. 4, Cum să fii un partener de încredere în relația cu copilul tău* [Appreciative Parenting. How to be a reliable partner for your child], Iași: Expert Projects.

- Holtis (2019e). *Parenting apreciativ, vol. 5, Cum abordezi pozitiv comportamentele copilului* [Appreciative Parenting. How to take a positive approach to children's behaviour], Iași: Expert Projects.
- Holtis (2019f). *Parenting apreciativ, vol. 6, Cum prevenim abuzul și efectele lui asupra copilului* [Appreciative Parenting. How to prevent abuse and its effects on children], Iași: Expert Projects.
- Holtis (2019g). *Parenting apreciativ, vol. 7, Cum însoțești copilul pe calea dezvoltării sale* [Appreciative Parenting. How to support your child's development], Iași: Expert Projects.
- Holtis (2019h). *Parenting apreciativ, vol. 8, Educație pentru sănătate* [Appreciative Parenting. Health education], Iași: Expert Projects.
- Holtis (2019i). *Parenting apreciativ, vol. 9, Anturajul și timpul liber la adolescenți* [Appreciative Parenting. Peer relationships and leisure time in adolescence], Iași: Expert Projects.
- Holtis (2019j). *Parenting apreciativ, vol. 10, Auto-controlul și evitarea consumului de substanțe nocive* [Appreciative Parenting. Self-control and avoidance of substance use], Iași: Expert Projects.
- Holtis (2019k). *Parenting apreciativ, vol. 11, Cum ne jucăm cu copilul nostru* [Appreciative Parenting. How to play with your child], Iași: Expert Projects.
- Holtis (2019l). *Parenting apreciativ, vol. 12, Abilități noncognitive* [Appreciative Parenting. Noncognitive Skills], Iași: Expert Projects.
- Holtis (2019m). *Parenting apreciativ, vol. 13, Bullying și cyberbullying* [Appreciative Parenting. Bullying and cyberbullying], Iași: Expert Projects.
- Holtis (2019n). *Parenting apreciativ, vol. 14, Importanța susținerii copiilor în procesul de tranziție de la gimnaziu la liceu* [Appreciative Parenting. The importance of supporting children's transition from middle school to high school], Iași: Expert Projects.
- Holtis (2019o). *Parenting apreciativ, Vol. 15, Imunitate și vaccinare. Informații utile părinților* [Appreciative Parenting. Immunity and vaccination. Useful information for parents], Iași: Expert Projects.
- Holtis (2022). *Parenting apreciativ, vol. 16, Cum putem înțelege egalitatea de gen* [Appreciative Parenting. Understanding gender equality], Iași: Expert Projects.
- Hoover-Dempsey, K. V., & Sandler, H. M. (1997). Why do parents become involved in their children's education? *Review of Educational Research*, 67, 3-42.
- Hoover-Dempsey, K. V., Walker, J.M.T., Reed, R.P., & Jones, K.P. (2002). Teachers Involving Parents (TIP): Results of an in-service teacher education program for enhancing parental involvement, *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 18, 843-867. doi: 10.1016/S0742-051X(02)00047-1.
- Hoover-Dempsey, K.V., & Sandler, H. M. (2005, March 22). *Final Performance report for OERI Grant # R305TO10673: The social context of parent involvement: A path to enhanced achievement*. Presented to Project Monitor, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education, Washington, DC. Available at <http://www.vanderbilt.edu/Peabody/family-school>.
- Hopkins, D. (2001). *School Improvement for Real*, London: Routledge-Falmer.
- Hoy, W.K., & Tarter, C.J., & Kottkamp, R.B. (1991). *Open schools/healthy schools: Measuring organizational climate*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.
- Hoy, W.K., Tarter, C.J., & Bliss, J.R. (1990). *Organizational health, climate, and effectiveness: A comparative study*. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 26(3), 260-279.
- Kemmis, S. & McTaggart, R. (1992). *The action research planner*. Geelong, Victoria, Deakin University Press.
- Kruger, M. L., Witziers, B., & Sleegers, P. (2007). The impact of school leadership on school level factors: Validation of a causal model. *School Effectiveness and School Improvement*, 18, 1-20.
- Kruse, S. D., & Seashore Louise, K. (2009). *Building strong school cultures: A guide to leading change*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- Lambert, L. (2003). *Leadership capacity for lasting school improvement*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- Law No 272 (2004). Law on the protection and promotion of children's rights, *Official Gazette*, Part I, Issue No 557 of 23 June 2004.
- Leseman, P., Rollenberg, L., & Rispen, J. (2001). Playing and working in kindergarten: Cognitive co-construction in two educational situations. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 16, 363-384.
- Levine, D. U., & Lezotte, L. W. (1990). *Unusually effective schools: A review and analysis of research and practice*, Madison, WI: National Center for Effective Schools Research.
- Lieberman, A. (2005). *The roots of educational change*. Berlin: Springer.
- Little, J. (1982). Norms of collegiality and experimentation: Workplace conditions of school success. *American Educational Research Journal*, 19(3), 325-340.

- Loeber, R., & Farrington, D. P. (1998). (Eds.) *Serious and violent juvenile offenders: Risk factors and successful interventions*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Louis, K.S., Kruse, S.D., & Associates. (1995). *Professionalism and community: Perspectives on reforming urban schools*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- Loukas, A., & Robinson, S. (2004). Examining the moderating role of perceived school climate in early adolescent adjustment. *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, 14, 209–233.
- Loup, K. S. (1994). *Measuring and linking school professional learning environment characteristics, teacher self and organizational efficacy, receptivity to change, and multiple indices of school effectiveness*. Retrieved June 22, 2006, from Dissertation Abstracts Online <http://wwwlib.umi.com/dissertations/fullcit/9508589>.
- Marsh, H. W. (1992). Extracurricular Activities: Beneficial Extension of the Traditional Curriculum or Subversion of Academic Goals? *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 84(4), 553-562.
- Maslowski, R. (2001). *School culture and school performance: An explorative study into the organizational culture of secondary schools and their effects*. Twente: Twente University Press.
- Maslowski, R. (2006). A review of inventories for diagnosing school culture. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 44(1), 6-35.
- Mayer, R. C., Davis, J. D. & Shoorman, F. D. (1995). An integrative model of organizational trust. *Academy of Management Review*, 20(3), 709-734.
- McCarthy, K. J. (2000). *The effects of student activity participation, gender, ethnicity, and socio-economic level on high school student grade point averages and attendance*. Paper presented at the meeting of the National Association of African American Studies & National Association of Hispanic and Latino Studies, Houston, TX.
- McLoyd, V. C. (1990). The impact of economic hardship on black families and children: Psychological distress, parenting and socio-emotional development. *Child Development*, 61, 311-346. doi: 10.1111/j.1467-8624.1990.tb02781.x.
- McLoyd, V. C. (1998). Socioeconomic disadvantage and child development, *American Psychologist*, 53(2), 185-204.
- McNeal, R. B. (1995). Extracurricular activities and high school dropouts. *Sociology of Education*, 68, 62–80.
- Mitra, D. L. (2003). Student voice in school reform: Reframing student-teacher relationships. *McGill Journal of Education*, 38(2), 289-304.
- Muntean, A., Roth, M., Iovu, M. B. (2010). The role played by the social environment within the future plans of youth. *Revista de Cercetare și Intervenție Socială*, 28, 7-22.
- Neagu, G. (2012). *Șanse de acces la educație în societatea românească actuală* [Current access to education in Romanian society], Iași, Lumen.
- Newmann, F. M. & Wehlage, G. (1995). *Successful school restructuring: A Report to the public and educators by the Center on Organization and Restructuring of Schools*. Madison, WI: U.S. Department of Education.
- Newmann, F. M., & Associates. (1996). *Authentic achievement: Restructuring schools for intellectual quality*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass;
- Noddings, N. (2002). *Educating moral people: A caring alternative to character education*. NY: Teachers College Press.
- Olds, D.L., Henderson, C.R., Kitzman, H.J., Eckenrode, J.J., Cole, R.E., & Tatelbaum, R.C. (1999). Prenatal and infancy home visitation by nurses: Recent Findings. *The Future of Children*, 9(1), 44-65.
- Owens, R.G. (2001). *Organizational behaviour in education: Instructional leadership and school reform*, Boston: Allyn and Bacon.
- Perry, A. (1908). *The management of a city school*, New York: Macmillan.
- Pfannenstiel, J. C. & Seltzer, D. A. (1985). *New Parents as Teachers project: Evaluation*. Jefferson City, MO: Missouri State Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.
- Prosser, J. (1999). The evaluation of school culture research. In J. Prosser (Ed), *School Culture* (pp. 1-14): London: Paul Chapman.
- Rowe, F., & Stewart, D. (2009). Promoting connectedness through whole school approaches: A qualitative study. *Health Education*, 109(5), 396–413, doi:10.1108/09654280910984816.
- Sanders, M. R., Tully, L. A., Baade, P. D., Lynch, M. E., Heywood, A. H., Pollard, G. E. (1999). A survey of parenting practices in Queensland: Implications for mental health promotion. *Health Promotion Journal of Australia*, 9, 105-114.

- Sarason, S. (1990). *The predictable failure of educational reform: Can we change course before it's too late?* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Schein, E. H. (2004). *Organisational culture and leadership* (3rd ed.), San Francisco: Jossey-Bass;
- Schoen, L. T., & Teddlie, C. (2008). A new model of school culture: A response to a call for conceptual clarity. *School Effectiveness and School Improvement*, 19(2), 129-153.
- Seashore, K. R. (2009). Leadership and change in school: Personal reflections over the last 30 years. *Journal of Educational Change*, 10, 129-140.
- Senge, P., Cambron-McCabe, N., Lucas, T., Smith, B., Dutton, J., & Kleiner, A. (2000). *Schools that learn: A fifth discipline fieldbook for educators, parents, and everyone who cares about education*. New York: Doubleday.
- Sheridan, S. (2011). Pedagogical quality in preschool: A commentary, in N. Pramling and I. Pramling Samuelsson (eds.), *Educational encounters: Nordic studies in early childhood didactics*, Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Springer, pp. 223-242.
- Sherman, L. W., Gottfredson, D., Mackenzie, D., Eck, J., Reuter, P., & Bushway, S. (1997). *Preventing crime: What works, what doesn't, what's promising*. University of Maryland. Retrieved from <http://www.ncjrs.gov/works>.
- Short, P., & Greer, J. (2002). *Leadership in empowered schools: Themes from innovative efforts*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Skiba, R., Simmons, A. B., Peterson, R., McKelvey, J., Forde, S., & Gallini, S. (2004). Beyond guns, drugs and gangs: The structure of student perceptions of school safety. *Journal of School Violence*, 3, 149-171. doi: 10.1300/J202v03n02_09.
- Sprague, J., Walker, H., Golly, A., White, K., Myers, D. R., & Shannon, T. (2001). Translating research into effective practice: The effects of a universal staff and student intervention on indicators of discipline and school safety. *Education and Treatment of Children*, 24, 495-511.
- Staessens, K. (1991). Ontwikkeling en validering van de Vragenlijst Professionele Cultuur van Basisscholen [Development and validation of the professional culture questionnaire for primary schools], *Pedagogische Studien*, 68, 241-252.
- Stoll, L. (1998). School culture. *School Improvement Network's Bulletin*, No. 9, Institute of Education, University of London.
- Stoll, L., & Fink, D. (1996). *Changing our schools*, Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Stoll, L., & Myres, K. (1997). *No quick fixes: Perspectives on schools in difficulty*. Lewes, UK: Falmer Press.
- Sugai, G., & Horner, R. H. (2002). The evolution of discipline practices: School-wide positive behavior supports. *Child & Family Behavior Therapy* 24(1/2), 23-50.
- Teddlie, C., & Reynolds, D. (2000). *The international handbook of school effectiveness research*. New York: Falmer Press.
- Teddlie, C., & Stringfield, S. (1993). *Schools make a difference: Lessons learned from a 10-year study of school effects*. New York. Teachers College Press.
- Van Houtte, M. (2005). Climate or culture? A plea for conceptual clarity in school effectiveness research. *School Effectiveness and School Improvement*, 16(1), 71-89, DOI: 10.1080/09243450500113977.
- Van Houtte, M., & Van Maele, D. (2011). The black box revelation: in search of conceptual clarity regarding climate and culture in school effectiveness research, *Oxford Review of Education*, 37(4), 505-524.
- Walker, J. M. T, and Hoover-Demsey, K. V. (2006). Why research on parental involvement is important to classroom management. In C. Evertson & Weinstein (Eds.), *The handbook of classroom management*, (pp. 665-684). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Walker, J. M. T, and Hoover-Demsey, K. V. (2008). Parent Involvement. In T. Gool (Ed.), *21st century education. A reference handbook* (pp II- 382-II-392) Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc, doi: 10.4135/9781412964012.n90.
- Waller, W. (1932). *The sociology of teaching*. New York: Russell & Russell.
- Weiss, H. B., Myer, E., Kreider, H., Vaughan, M., Dearing, E., Hencke, R., et al. (2003). Making it work: Low-income working mothers' involvement in their children's education, *American Educational Research Journal*, 40, 879-901.

- Wood, D., Kurtz, B., & Copping, K. E. (2011). Gender differences in motivational pathways to college for middle class African American youths. *Developmental Psychology*, 47(4), 961-968. doi.10.1037/a0023745.
- Wright, M. O., Masten, A. S., & Narayan, A. J. (2013). Resilience processes in development: Four waves of research on positive adaptation in the context of adversity. In S. Goldstein & R. B. Brooks (Eds.) *Handbook of resilience in children*, 2nd edition (pp. 15-37). New York: Springer.
- Zimmerman, J. (2006). Factors that relate to educators' use of the Baldrige Framework. *Continuous Improvement Monitor*, 2(3).