Research Article

# Parental Involvement in Assisting the Student in the Social Domain: The Educators' Perspective

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**Abstract:** Parental involvement is one of the key issues in education that remains a constant part of the public and academic agenda, but little is known about the perspective of educators on parental involvement in assisting the student in the social domain. It is essential to throw light on this perspective in order to construct an effective parent-educator partnership in this domain. This qualitative study focuses on educators' perspectives (perceptions and strategies). It is based on analyses of 10 case studies perceived by educators as successful and 16 statements by educators, which were not connected to a specific case study, but expressed their views about parents generally. It was found that the educators' perceptions include positive and negative aspects. Three types of effective strategies have emerged from the data: creating good communication with parents, giving practical advice to parents, and driving positive change in the relations between the child and their parents. The conclusions point to aspects that should be emphasized in teacher education, particularly professional training in how to develop social competence in students.

*Keywords*: socio-emotional learning (SEL), social competence, social skills, social difficulties, parent-teacher partnership, communication strategies, leaning from success

## 1. Introduction

Parental involvement is one of the key issues in education that does not drop from the public and academic agenda (Addi-Raccah et al., 2021; Engin, 2020; Fisher & Kostelitz, 2015). Studies indicate its great importance for the child's development and advancement (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002; Lara & Saracostti, 2019). The current study focuses on parental involvement in assisting the student in the social domain which is considered one of the key areas in the 21st century (UNESCO MGIEP, 2021).

The existing literature emphasizes the importance of fostering the partnership of parents and educators in the field of socio-emotional learning (SEL) (Albright & Weissberg, 2010; Garbacz et al., 2015), but before fostering it there is an earlier stage, on which there is a lack of empirical knowledge-how do educators view parental involvement in the student's social domain at school? Are they interested in this involvement? Do they think it does contribute to the students? What, in their opinion, develops it and what strategies do they employ in working with parents in the social domain?

The current study, focusing on educators' perspectives (perceptions and strategies), was carried out with the aim of

investigating these questions in depth. The findings and conclusions will provide knowledge to build an effective parent-educator partnership in the social domain.

## 1.1 *Review of the literature*
### 1.1.1 *The parents' place in developing their child's social competence*

Parents have a major role in developing the social competence of children and adolescents, that is, in developing the individual's ability to cope with the social demands that are directed to them (Spence, 2023; Ten Dam & Volman, 2007). The first social relationship that the child experiences is their relationship with their parents, and the research literature describes an association between secure attachment and social competence. When children experience secure attachment, they develop positive expectations of those around them, for example, they expect pleasant interactions with others. On the other hand, when the attachment is insecure, they tend to expect little from those around them and may develop a pattern of behavior that is characterized by aggression or withdrawal, in order to avoid a negative social experience. Moreover, the social relationships of the parents themselves serve the students as a model of learning and imitation (Booth-LaForce & Groh, 2018; Schneider et al., 2001; Siegler et al., 2003). Their parenting style is also of major importance in the child's social development (Attili et al., 2010; Franz & Gross, 2001). For example, it was found that the parents' ability to identify their child's emotions may reduce-or alternatively, increase-the shy child's fears of society (Korem, 2019); it was also found that encouragement by the mother to express feelings in early childhood is associated with the child's development of empathy (Taylor et al., 2013). It was also found that parents of socially competent children tend to include components of warmth and control in their parenting style and use explanations in interactions with their children (Leve & Fagot, 1997; Siegler et al., 2006). On the other hand, strict control on the part of the mother is associated with reports by adolescents of a low level of social competence on their part (Laible & Carlo, 2004).

For young children, the parents' role is described using the image of "gatekeepers," in the sense that they organize and control their children's social experiences (Siegler et al., 2006). In adolescents too, the role of the family is conspicuous: it was found that the family's cohesion and support for adolescents is associated with their social abilities (Schoenrock et al., 1999).

In view of the importance of the family in the social lives of children and adolescents, various programs are implemented to develop social competence that are focused on parent training. It was found that parent training before children start school is effective in reducing social anxieties in those children who tend to develop these (Rapee et al., 2005). Moreover, programs to support parents of young children who are characterized by behavioral problems were found to be effective in diverting the channel of negative development (Somech & Elizur, 2012).

### 1.1.2 *The school's place in developing the student's social competence*

The school also has a major role in developing the students' social competence (Spence, 2023; Ten Dam & Volman, 2007; Zwaans et al., 2008). The educational framework is the social arena that students attend each day. As developing social competence contributes to the development of all the students, and therefore to advancing equal opportunities for integration and advancement in society, there are some who see it as a moral goal of education (Ten Dam & Volman, 2007; Zwaans et al., 2006).

It is important that educators are involved in the process of developing the students' social competence. The professional literature emphasizes that the school should use interventions that see the educator in the classroom as an integrator, as the educator has a unique perspective of the students and can consult experts about the strategies that will meet the students' unique needs (Farmer et al., 2011). Studies show that it is important for students to feel that the school staff support them, as this advances a positive self-image and positive attitudes towards the staff (Demaray et al., 2005; 2009). Moreover, when educators are involved in processes, the probability of retaining and generalizing new desirable social behaviors in the school framework increases (Greco & Morris, 2001).

### 1.1.3 *The importance of school-family partnerships in developing the student's social competence*

As suggested by Grolnick and Slowiaczek (1994), parental involvement is conceptualized as dedication of

resources by a parent to a child within a given domain. Parental involvement is important in various aspects of student's lives and has been shown to improve their functioning at school (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002; Đurišić & Bunijevac, 2017; Lara & Saracostti, 2019) and their social skills and adjustment (El Nokali et al., 2010; Powell et al., 2010). Different levels of parental involvement are described in the literature, for example parents as observers, as consumers, as learners and as partners in policy making (Noy, 2014).

In our study framework, the focus is on the social domain. Parental involvement has been found important for the success of programs for nurturing students' SEL, since the combination of the family and the school emphasizes their complementary role in the children's lives (Albright & Weissberg, 2010; Garbacz et al., 2015; Wilkinson, 2005). The term "parental involvement" refers to both parent-initiated and educator-initiated parental involvement.

Sheridan (1997) describes a model of conjoint behavioral consultation of teachers and parents in the social domain. The model is based on an approach that promotes shared responsibility for educational problems and aspires to achieve a partnership of teachers and parents in a structured problem-solving framework. Sheridan et al. (1990) compared, for example, outcomes of behavioral counseling given to teachers only and outcomes of behavioral counseling given to teachers and parents together in order to advance four children who tended to abstain from social interactions. It was found that in the model in which only teachers participated, the positive changes in the students' social behavior were connected to the school framework. On the other hand, in the shared model for teachers and parents the positive changes in the students were connected both to the school framework and to home. In a study that examined teachers' perceptions of shy students, educators also described strategies of guiding parents (Korem, 2016).

The partnership between the school and the family is based on a perception of shared responsibility (Epstein, 2018), and the parent is described in the literature as an expert on the child in many fields of life, including in the social field (Walker et al., 2010). This partnership creates a supportive climate and emphasizes the importance of social skills in the students' lives (January et al., 2011). It increases the students' feeling of safeness, transmits uniform and consistent messages to them and is a source of listening, guidance and support. In addition, it was found that in the present era, SEL skills have become very important to parents, that is, an opportunity has been created to advance partnership in this field (Korem & Alfi-Shabtay, 2023).

### 1.1.4 *The complexity of parental involvement in assisting the student in the social domain*

Openly, educators and parents have a shared goal: they both want the students to develop social competence and integrate socially. However, the complexity created due to the high level of emotional involvement in the social domain and may lead to miscommunication (Abraham, 2012; Noy, 1984). The complexity will be described first from the parents' perspectives, followed by that of the educators.

From the perspective of parents, their son's or daughter's difficulty in the social field usually gives rise to a feeling of helplessness, as they are unable to be with them at school, to help and protect them socially. In this situation parents have to place their trust in the educational staff and rely on them to deal with the matter professionally. Indeed, it was found that parents of adolescents expect teachers to help their children socially (Tatar & Horenczyk, 2000). Moreover, the parents themselves may experience a feeling of helplessness in the face of the child's behavior at home and do not want to expose these difficulties to the educational staff (Abraham, 2012; Noy, 1984).

"The parental voice" is supposedly the voice of an adult; however, it has psycho-developmental characteristics and emotional motives (Plotnik, 2013). For example, the parent may project their own difficulties onto the child or have difficulty accepting the child's characteristics when they do not match those of their "fantasy child." All these may create vulnerability and distress in the parents and sabotage their ability to discuss things rationally that is necessary to establish a constructive partnership with the educator in order to assist the child (Noy, 1984; Plotnik, 2013).

From the perspectives of educators, they have to cope with possible biases in how parents perceive their son's or daughter's social behavior; there are parents who see their child as a kind of continuation of themselves (Plotnik, 2013) and therefore are very sensitive to any socio-emotional information reported to them about the child. It was found that it is difficult for parents to recognize their child's social difficulty, and they tend to minimize its severity (Malik & Furman, 1993). Moreover, parents see their child in certain situations, and they do not have the comprehensive comparative point of view of the educator, who can compare the student's behavior to that of other students (Malik & Furman, 1993).

Another aspect of the educators' perspectives is rooted in the educators' social self-efficacy itself, as conducting a discussion or negotiating with adults may arouse or exacerbate their doubts that they themselves are sufficiently socially

competent. This is especially conspicuous when the parents work in areas considered to be characterized by a high level of social confidence (such as lawyers or media professionals), and some educators may perceive this as a threat (Noy, 1984). In addition, there are educators who tend not to involve parents because they fear that their involvement may reduce their own professional status, as a result of parents becoming active partners and having an influence on the school and on decision-making (Addi-Raccah & Ainhoren, 2009; Deslandes et al., 2015; Vincent, 2000).

The emotional involvement of parents and educators in children's social difficulties may cause miscommunication between them and be expressed in being judgmental, in aggressive speech and threats or alternatively as withdrawal, non-reaction, ignoring them or vanishing (Noy, 1984). All these make it difficult to relate in a matter-of-fact way to the social domain of the students' lives.

### 1.1.5 *This study and its aims*

The literature in the field deals with developing the partnership between parents and educators in the field of SEL, its principles and plans (Albright & Weissberg, 2010; Garbacz et al., 2015), but there is an earlier stage about which little is known-how do educators regard parental involvement in assisting the student socially?

Since the aim of the research is to understand the educators' perspectives (perceptions and strategies) on parental involvement in assisting the student in the social domain deeply, a qualitative-interpretive approach based on a "learning from success" method was used. This combination makes it possible to receive various kinds of reasoning and examples from the educators and at the same time to reduce their defense mechanisms when reporting cases related to their work (Fisher, 2010; Schechter et al., 2004; Schechter, 2019). The research questions were:

i. What characterizes the educators' perceptions about parental involvement in assisting the student socially?

ii. What strategies are regarded by educators as effective in relation to parental involvement in assisting the student socially?

## 2. Methodology

### 2.1 *Participants*

Twenty-three educators (eleven homeroom teachers, six school counselors, three subject teachers and three educators in managerial roles) participated in the study. The aim was to learn about the diverse perspectives of educators in a variety of roles.

All the participants work in regular schools. The aim was to locate educators with extensive experience in educational activity who could describe cases with different characteristics (the participants have been working in education for 10-43 years and on average for 29.17 years). The first research participants who met these criteria were located due to prior acquaintance (a combination of purposeful and convenience sampling) and they themselves also referred additional educators to participate in the study (the snowball method) in order to expand the range of participants.

### 2.2 *Instrument and procedure*

The study is based on semi-structured in-depth interviews. The question posed by the researcher to the research participants was: "Can you describe a case in which you succeeded in assisting a student in the social domain?" The participants in the study were the ones who led the conversation, and the researcher asked clarifying questions (for example, "What do you mean?") or asked them to expand on a specific matter ("Can you give an example?") The interviews were carried out in quiet places and in a pleasant atmosphere. Each interview lasted one to two hours. The words of the participants were written down word for word during the interview and then typed.

### 2.3 *Data analysis*

As explained, case studies were described in the interviews. They were counted and analyzed. Each interview produced two case studies on average (zero to four case studies in each interview). The 43 cases focused on the social

domain, for example, they described a student who experiences a problem in close friendship, who is isolated or rejected by his peers or who annoys or teases his classmates.

Stage 1: The researcher and a colleague read the 43 collected case studies thoroughly in order to familiarize themselves with the data and then sorted them according to the following two criteria:

*A description of involvement by the students' parents:* Of the 43 case studies, in 13 of them, seven educators described parent-initiated or educator-initiated parental involvement (for example: "The mother called me"; "I advised the father..."). In addition to these case studies, statements by 16 educators that did not talk about specific parents, but made general statements about parents (such as: "The parents are…"; "The parents' function is to…") were collected.

*Suitability for analysis by the "learning from success" method:* Of these 13 case studies, 10 were found suitable for this kind of analysis as (a) they described results that were desirable from the point of view of the educator; (b) the results described were connected to the educator's activities (Schechter et al., 2004).

Stage 2: The researcher and a colleague reread the 10 cases and the statements and identified in them educators' perceptions through thematic analysis (Saldana, 2013). The case studies were analyzed according to a component, taken from the "learning from success" method, namely, mapping the strategies that the educators describe as contributing to success (Sykes et al., 2006). In addition, the researcher and a colleague independently identified sub-themes in the entire data. Then they discussed similar and dissimilar aspects in the analysis, and jointly decided on the sub-themes that most accurately reflected the participants' responses (Holley & Colyar, 2009; Morrow, 2005; Saldana, 2013).

Stage 3: An expert is the field of education and psychology was asked to comment on the entire analysis. The researcher discussed with him how to map the data and changes were made based on discussion and agreement between the researcher and the expert. The collaboration of scholars in the analysis process is intended to improve its reliability (Tracy, 2010).

## 2.4 *Ethical aspects*

Levinsky College of Education approved the study. The participants consented to participate in the research, and it was explained to them that what they said would be presented anonymously and without mentioning identifying details.

# 3. Findings

Two categories were extracted from the data: the first mapped how educators perceive parental involvement in assisting the student socially; the second mapped strategies that they consider to be effective in relation to this involvement. The educators' comments appear in quotation marks with the aim of making their "voice" heard. A previous version of the findings and conclusions appears in Hebrew in a book chapter published by the Mofet Institute (Korem, 2021).

## 3.1 *Educators' perceptions on parental involvement in assisting the student socially*

The educators expressed ambivalence regarding parental involvement in the social domain. The first two sub-themes tend to be negative and the last three sub-themes-positive.

### 3.1.1 *Negative perceptions*
#### 3.1.1.1 *The parents also contribute to the child's social difficulties*

A view that attributes part of the child's social difficulties to the education that the parents give at home is evident among the educators, as noted by a very experienced homeroom teacher: "Social skills can be learned, practiced, improved [...] the problem is the people around you [...] I have often dealt with children and the parents were the ones who disturbed the process"; "If we could work only at the domain of the children, we could work much more easily." In certain situations the educators perceive parents as an obstacle for these reasons: 1) the behavioral model that they set their children is inappropriate (for example, an aggressive model); 2) they increase the child's social difficulties (for example, difficulty in postponing satisfaction); 3) they put pressure on the child to form connections with other children; 4) they attribute only minor importance to the child's social life; 5) they do not give the child treatment in contradiction

to what has been agreed with the school staff. According to this perception, which in the theoretical literature is called "the parent as a problem," the parents' ways of education make it difficult for educators to carry out their work optimally (Hughes et al., 1994; Lareau, 2019).

### 3.1.1.2 *Parental involvement involves power struggles*

Another negative view that arose is that the involvement of parents regarding the students' social lives involves power struggles, as noted by a subject teacher: "Parents who begin to manage me: do this or that"; "The mother would phone all the time and give me work orders and operating instructions." The power struggles were also expressed in the use by the parents of second person pronouns when addressing educators: "You are not right, you didn't say so."

### 3.1.2 *Positive perceptions*
### 3.1.2.1 *Parental involvement is important*

Alongside with the negative perceptions, the educators emphasized the importance of parental involvement. They perceive it as a desirable and natural involvement. Examples of this can be seen in these statements: "I want the parents with me"; "Because we are a triangle-we need to collaborate." They also said that the involvement contributes to the success of assisting processes in the social sphere. For example: "When you work in collaboration with the parents, you achieve results."

### 3.1.2.2 *Empathy towards parents' feelings*

Another positive perception is that educators display empathy towards parents' feelings that their child experiences social difficulty. One of them maintained, for example, that there is a similarity between the student's social status and that of their parents, as noted by a school counselor with 40 years of experience: "Parents of rejected children are embarrassed to ask for help because they themselves are rejected. They do not have the courage to ask for help." Empathy for parents' feelings also includes realizing that there are parents who are afraid of the school's supervision of the quality of their parenting. For example: "The educational staff is perceived as social supervision. There is great sensitivity on this matter."

### 3.1.2.3 *A possibility of a positive change in the dynamic of this parental involvement*

Another positive perception was the possibility of a positive change in the dynamic of the parental involvement in assisting the student socially. The process is usually described like follows: first the parents oppose the process; however, in time their attitude changes and becomes more encouraging. One of the research participants described a conversation that she conducted with parents who their child bothered the children in the class. At first, they were aggressive towards her and defended the behavior of their son, but at the end of the conversation there was a change in their attitude, as noted by a relatively young homeroom teacher: "I felt that they greatly appreciate me in the conversation, that they greatly appreciate my way of doing things." Another very experienced educator in a managing role said that one of the parents expressed strong opposition to a step she suggested (joint consistent handling by educators and parents of aggressive behavior by students), but towards the end of the school year there was a change in his behavior: "He came to me with a personal gift and dedication and said 'You are the best of all!'"

## 3.2 *Strategies that in the view of the educators contribute to parental involvement in assisting the student in the social domain*

The research participants attributed three discrete aims to the strategies that they reported: contribution to good communication with parents, giving practical advice to parents and driving positive change in the relations between the child and their parents. These aims revealed three sub-themes.

### 3.2.1 Strategies for creating good communication with the parents

Eight strategies were mentioned to which the research participants attribute a contribution to effective communication with parents in assisting the student in the social domain. Some of the strategies focus on the student and some on the parents (see Table 1).

**Table 1.** Educators' Strategies for Good Communication with Parents in order to Assist the Student in the Social Domain

| Focus | Strategies |
|---|---|
| Strategies that focus on the student | A holistic attitude to the student |
| | Strengthening the student's positive aspects |
| | Emphasizing the good of the student |
| Strategies that focus on the parents | Providing positive reinforcement for parents on investing efforts in the child |
| | Asking the parents questions (and refraining from rebuking them) |
| | Encouraging the parents to be active in the discourse and to express an opinion on the child's social situation |
| | Joint thinking about solutions |
| | Maintaining open channels of communication |

### 3.2.1.1 Communication strategies focused on the student

The research participants reported that at the beginning of the conversation with the student's parents they do not focus on the student's social difficulty, but related to the student holistically, as noted by a homeroom teacher: "I always speak about the child as a whole, how I see them generally." The research participants also reported that at the beginning of the conversation they relate to the student's positive aspects: "I always say good things about the child. When you receive parents, you begin with the good things." The research participants said that one should transmit a message to the parents that the student is the one who is important and that their welfare is central: "I first of all emphasize that I want the best for the girl." Even when the student's behavior harms others, they transmit a message to the parents that focuses on the good of their child: "The message was transmitted that I will not allow anyone to harm their child, just as I do not let anyone harm others."

### 3.2.1.2 Communication strategies focused on the parents

The research participants reported giving reinforcement to parents for their investment in advancing the student, as noted by a homeroom teacher: "I emphasize the child's efforts within the family support system"; presenting questions to the parents and refraining from rebuking them: "I mediate, I don't preach [...], and then the conversation comes not from an accusing place but an educational one"; encouraging the parents to be active in the conversation and to express an opinion on the child's social situation: "I hear what the mother has to say. The parents also have something to say, they also have ideas." The importance of maintaining open channels of communication with the parents was also mentioned: "I say to the parents, keep in touch with me, you can feel free to phone me; and the parents are very happy with this collaboration."

### 3.2.2 Strategies of giving practical advice to the parents

It was found that most of the messages that educators transmit to parents in order to assist the student in the social domain are connected to encouraging the child's social interactions. The research participants reported that they recommend to parents to enroll their child in group activities, drive them there and initiate social events, as noted by a subject teacher with 35 years of experience: "We recommended to the parents that they should take the initiative: encourage them to invite their friends home, take them to group activities; not activities that are related to learning, but those that involve dynamics between the children and work in groups." One of the educators said that she suggested to a parent that she could celebrate the child's birthday at home and invite the class. Another educator explained the logic in giving this advice to parents: "The parent initiates the activity and helps the child to make the initial contact."

### 3.2.3 Strategies for driving positive change in the relations between the students and their parents

Five strategies arose from the findings that were intended to create positive change in the relations between the students and their parents; three of them focused on the parents and two on the student (see Figure 1):
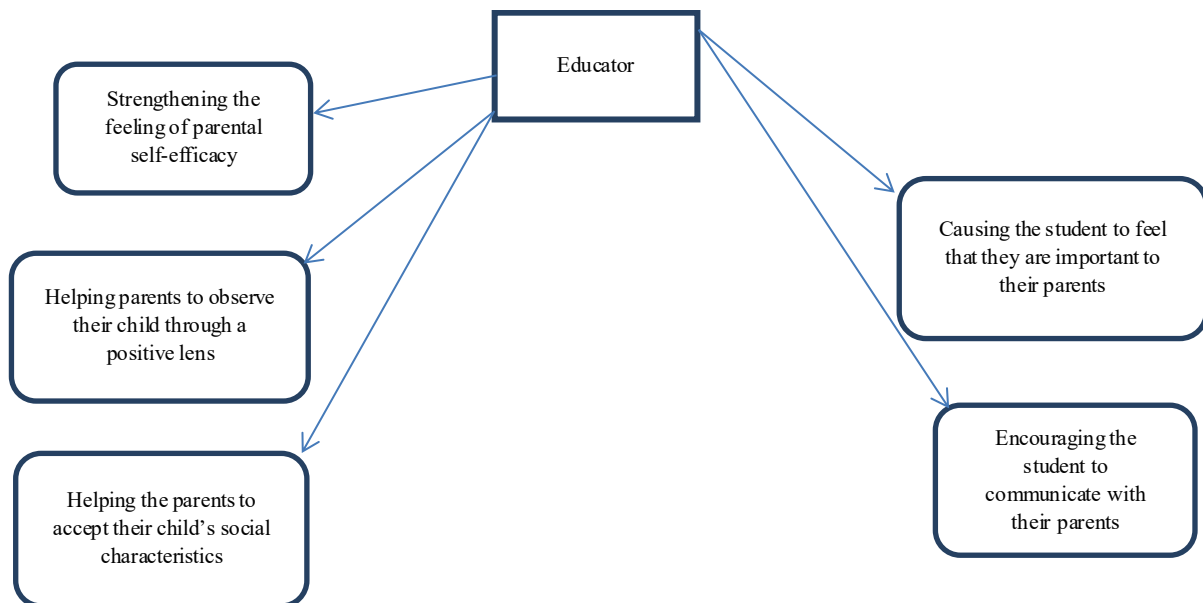


**Figure 1.** Educators' Strategies for Driving Positive Change in the Relationship between the Child and their Parents in order to Assist the Student in the Social Domain

### 3.2.3.1 Strategies focused on the student

The first strategy is intended to *cause the student to feel that they are important to their parents.* Reference to this arose in relation to homes where there is neglect. A homeroom teacher with 15 years of experience said: "The fact that the parent is involved is very important to the child: that they know that their parents are involved in their life. This was not only for guidance, but so that the child would see that their parent cares." In this statement she distinguishes between two different aims: guiding the parent and creating positive change in the relations between the child and their parents. That is to say, she involves the parent in the discussion and in the entire process so that the student feels that they are important to their parent. She also said that the students' social behavior improves when their parents are present their lives. According to the theoretical literature the support of parents for their children is indeed a key factor in improving their self-image and their social competence (Allen et al., 2002; Demaray et al., 2009; Engels et al., 2002; Laible & Carlo, 2004). A connection has been found between adolescents' reports of support on the part of their mother and their reports of their social ability (Laible & Carlo, 2004).

The second strategy is intended to *encourage the student to communicate with their parents.* An experienced subject teacher described a turning point that occurred during the school year in a student's social behavior-she became quiet and introverted. When she spoke to the student, she realized that some event had caused the change, and encouraged her to speak to her mother about it. The student did so, and there was indeed a positive change in her behavior. Afterwards the mother thanked the teacher for encouraging direct communication between her and her daughter. The teacher described her feeling of achievement: "Her mother phoned me, thanked me and said that the child had only spoken to her because of me." According to the theoretical literature, interactions between mothers and socially competent children are characterized by communication, talking about feelings and use of reasoning and explanations (Leve & Fagot, 1997; Siegler et al., 2006).

### 3.2.3.2 *Strategies that focus on the parent*

The third strategy is intended *to strengthen the feeling of parental self-efficacy*. An experienced subject teacher explained that, in time, strengthening parental self-efficacy improves the social behavior of the students. One of the research participants described how she strengthened the parents' feeling of self-efficacy indirectly using information that she received from the student in school. She said to the mother: "It's good that when she comes home you have a meal ready for her"; "I spoke with the child, and I know that she has a fixed schedule." The research participants realize the importance of strengthening parental self-efficacy: "The mother examines her parenting, and this is a message to the mother that she is doing the right thing."

The fourth strategy is intended *to help parents to observe their child through a positive lens.* A homeroom teacher said that she seeks opportunities to share with parents who do not devote much time to their child the pleasant moments that she experienced with the child at school, in order to help the parents to see the child in a positive light. Another participant described situations in which the students seem frightened or worried next to their parents, and said that her policy is to say good things about the student in front of the parents in order to help them to see their child in a more positive light: "The most important thing for the child's success is a good relationship between the parent and the child. What the parent needs to learn is how to reach the child."

The fifth strategy is intended *to help the parents to accept their child's social characteristics.* A very experienced school counselor described a case in which parents educated their son to be very polite in company: "They saw their child as they saw themselves as children... times have changed, and their outlook was different from the outlook today, and it was difficult for them to see this." She gradually asked them to relax their demands from him and not expect him to change: "The entire process was only with the parents. I said, go easy on the child, let's see where it goes. The parents calmed down slightly, as if they accepted the child that they have."

## 4. Discussion

This study sought to examine how educators perceive parental involvement in assisting the student in the social domain, and what strategies they regard as effective in relation to it.

*Regarding the educators' perceptions*, the findings reveal an ambivalent attitude: On the one hand, in certain situations they attribute the student's social difficulties to the education the child receives at home and the parental involvement is experienced as being replete with power struggles. On the other hand, they think this parental involvement is important; they display empathy towards the parents' feelings, and they report a possibility of a positive change in its dynamics. The ambivalence that characterizes the educators' perceptions corresponds to the complexity described in the literature regarding the emotional and irrational aspects of the "parental voice" and its implication for joint activity between parents and educators (Noy, 1984; Plotnik, 2013). These results add to the body of knowledge that seeks to reveal educators' perceptions on parental involvement and to understand origins of tensions in parent-educator relationships (Deslandes et al., 2015; Vincent, 2000), where the focus of the current study is on the social domain.

Regarding *strategies that in the view of educators are effective in relation to parental involvement,* three kinds were found. They are distinct from one another in the aims that the educators attribute to them: in the first kind the educators' aim is to create good communication with parents; in the second kind their aim is to give the parents practical advice; and in the third kind their aim is to drive positive change in the relations between the child and their parents.

The strategies are divided into two kinds: strategies that focus on the student and strategies that focus on the parent. The student-focused strategies include a holistic attitude to the student, strengthening the student's positive aspects and emphasizing the good of the student. The strategy that deals with strengthening the student's positive aspects can be focused to emphasize the student's positive aspects *specifically in the social domain*, such as ability to tell a joke or willingness to help others, with the aim of focusing on strengthening the aspect that one wants to nurture. The strategies that focus on the parents include providing positive reinforcement to the parents for investing efforts in the child, asking the parents questions, encouraging the parents to talk about the social domain in the child's life, joint thinking about solutions and maintaining open channels of communication. These strategies reflect an egalitarian and collaborative approach towards the parent that reflects their being an expert on their child in the social sphere, transmits respect towards them and thus structures their significant place in the relationship (Walker et al., 2010). It can therefore be concluded that the strategies that arose in the study correspond to the recommendations described in the literature according to which educators should turn to the parental voice gradually, carefully and sensitively, and therefore they do indeed contribute to creating a constructive partnership with parents (Bryan et al., 2020; Gerich & Schmitz, 2016). This study supports educators dedicating thought to planning the discourse with a parent on social matters in the student's life and developing strategies that contribute to good communication between educators and parents on sensitive subjects.

When the messages that educators transmit to parents on the matter of assisting the student in the social domain were examined, it was clear that educators emphasize practical advice that is intended mainly to encourage the child to increase social activity. This is important advice, as it affords the child opportunities for social interactions; however, it does not reflect extensive knowledge about developing social competence. The lack of processes of consultation with parents was conspicuous and so was the absence of planning and implementing professional and systematic joint plans for educators and parents to assist the child socially.

Additional strategies, of a unique nature, also arose from the findings. As was said, the educators were asked to describe a case in which they succeeded, in their view, in assisting a student in the social domain. The fact that in practice the educators described cases in which they aspired to drive positive change in the relations between the child and their parents shows that they see an association between the nature of the relationship between the child and their parents and improving the child's situation in the social domain.

In the study five strategies were identified by means of which educators aspire to create positive change in the relationship between the child and their parents (see Figure 1). What all the strategies have in common is that they encourage emotional confidence in the family experience, open communication between parents and their children, family cohesion and support of the family for their child-factors that according to the literature do indeed contribute to developing social competence in children and adolescents (Schoenrock et al., 1999; Siegler et al., 2006).

A supportive, warm attitude on the part of the parents is especially important in nurturing the child's ability to understand the feelings of others and react to them and in developing social competence (Laible & Carlo, 2004; Spence, 2023). Dealing with students' social difficulties by relating to the family dynamics is supported in the literature; difficulty in the child's relations with the peer group is sometimes associated with a difficulty in other close relationships, and therefore examining family problems that need to be dealt with is recommended (Malik & Furman, 1993). However, in the professional literature this intervention is attributed to therapeutic professionals such as a social worker or psychologist, and not to educators.

# 5. Concluding remarks

When attempting to draw overall conclusions from the findings, the question is why there was no expression of consultation processes between parents and educators in order to discuss professional, systematic principles and plans for assisting the students socially. If we combine the various findings, we can presume that the educators' perspective of this parental involvement as being replete with power struggles makes it challenging for them to communicate with the parents directly, openly and assertively (Addi-Raccah & Ainhoren, 2009; Deslandes et al., 2015), communication that is needed to create a constructive partnership. Therefore, assertive communication with parents should be emphasized and experienced using simulations in teacher training.

Another possible interpretation is that educators lack orderly, methodical knowledge of how to assist the students socially and therefore direct communication with parents on this subject is not expressed. This hypothesis is supported

by the fact that when educators offered parents practical advice, the main message was that the parents should encourage the child to participate in social interactions. This practical advice is important but does not reflect extensive professional knowledge about developing students' social competence. Therefore, developing social competence should be positioned as a core practice in teacher education (Tal, 2019; Tynjälä et al., 2016). Theoretical and practical training in the social domain will give educators informed understanding, enable them to provide the parents with effective information, and as a result will enable them to involve the parents in higher levels of involvement (Noy, 2014; Spence, 2023).

This study has some limitations. First, parents are not all cut from the same cloth and there are gender, socio-economic, educational, cultural and other differences between them. In to the current study, the unique characteristics of the parents who were mentioned in the reported case studies of the educators and how these characteristics affected the educators' experience are unknown factors. Second, the research findings should also be examined in other schools, as the school's characteristics may affect the nature of this parental involvement (Addi-Raccah & Ainhoren, 2009). In particular, the findings should be examined in varied cultural contexts as parent-educator relationship is context-related (Albright & Weissberg, 2010). These aspects were not taken into consideration in the present study since it is an exploratory one. Finally, further research should examine the complementary perspective of the parents about parental involvement in the social domain.

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# Conflict of interest

The authors declare no competing financial interest.

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