Parental involvement in compulsory schools in Iceland

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Dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of a Ph.D.-degree

UNIVERSITY OF ICELAND
SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

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Preface

This Ph.D. dissertation (180 ECTS) is a collection of four published scientific papers and this synopsis that unites them. The first paper, “Home-school relationships and cooperation between parents and supervisory teachers”, was published in BARN, in 2012. The second paper, “Desirable parental participation in activities in compulsory schools”, was also published in BARN, in 2013. The third paper, “Teenagers´ opinions on parental involvement in compulsory schools”, was published in International Journal about Parents in Education, in 2015. The fourth paper, “Influential factors behind parents´ general satisfaction with compulsory schools in Iceland”, was published in Nordstep, Nordic Journal of Studies in Educational Policy, in 2017.

My main supervisor during my doctoral studies was Dr. Amalía Björnsdóttir, professor at the University of Iceland. Dr. Unn-Doris K. Bæck, professor at UiT The Arctic University of Norway, was co-supervisor, and Dr. Gerður G. Óskarsdóttir, researcher at the University of Iceland, was on the doctoral committee. They have given me several tasks to solve and many opportunities for enlightening discussions, and for that I am very grateful. I want to thank all the participants and researchers who contributed to the research project Teaching and learning in Icelandic Compulsory Schools*;* it was a valuable experience to be a part of such a big and multi-dimensional project. I also owe gratitude to the University of Iceland Research Fund, The Icelandic Centre for Research (Rannis), and the University of Akureyri Research Fund for financial support of the research project.

I also want to thank my students in compulsory schools and my student teachers at the university; you have inspired me as an educator and researcher. Finally, my deepest thanks to my family and friends; your support all along has been just great.

Reykjavík, June 2018, Kristín Jónsdóttir

Abstract

This dissertation had three main aims: first to give an overview of parental involvement in Icelandic compulsory schools, second to bring attention to opinions of teenage students on the home-school relationship, and third, to examine how parental involvement and satisfaction with school are influenced by school services and social factors. The main research question was: What part does parental involvement play in compulsory schools in Iceland?

The research on parental involvement is part of a bigger research project, *Teaching and learning in Icelandic compulsory schools* conducted in 20 schools in collaboration with their personnel, students and parents, and a team of around 50 researchers and graduate students. Quantitative data from questionnaires were used. Four online questionnaires were directed to school personnel, one online questionnaire to parents of all students in the 20 schools, and an onsite questionnaire was directed to students in grades seven through ten in 14 schools, i.e. all schools in the sample with lower-secondary level. Analysis of parental involvement was done by exploring differences and relationships in opinions, and factor analysis and regression analysis were used to bring forth what influenced participants' opinions.

The findings have been published in four papers. An overview of parental involvement showed that the home-school relationship is systemic and regular, but it is questionable if it comprises real cooperation. Findings showed that relationships between parents and teachers are important; parents were generally satisfied, but some teachers, especially the younger ones, felt that communicating with parents is difficult. Most adults, parents and school personnel favoured the traditional kind of parental participation, which primarily involves social activities. Meanwhile, the teenagers showed interest in relating parental participation to their academic activities. There were differences in teenagers' opinions that signify how essential it is to reach out to strengthen cooperation with all families. The research revealed a reality of inequity in praxis; most striking was that single mothers often feel powerless, and receive less support for their children than do other parents. That must be unveiled if compulsory schools want to be part of the Nordic model of quality and equity in education.

Abstract in Icelandic

Tengsl heimila og grunnskóla á Íslandi

Þessi rannsókn fjallar um tengsl heimila og grunnskóla og markmið hennar var þríþætt: Í fyrsta lagi að lýsa því sem er einkennandi fyrir samskipti heimila og skóla, samstarf foreldra og kennara, og fyrir þátttöku foreldra í skólastarfi. Í öðru lagi að skoða hvað unglingum finnst æskilegt varðandi þátttöku foreldra og hvernig koma mætti til móts við óskir þeirra. Í þriðja lagi að draga fram hvernig þjónusta skóla og félagslegir þættir hafa áhrif á tengsl heimila og skóla sem og á ánægju foreldra með skólastarf. Leitað var svara við meginspurningunni: Hvaða hlutverki þjóna tengsl heimila og skóla í grunnskólastarfi á Íslandi?

Rannsóknin er þáttur í stærra rannsóknarverkefni, *Starfshættir í grunnskólum*, en meginmarkmið þess var að veita yfirsýn yfir starfshætti í íslenskum grunnskólum. Gagna var aflað í 20 grunnskólum í fjórum sveitarfélögum og að henni komu um 50 rannsakendur. Þátttakendur voru nemendur, foreldrar og starfsfólk skólanna. Í þessari rannsókn á tengslum heimila og skóla var unnið með gögn úr spurningalistum. Fjórir rafrænir spurningalistar voru lagðir fyrir starfsfólk skólanna og rafrænn listi var sendur til foreldra allra nemenda. Einnig voru rafrænir listar lagðir fyrir nemendur í 7.-10. bekk í þeim skólum sem voru með unglingadeildir en þeir voru 14 talsins. Við úrvinnslu var reiknuð lýsandi tölfræði, skoðuð tengsl á milli þátta og notuð fjölbreytuaðhvarfsgreining til að varpa ljósi á hvað hefði áhrif á sjónarmið þátttakenda.

Niðurstöður hafa verið birtar í fjórum rannsóknargreinum skrifuðum á ensku en hluti niðurstaðna er til umfjöllunar í kafla um foreldrasamstarf í bókinni *Starfshættir í grunnskólum við upphaf 21. aldar*. Niðurstöður sýndu að foreldrar og kennarar voru einhuga um að samskipti jafnt sem samstarf þeirra væri mikilvægt fyrir menntun barna og unglinga. Samskipti milli heimila og skóla eru kerfisbundin og regluleg og foreldrar voru yfirleitt ánægðir með þau. Það er hins vegar álitamál hversu oft er um samstarf að ræða. Einkum yngri kennarar sögðu samstarf við foreldra stundum vera erfitt. Foreldrar jafnt sem starfsfólk skóla töldu æskilegast að foreldrar tækju þátt í félagslífi og viðburðum skóla á hefðbundnum nótum. Foreldrar virtust ekki sækjast eftir að taka þátt í sjálfu námi barna sinna. Hins vegar sýndu unglingar áhuga á að foreldrar tækju frekar þátt í því sem sneri að náminu en félagslífinu, svo sem í námsmati og gerð áætlana um nám þeirra.

Mikill meirihluti unglinga sagðist vilja stuðning foreldra við heimanám. Fram kom töluverður munur á viðhorfum innan unglingahópsins en lítill hópur unglinga vill sem allra minnst tengsl milli heimila og skóla. Rannsóknin leiddi í ljós að foreldrar stóðu ekki jafnt að vígi gagnvart skólunum. Sláandi var að einstæðar mæður fundu oft til vanmáttar í samskiptum sínum við starfsfólk skóla og þær töldu sig síður en aðrir foreldrar fá stuðning innan skólanna fyrir börn sín sem þurftu þess með.

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List of papers

This thesis is based upon the following papers, referred to by their Roman numerals.

Paper I: Jónsdóttir, K., & Björnsdóttir, A. (2012). Home-school relationships and cooperation between parents and supervisory teachers. *BARN, 4*, 109-127.

Paper II: Jónsdóttir, K. (2013). Desirable parental participation in activities in compulsory schools. *BARN, 4*, 29-44.

Paper III: Jónsdóttir, K. (2015). Teenagers' opinions on parental involvement in compulsory schools in Iceland. *International Journal about Parents in Education, 9*(1), 24-36.

Paper IV: Jónsdóttir, K., Björnsdóttir, A., & Bæck, U.-D. K. (2017). Influential factors behind parents' general satisfaction with compulsory schools in Iceland. *Nordic Journal of Studies in Educational Policy*, *3*(2), 1-10. doi:10.1080/20020317.2017.1347012

1 Introduction

1.1 Origins of the study

When I started my doctoral studies in 2009, I joined the research project *Teaching and learning in Icelandic compulsory schools.* The main objective of the research project was to provide an overview of school practices at the beginning of the 21st century, focusing on the trend towards individualised learning.

The project was organised within a framework based on an evaluation tool for schools´ progress towards individualised and cooperative learning, published by the Reykjavík Department of Education in 2005 (Óskarsdóttir, 2014; Reykjavíkurborg, 2005) and included six strands:

- Attitudes: views of students, teachers, administrators and parents towards teaching and learning
- Physical learning environment: buildings, classrooms and general equipment
- Internal structures: school-based planning and management
- Teachers: their roles and classroom practices
- Students: their tasks, assignments and learning
- Parents and community: parental involvement and school-community relations

The research team consisted of around 50 people, including 20 researchers from two universities in Iceland, a group of master's and doctoral students, school district officials from three districts and partners from an architectural and information technology firm**.** The research was conducted in 20 compulsory schools in collaboration with school personnel, students and parents. *Teaching and learning in Icelandic compulsory schools* is the largest research project conducted in Iceland concerning the compulsory school system. It gives a valuable overview of school practices to inform educators, parents and politicians, and provides important ground for further research (Björnsdóttir & Jónsdóttir, 2010; Óskarsdóttir, 2014; Sigurðardóttir & Hjartarson, 2011).

In the beginning, I joined the strand about attitudes, but in 2010 I accepted leadership of the strand of parental involvement. Thus, my focus turned towards the role parental involvement plays in compulsory school: the organisation of home-school cooperation, factors affecting the relationship between parents and teachers, and teenagers' perspectives on parental involvement.

The research team used a diagram of an evaluation tool intended to evaluate the development from traditional practices of the 20th century towards changes in the 21st century in five stages (Reykjavíkurborg, 2005). The evaluation tool was influential when the researchers designed the project. It was also used by other strands to evaluate the present situation by placing the participating schools on the defined stages when describing their outcome in the main publication about the research project (Óskarsdóttir, 2014). The strand of parental involvement was depicted as shown in Figure 1.

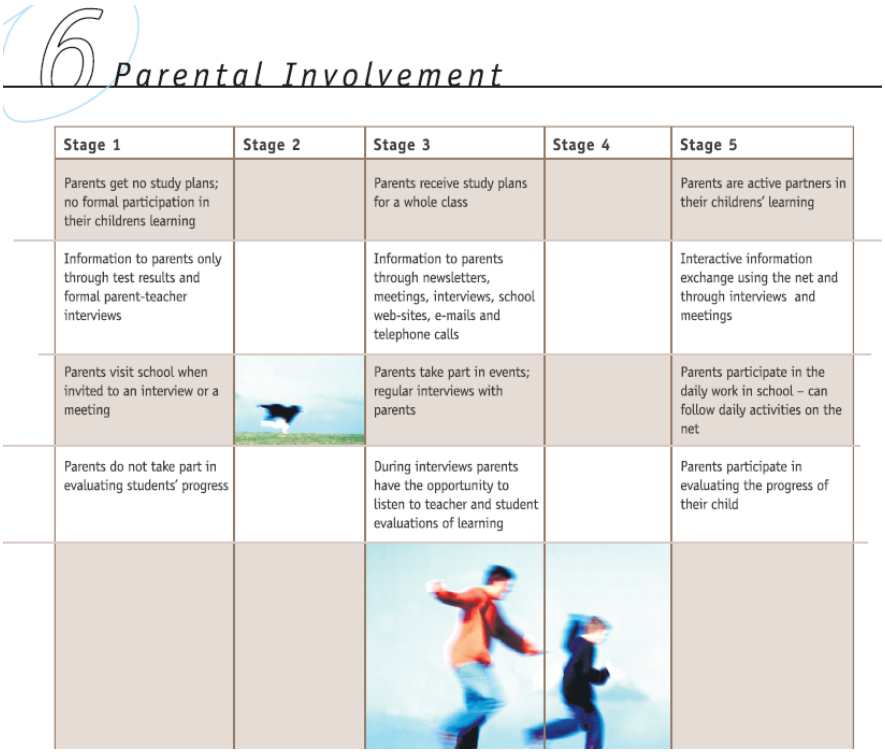

Figure 1 The strand of parental involvement in the evaluation tool on individualized and cooperative learning (Reykjavíkurborg, 2005)

1.2 Components of the study; chapters and papers

The general frame of the research project *Teaching and learning in Icelandic compulsory schools* directed the process of my study in the beginning, but later I added perspectives to gain a broader understanding of the research field.

The main publication about the whole project is a peer-reviewed book in Icelandic, called *Teaching and learning in Icelandic compulsory schools at the beginning of the 21st century* (i. Starfshættir í grunnskólum við upphaf 21. aldar), published in December 2014 (Óskarsdóttir, 2014). An English abstract from the book is adhered in Appendix E. I am the first author of Chapter VIII on home-school relationships, and the second author of Chapter III on attitudes; they are both written with my supervisor (Björnsdóttir & Jónsdóttir, 2014; K. Jónsdóttir & Björnsdóttir, 2014). I also contributed to three other chapters: Chapter VI on teaching practices (Sigurgeirsson, Björnsdóttir, Óskarsdóttir, & Jónsdóttir, 2014), chapter II on methodology (Óskarsdóttir et al., 2014a), and the final chapter, XII, with a discussion of the main findings of the research project (Óskarsdóttir et al., 2014b).

In last five years, I have published four peer-reviewed papers in English that use data from this research project. The papers are the substance of my doctoral work but are supported by the book chapters mentioned before.

Paper I, Home-school relationships and cooperation between parents and supervisory teachers (K. Jónsdóttir & Björnsdóttir, 2012) was published in 2012 in BARN, a journal published by Norsk senter för barneforskning. The focus is on the organization of home-school relationships, cooperation between parents and supervisory teachers, and satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the relationship.

Paper II, Desirable parental participation in activities in compulsory schools (K. Jónsdóttir, 2013) also published in BARN in a special issue on home-school partnership in a Nordic context. This paper presents findings on the expectations parents, school personnel and students have concerning parents' participation.

Paper III, Teenagers' opinions on parental involvement in compulsory schools (K. Jónsdóttir, 2015), was presented at the ERNAPE-ARCTIC conference in August 2015, and published in the e-journal International Journal about Parents in Education at the end of the year. The paper

focuses on teenagers and debates whether home-school relationships should be somewhat different as students grow older.

Paper IV, Influential factors behind parents´ general satisfaction with compulsory schools in Iceland (K. Jónsdóttir, Björnsdóttir, & Bæck, 2017), was published online in July 2017 in a special issue of Nordstep, Nordic Journal of Studies in Educational Policy, called Managing the gap – policy and practice of parents in child care and education. It focuses on factors that affect parents´ experience, both social factors such as marital status and school factors that local leaders and school personnel can address, like special support to students in need.

1.3 Purpose and relevancy

This study had three main objectives that guided the working process. The first was to provide an overview of parental involvement in compulsory schools in Iceland, with a focus on how the home-school relationship is in praxis, how cooperation between teachers and parents is organised, and how parents participate in their child´s education. This corresponds with the primary objective of the research project Teaching and learning in Icelandic compulsory schools, to provide an overview of school practices at the beginning of the 21st century.

The second objective was to bring special attention to teenage students and the relationship between them, parents and teachers. Parents' participation has an impact on students' performance and well-being throughout their schooling. It is important to clarify if and how that parental involvement diminishes or changes as students grow older and to explore teenagers' opinions on parental involvement.

The third objective was to examine how parental involvement in schools and parents' satisfaction with their children´s education is influenced by school services and several social factors, including marital status or education. The research project gives an excellent opportunity to determine if equity and quality are core values in the context of home-school relations and the Icelandic compulsory school system.

These three objectives are relevant within the Icelandic school context since few studies have been conducted here in the field of parental involvement. The study can also lead to a deeper understanding of the sensitive and important relationships between parents, community and schools for the benefit of the students.

Icelandic society has many similarities with the other Nordic countries, and their school systems have several traits in common. Therefore, the

focus is more often directed onto Nordic research findings in the field than on research from societies further away with different school systems. It is hoped that the findings here can contribute to the theoretical discussion in the research field and particularly contribute to the Nordic research base and discussion about the development of home-school relations.

1.4 Structure of the synopsis

The synopsis consists of six chapters. Following this introductory chapter is *Background*, Chapter 2, where the concepts used are defined, the school-family-community partnership model is described, and the more critical perspectives on parental involvement are presented. Nordic traditions in the home-school relationship are described, including the Icelandic context. Families´ influences are discussed and attention is given to teenagers´ concerns. Chapter 3, *Methods*, reports on the research design, participants, data gathering through questionnaires, procedures, analysis, validity and ethical issues. Chapter 4, *Findings*, brings forth the main findings organised into four sections, in the order of the four papers that comprise this doctoral thesis. In Chapter 5, *Discussion*, I engage in the main research question and discuss the findings according to the three underpinning research questions that correspond to the aims of this study. Chapter 6, *Conclusions*, is devoted to my concluding remarks and speculations about how this research can contribute to school development and the research field in general. The main research question and the three underpinning questions are:

What part does parental involvement play in compulsory schools in Iceland?

1. What characterises the home-school relationship and the cooperation between parents and teachers?
2. What do teenagers prefer in parents' participation, and how could their wishes affect cooperation?
3. Which factors influence parents´ satisfaction with schools, and how do they affect the home-school relationship?

2 Background

In this chapter, literature related to parental involvement is examined to provide a platform for answers to the research questions. In the first section, key concepts are defined, and then different perspectives on home-school relations are introduced. The third section is about Bronfenbrenner´s ecological systems theory; then, Epstein's school-family-community partnership model is described as well as social differences that can effect parental involvement. The Nordic view, which emphasises equity and quality in educational systems and influences the home-school relationship, is introduced. Then, practices in home-school cooperation in the Nordic countries, including the Icelandic context, are presented. Families are brought into the spotlight, and last, the focus of this study is clarified, and the research questions stated.

2.1 Key concepts

In Iceland, the terms regarding parental involvement are not clearly defined in Compulsory School Act of 2008, The National Curriculum, or policy documents of the municipalities (Compulsory School Act, 91 C.F.R., 2008; Icelandic national curriculum guide for compulsory schools – with subjects areas, 2013; Reykjavíkurborg, 2015). One of the tasks during the research process was to interpret the terms used in the discourse about parents in education in Iceland and to choose which concepts to use.

It seems to be assumed that stakeholders have a similar understanding or the same ideas of what the home-school relationship means. This assumption can lead to misunderstandings in discussions about the issue. Another challenge, or maybe a consequence, is that translations of the Icelandic terms into English or Scandinavian languages differ widely. This might be partly because the Icelandic terms have no clear definitions, but also because of cultural differences, it is often difficult to find corresponding terms in other languages. Lastly the translations in official documents are sometimes inconsistent, and even different versions of the same documents are in use. This is, for example, the case with the 2008 Icelandic Compulsory School Act 2008, and it affects one of the key terms in the thesis, namely the term *supervisory teacher,* as will be explained later in this chapter.

The terms used in this study are defined in line with corresponding terms in English and Nordic languages (Dannesboe, Kryger, Palludan, &

Ravn, 2012; Deslandes, 2001; Epstein, 2011; Epstein, Sanders, Salinas, Jansorn, & Van Voorhis, 2002; Jeynes, 2011b; Kristoffersson, 2009; Nordahl, 2007). They also include slight reference to the usage in Icelandic research done on policy making in the field (Finnbogason, 2009; K. B. Guðmundsson, 2003; Óskarsdóttir, 2014).

Parental involvement (i. hlutdeild foreldra) is the broadest term, and it includes communication, cooperation and participation. The term is equivalent to the home-school relationship and parent-teacher relations. The term also refers to parents' opportunities to be involved in policy making and management of compulsory schools (Kristoffersson, 2009).

Cooperation (i. samstarf) refers to meaningful discussion or collaboration between parents and teachers or other school personnel about issues regarding a student (Deslandes, 2001; Nordahl, 2007).

Communication (i. samskipti) refers to contact and the exchange of information between parents and teachers or other school personnel, including contact via phone calls, e-mail and information systems (Epstein, 2011).

In this study, a distinction is made between communication and cooperation whenever possible, but these terms are often used interchangeably in discussions and writings both in Icelandic and other languages. Also, it is often taken for granted that communication or any contact between home and school automatically includes cooperation, but that is not necessarily true (Dannesboe et al., 2012). The terms communication and cooperation used here correspond to the first two levels in Nordahl's (2007) description of levels of home-school relations, in which where he defines the following three stages: 1) exchange of information; 2) meaningful discussion; and 3) shared responsibility for pedagogical decisions.

Parents' participation (i. þátttaka foreldra) describes how parents come to school to attend social events or take part in other school activities. Parents can also participate in students' education away from school, for example by assisting their children with homework and in policymaking and management at the school (K. B. Guðmundsson, 2003). Parents' participation can therefore refer to a rather inactive role as passive attendants at social events, or to active participation and shared responsibility of pedagogical decisions regarding their child, as described at the third level in Nordahl´s description of home-school relations.

Home-school relationship (i. tengsl heimila og skóla, samstarf heimila og skóla) refers to the connection between the two important institutions in

every child's life, the school and the home. *Samstarf heimila og skóla* is the term used in official Icelandic documents like the Compulsory School Act of 2008, the Icelandic national curriculum guide of 2013, and several school policy documents. Home-school relations or relationship is a term widely used in the literature (Dannesboe et al., 2012; Nordahl, 2007). The term home-school relationship is often used and fits well with the school-family-community partnership model introduced later in this chapter. In this doctoral project, I use the terms home-school relationship, home-school relations, and parental involvement almost interchangeably, but they bring slightly different connotations to the writings.

Parent-teacher relations (i. samband foreldra og kennara) is another broad term often used to comprise the home-school relationship. Parents and teachers, especially supervisory teachers, are key persons in the home-school relationship concerning children's education. Therefore, sometimes it might be more appropriate to refer to the people involved and talk about parent-teacher relations instead of home-school relations, since the core is the connection between individuals (Christiansen, 2010). This is partly done in Iceland when the common term *foreldrasamstarf* (parents' cooperation) is used.

Parents (i. foreldrar) are defined in the study as parents and other adults responsible for students. They are responsible for the legal custody of children, and they shall look out for the interests of their children at compulsory school age (see the Compulsory School Act, Article 3).

Parental satisfaction (i. ánægja foreldra) with the school their child attends refers to how content or satisfied parents are with service the school provides. It seemed to be a straightforward and rather simple term at the beginning of this research project, but that changed during the research process as discussed later.

Supervisory teacher (i. umsjónarkennari) has special obligations towards his or her students and parental involvement. The supervisory teacher's role is defined in Article 13, Pupil´s rights, in the Compulsory School Act of 2008:

> Each pupil shall have a supervisory teacher. Supervisory teachers shall follow closely their pupils' studies and their personal development, their condition and general welfare, they shall guide their pupils in their studies and school work, provide assistance and advice regarding personal matters and thus strengthen the cooperation between school and home. (Compulsory School Act, 91 C.F.R., 2008)

The terms "classroom teacher" and "homeroom teacher" have also been widely used in writings about pedagogy and education in Iceland (L. M.

Jónsdóttir, 2012), and the problem of inconsistency in translations is apparent, since in some translations of the Compulsory School Act, the supervisory teacher is called a "class teacher".[1]

The fundamental concepts have been defined here, but several definitions and interpretations are in use in the research field of parental involvement. This can be confusing, but can also have more profound consequences like indicating something that isn´t there – like findings this research project uncovered and will be described later. This diversity of usage of concepts can be seen in discussions and writings, for example within Nordic and European networks in the research field (European Network About Parents in Education (ERNAPE); Families Institutions and Communities in Educational Contexts (FICEC/NORNAPE)).

2.2 Different perspectives on home-school relations

The relationship between compulsory schools and the communities in which they are situated is growing in the 21st century (B. Guðmundsson, 2000; Hargreaves, 2000; Óskarsdóttir, 2014). Currently, family involvement programmes often go beyond linking children´s home and classroom learning experiences to include the communities where the families live, according to research in the USA (Coleman, 2013; Sanders, 2007). School children visiting workplaces or homes for older adults in the neighbourhood, and local artists visiting classes, are also examples of growing relations, both in Europe and overseas. Moreover, the integration of the community nearby into the relationship is meant to strengthen home-school relations (Deslandes, 2001; Epstein et al., 2002; Óskarsdóttir, 2014).

A genuine home-school partnership is based on mutual trust, common goals and two-way communication (Deslandes, 2001). In current international research on home-school relationships, there are two main approaches, both contributing to an improvement of home-school

[1] The term s*upervisory teacher* is used in accordance with the official translation of the Compulsory School Act, at the time when the first paper was published in 2012. This translation is still used, for example in UNESCO´s database, see http://planipolis.iiep.unesco.org/upload/Iceland/Iceland_Compulsory_School_Act_2008.pdf. It is also the term used in the National Curriculum translated in 2012. The term "class teacher" is used in the translation published now on the website of The Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, see http://eng.menntamalaraduneyti.is/media/law-and-regulations/Compulsory-School-Act-No.-91-2008.pdf. Retrieved 21st of September 2017 from http://eng.menntamalaraduneyti.is/Acts

relations. The first approach focuses on different forms of parental involvement, emphasizes the benefits of strong structured relations and the schools' guiding role in children's upbringing, and results in positive influences on student achievement (Coleman, 2013; Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003). The second approach emphasises that families have unequal preconditions for fruitful cooperation and addresses some of the obstacles for improving home-school relations. The second approach brings forth a more critical sociological perspective, and some question if the relationship results in schools´ interference in families' private lives (Bæck, 2005, 2009; Dannesboe et al., 2012; Kryger, 2012, 2015; Palludan, 2012).

2.3 Bronfenbrenner´s ecological systems theory

The Ecological systems theory, developed by Bronfenbrenner (1979), can be useful in approaching the research topic. It is a system theory that describes the relationship between the individual and the environment. The theory has been widely used in educational research and provides a basis for several models describing the family-school-community partnership (Epstein, 2001).

In 1979, Bronfenbrenner (1917-2005), an American developmental psychologist, published a book about his ecological systems theory, describing how individuals' development is affected by their social relationships and the world around them (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The theory was influential in changing perspectives in developmental psychology by calling attention to many societal and environmental influences on child development (Jeynes, 2011a).

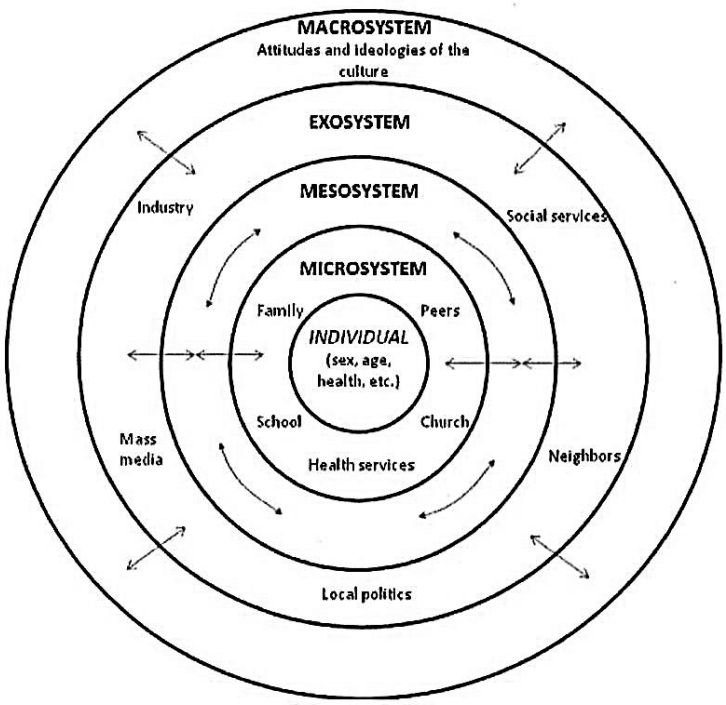

Figure 2 Bronfenbrenner´s ecological systems theory

Ecological systems theory identifies four environmental systems with which an individual interacts; the microsystem, the mesosystem, the exosystem and the macrosystem, see Figure 2 (Hchokr, 2012).

Children live and mature in many microsystems such as at home and in school, and these systems are connected in the mesosystem, for example by mail and meetings. The mesosystem, in turn, is a part of the exosystem that includes systems of institutions such as the social and school system. Individuals are affected by exosystem; for example, students are affected by the school system, but they have no direct influence on it themselves. Finally, all these systems are surrounded by the macrosystem of culture, traditions, customs, rights and duties in society. In later versions, Bronfenbrenner added the chronosystem to his theory to acknowledge that, like physical ecologies, human ecologies change over time (built on Coleman, 2013; Martínes Gonzáles, 2001; Óskarsdóttir, 2012).

Bronfenbrenner's theory has been used in educational studies on parental involvement at home and in school (Coleman, 2013; Epstein, 2001; Seginer, 2006), on family education (Martínes Gonzáles, 2001), on different models and programmes of cooperation between home and school

(Deslandes, 2001), and as a lens for understanding how children´s development and education can be supported at all levels of society (Coleman, 2013), to name a few research areas that concern parental involvement.

An Icelandic research on borders between school levels described how school children moved between pre-school to compulsory school and then to secondary school, and referred to Bronfenbrenner´s theory in explaining influential factors (Óskarsdóttir, 2012). Findings showed that the contact between school levels could be improved, and even though similarities in school structures and practices were many, the receiving school level was dominant, and information was often lacking about the previous school level.

A review of research on parents´ educational involvement, employing Bronfenbrenner´s ecological theory, shows that

> although family-based and school-based involvement are positively related to educational outcomes, their examination in the ecological framework prompts consideration of additional aspects of the micro- and mesosystems and their embeddedness in four exosystemic aspects (parents´ networks and workplace, neighbourhood, and educational policy) and two macrosystemic types (immigrant and ethnic groups) (Seginer, 2006, p. 1).

The positive effects of parents' participation in their children's education should be interpreted with regard to social circumstances, families´ premises and educational policy, is Seginer´s (2006) conclusion; a necessary reminder of all the interrelated factors that are parts of the picture.

Bronfenbrenner´s theory describes a schoolchild´s position in society. I used the theory to form the three models used in the regression analysis on what influences teenagers' opinions of parental involvement and to interpret the findings (see Paper III); the theory also provided a basis for understanding findings of the doctoral project in general.

2.4 Epstein's school-family-community partnership model

Coleman´s (2013) opinion is that the *school-family-community partnership model* by Joyce Levy Epstein and her colleagues best reflects a contemporary comprehensive approach to family involvement.

As the title *school-family-community partnership model* suggests, three "overlapping spheres of influence" form the core of the model and point out the importance of the family (one sphere), the school (a second sphere), and the community (a third sphere) working together to support

children´s development and education (Coleman, 2013; Epstein, 2011), see Figure 3. “The theory of overlapping spheres of influence integrates and extends ecological, educational, psychological, and sociological theories and perspectives on social organisation and relationships”, states Epstein, who refers to Bronfenbrenner, amongst other scholars (Epstein, 2001, p. 44).

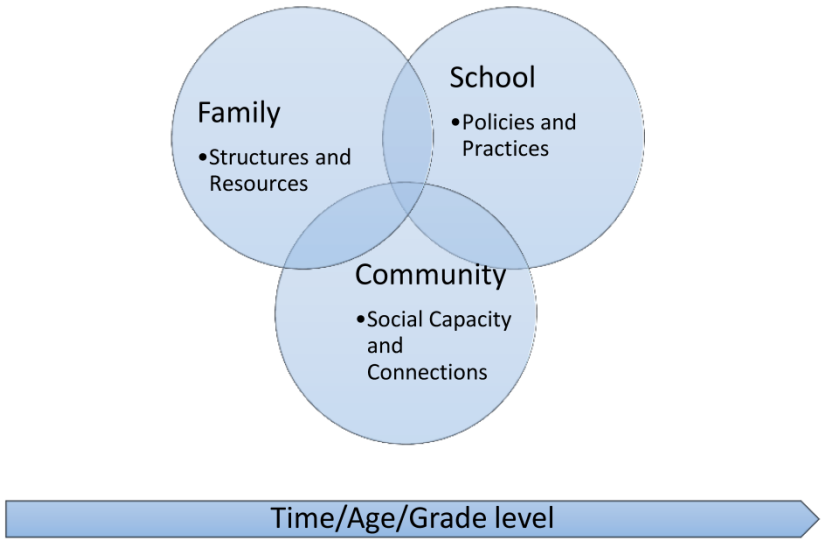

Figure 3 Epstein´s School-family-community partnership model (adapted from Coleman, 2013, p. 24)

Epstein (2011) states that a maximum overlap among these three spheres is reached when there is a true partnership that reflects frequent school-family-community communication and a program that is responsive to the needs of all families and children. In contrast, she says, the spheres minimally overlap when families, schools, and communities operate with very little communication and mutual planning.

The depiction of the model in Figure 3 builds on Coleman (2013, p. 24) and shows a slightly simplified version of the external structure of the model as described by Epstein. That model also has an internal structure only containing the spheres of family and school (Epstein, 2011, p. 32). The time axis is added in Figure 3 to Coleman’s depiction, as it is an essential factor in Epstein’s model of the external structure and symbolises a history line for students, families and schools. The time axis shows that there will be a “typical,” or expected, pattern of separation or overlap of the spheres at different times, based on the child’s age, the level of school and the

historical time. Until now, “the greatest overlap of family and school spheres for most children has occurred during the preschool and early elementary grades,” says Epstein (2011, p. 33), but the overlap also varies due to different philosophies, policies, practices and pressures of parents, teachers or both.

There have been several studies with different perspectives on programmes used by schools within the National Network of Partnership Schools (NNPS), a network of schools that build their programmes of home-school relationship based on Epstein´s model (National Network of Partnership Schools, n.d.). Findings indicate positive results of using NNPS parental involvement programmes to affect students at risk in a positive way, to work against racism and discrimination in schools with a diverse student group, and how parents’ liaisons can help to bridge the home-school gap (Sanders, 1996, 2008; Sanders & Lewis, 2005).

Epstein and her colleagues, cooperating with the NNPS, have developed a version of the programme for middle and high schools so "schools can create programmes that enable all parents to remain engaged with their teens and their schools” (Epstein, 2007, p. 19). The time axis of the model is a good reminder that it is important to look for changes in partnership and parental involvement during the years students spend in compulsory school.

Epstein’s model has been used in Nordic research, and it has influenced the official policy in the Nordic countries, as described in next section (Christiansen, 2010; Dannesboe et al., 2012; Nordahl, 2007). A study of teacher competencies and parental cooperation in Norway used the model for planning and analysing data from interviews with 16 pairs of parents and teachers in two primary schools (Westergård, 2013). The findings revealed that school leaders must appreciate parental cooperation and recognize their responsibility to build the necessary competence in the school system by creating standards and routines. Moreover, they must give teachers a space to build their professional and personal competencies to use in effective parental cooperation. Westergård argues that focus on building teachers’ competencies is needed to prevent disillusionment amongst parents. A project in a compulsory school in Akureyri in Northern Iceland followed Epstein’s model for developing the school's cooperation with families (Auðunsdóttir, 2007). An evaluation showed that the model was useful; teachers and parents were pleased with the organisation of the cooperation and the effects of the developmental project. The main conclusion was that these clearly positive results indicate that Epstein´s model would be useful for other Icelandic compulsory schools.

2.5 Perspectives on partnership models

Epstein's *school-family-community partnership model* aims to explain the relationship between those involved and is widely used in developmental work. However, Epstein´s model and other models of a similar kind have received their share of criticism from different perspectives.

One critical perspective touches upon responsibility and professionalism. According to Epstein´s model for enhancing parental involvement, school professionals are responsible for initiating and facilitating two-way or even three-way communication. This view on who is responsible is common and revealed in many writings about parental involvement (Christiansen, 2010; Nordahl, 2007). The same view of responsibility is also clear in the policy documents like the Icelandic Compulsory School Act of 2008 and the Icelandic national curriculum guide for compulsory schools from 2013, and it is also included in a report on the vision for the future in compulsory schools until 2020, set forth by unions of teachers and school leaders and the Icelandic Association of Local Authorities (Félag grunnskólakennara, Samband íslenskra sveitarfélaga, & Skólastjórafélag Íslands, 2007). To put the responsibility for parental involvement solely with the school professionals can be an attempt to counter the fact that many middle school and high school teachers report that the only time they contact families is when students are in trouble (Epstein, 2007; Nordahl, 2007). That school professionals bear the responsibility for initiating and facilitating the home-school relationship is regarded as a part of teachers' professionalism and professional duties (Christiansen, 2007, 2010; Guðjónsdóttir, Guðmundsdóttir, Ívarsdóttir, & Þórarinsson, 2005; Hargreaves, 2000). New theories regarding professionalism question this view and stress the importance of teamwork in school communities, where students and parents are active in decision-making along with school personnel. Cooperating with parents in this fashion promotes respect for teachers as professionals (Kristinsson, 2013; Þorsteinsson, 2003).

Another critical perspective is that parental involvement programmes are not responsive enough and don´t consider the differences and circumstances in each school, community, parent and student groups, which form the prerequisite for cooperation. In other words, the programmes are a bit rigid and function as though "one size fits all". Programmes should incorporate subtler components to maximize the efficacy of these initiatives, concludes Jeynes (2011a) after doing a meta-analysis on research findings about home-school relationships and academic success. He claims that parental involvement is more complicated

and broader than a set of deliberate, overt actions such as helping students with their homework or participating in social activities. He criticises the traditional image of good home-school cooperation, and describes that the findings from the meta-analysis indicate that the most powerful aspects of parental involvement are frequently subtle, such as maintaining high expectations of one's children, communicating with children, and parental style (Jeynes, 2005). An increasing body of research suggests that the key qualities for fostering parental involvement in schools may also be subtle, Jeynes says, and "whether teachers, principals, and school staff are loving, encouraging, and supportive to parents may be more important than the specific guidelines and tutelage they offer to parents" (Jeynes, 2011b, p. 10-11).

In this doctoral project, I used Epstein´s school-family-community partnership model as a frame of reference. I compared some findings using the structure of the model, but the critical perspectives also proved to be helpful in interpreting the findings.

2.6 Social and cultural factors

School personnel have contact with families of all students and experience the influences of their diverse economic, social and cultural backgrounds, i.e. the different background factors that affect children´s well-being and learning outcomes as well as the home-school relations. These factors can be referred to as the economic, social and cultural capital the families possess.

Several scholars have defined social capital, but in writings about its meaning in schools, Catts refers to Bourdieu: "social capital is found in social networks and connections, and in contacts and group membership that potentially support access to valued resources" (Bourdieu in Catts, 2009, p. 39). Social capital can therefore explain why it is easier for middle-class parents and teachers to connect and understand each other, easier than for teachers and parents of a different backgrounds. Cultural capital refers to a person's education and manners, therefore, for example, parents with higher education possess more cultural capital than do parents with only compulsory education. Social and cultural capital can present themselves in different forms depending on the field. These types of capital can be converted into some form of economic capital, although they are not as easily accessible as economic capital (e.g. money, properties) (Bourdieu, 2007). Catts (2009) writes about the inter-related roles of cultural and social capital within schools, and says that Bourdieu

identified both the strong dependency of educational outcomes on inherited cultural capital, and that there is a complex relationship between inherited cultural capital and social capital.

An ethnographic study in Denmark explored the home-school relationship with regard to differences in social and cultural capital (Palludan, 2012). Findings showed that parents tend to adapt to the social and cultural organization of home-school relationship without questioning it or trying to influence it. This adaption is easier for couples than for single parents, and easier for parents living in a middle-class neighbourhood rather than elsewhere.

In a mixed-method study in Norway, Bæck (2009) examines how lower-secondary school parents experience the interaction with teachers and school, if they feel welcome, and if so, if they feel that they can influence what goes on in school. Bæck uses Bourdieu´s concept of social field, where different actors fight to achieve or maintain power, and argues that the school arena can be regarded as such a social field. Bæck finds that even though most parents feel welcome in school and are satisfied with the home-school cooperation in many ways, there are still aspects of this relationship that are problematic, and the relationship is often experienced as distant. Bæck relates this to power-dynamics and says, “The failure to include parents in the central discussions that take place in the school setting disregards parents as equal partners in the home-school relation” (Bæck, 2009, p. 349). The main conclusion is that the teachers are in power in this social field called school.

In this project on parental involvement, it is necessary to take into consideration the cultural and social factors that influence the home-school relations, and the school as a social field. To sum up, research has shown that parents’ social background has definite effects on home-school relationships; parents with more formal education are more ready to participate in home-school cooperation than are those with less education (Bæck, 2005, 2009; Epstein, 2011; Epstein et al., 2002; Lareau, 2000). Parents tend to adapt to the social and cultural organization of school (Palludan, 2012). Middle-class parents find the cooperation to be easier than do working class parents, and the latter feel more detached from school, which is a hinderance to active participation, according to Lareau (2000). However, like many other social variables, class effects vary in research findings (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997).

2.7 The Nordic view

It is a common belief that Iceland is a society of educational equity. This is supported, for example, by analysis of results from Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) tests, which show that the differences in outcomes between schools are the smallest in all the participating countries (Ólafsson & Halldórsson, 2017). In Iceland, equity in education is very often associated with influences from Nordic countries. Therefore, it is of interest to find if parental involvement can be included in the Nordic point of view in education.

Pasi Sahlberg (2014) has described the emphasis on equity and quality in educational systems and suggested that it could be called the Nordic point of view, since the Nordic countries in general have emphasised these values. His writings and lectures about changes in education, policies and implications in practice have received much attention, and he is now counselling the city of Reykjavík on new school policy (Samráðsvettvangur um menntastefnu, 2017). His formation of the Nordic view, or the Nordic model of education, is compelling for the research field of parental involvement (Sahlberg, 2011, 2014, 2015). Sahlberg draws upon extensive international work and his experience as an "insider" in his work on Finnish lessons, now *Finnish lessons 2.0* (2015), in which he describes how the Finnish strategy and tactics differ from those of the global educational reform movement, North American reforms in particular.

In his writings about the global educational reform movement (GERM), Sahlberg (2011) draws attention to six main elements: standardization of and in education, increased focus on literacy and numeracy, teaching for predetermined results, transfer of innovation from corporate to the educational world, test-based accountability policies for schools, and increased control of schools. These indicators are visible in Iceland, for example, as an emerging interest for private schools, a heavy press debate about bad PISA results, and the last White Paper on educational reform (Mennta- og menningarmálaráðuneytið, 2014), a policy document by the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, which described the goals of improving literacy scores and diminishing dropout rates in higher secondary schools.

On the other hand, the Nordic view is also visible in the educational debate and in policy documents that explicitly point in the Nordic direction, including the report on the vision for the future in compulsory schools until 2020, set forth by the teachers' and school leaders' unions and the Icelandic Association of Local Authorities (Félag grunnskólakennara et al., 2007). The

Nordic view, emphasizing equity and quality, is eminent in the yearly plan set forth by local school authorities like in Reykjavík, for example, but one can also see the tendency of increased control in defining a myriad of indicators to evaluate school practices (Reykjavíkurborg, 2015).

A discussion of the Nordic view and Sahlberg's perspective on school development is vital for the analysis of parents' satisfaction about the school their child attends, and parents' view on their opportunities to influence that school.

2.8 Home-school relations in the Nordic countries

The Nordic countries have long traditions of home-school cooperation. The Icelandic compulsory school system is in many ways like systems in the other Nordic countries, but of course they all have their own national traits. Finland has chosen a developmental path a bit different from the other Nordic countries, characterised, for example, by the feature of teaching and learning with high confidence in teachers and principals as professionals (Sahlberg, 2015). Nonetheless, the prominent traits in the development of parental involvement in compulsory schools are in many ways similar in all the Nordic countries. A short, general description of home-school relationships in the Nordic countries would be that the relationships are systemic and regular; emphasis is on parent-teacher conferences (e.g. twice each school year for 15-20 minutes), and information flows mainly one-way to families from the supervisory teachers who bear the primary responsibility for initiating and sustaining contact with students' families.

Legislation and policy documents emphasise the importance of home-school cooperation, and steps have been taken in recent years to give parents a more significant position in the schools (Bæck, 2009; Kristoffersson, 2009; Risku, Bjork, & Browne-Ferrigno, 2012). Analysis of the development of home-school relations in Sweden showed that "the school has a responsibility for students' knowledge and social development that require real functioned collaboration between school and home, a need that is clearly stated in national curriculum documents" (Kristoffersson, Gu, & Zhang, 2013, p. 191).

In Denmark in the last 30-40 years, several political campaigns, programmes and pedagogical measures have emerged to strengthen the home-school relationship (Dannesboe et al., 2012). These actions have been grounded in the rhetoric that this is in the child's best interest, and that all cooperation between home and school is good. Dannesboe, Kryger, Palludan and Ravn (2012) are critical of "the more, the better" rhetoric and

argue that it is time to shift focus and pay attention to the quality of the home-school relationship. They focus on students and parents and the social significance of the home-school relationship in everyday life, with a particular interest in the impact of the prevailing practices of cooperation. They find the practices surprisingly similar from one school to another, and describe them as follows:

> The basic elements are to be found in very different schools, from early childhood to graduation. The standardized basic elements are one or two home-school conferences per year, where parents and teachers - and sometimes students - talk about the student, and one or two common parent meetings. Added to this are some letters with information, communication through information systems on the Internet, individual development plans and various social events (Dannesboe et al., 2012, p. 9).

The features of cooperation in Norway are described in a similar way. Direct contact between teachers and parents is limited to participation in one common parent meeting and one parent-teacher conference for 30 minutes per semester (Nordahl, 2007). The child is normally present during the conferences. In Nordahl's study, 53% of the parents say they have had contact with teachers by telephone; Nordahl points out that only half of the Norwegian parent group has had a direct conversation with teachers where only adults were present, restricting possibilities for real dialogues. Most teachers interviewed in this research report that they seek contact with parents only when needed, often just when something negative has happened at school. This can easily have negative consequences for the relationship between teachers and parents. Nordahl (2007) finds it somewhat noteworthy and unfortunate that schools and teachers do not focus more on cooperating with parents. He states that there is a long distance between the ideal and the reality in this matter.

A Finnish study of home-school collaboration shows a different kind of deficit in the cooperation. The study relied on questionnaires and interviews with teachers, school leaders, parents, and 10-11 year-old pupils, in four compulsory schools. The results showed that the basic structures necessary to enable the children's academic success were well established, but support for their healthy growth and development was only partially developed, despite good intentions. The school personnel intended to promote the children's learning and healthy development, but mutual collaboration between home and school was neither goal-orientated nor

systematically implemented in schools (Sormunen, Tossavainen, & Turunen, 2011).

The findings above bring attention to the fact that good intentions are not always fulfilled, and trying to understand what hinders is enlightening. A comparative study of pupil experience of secondary schooling in England, France and Denmark from 1998 to 2001 showed that the socio-cultural context in which learning takes place has a profound effect on the student, the class and the school environment including the relationship between the school and the home (Ravn, 2002). Contact with parents was a teacher responsibility in Denmark. In England, the group tutor was responsible for making the initial contact with parents. In France, the professor, principal or administration was responsible for contact with parents. Ravn (2002) also points out that schools in these countries have very different perspectives on the parent's role. School professionals in Denmark view parents as partners and discuss the curriculum and school life in class with them. In England, the school personnel see parents more as fund raisers and consumers. In France, parents had no formal relations with school personnel to enable the parents to control their children as pupils. The findings in Ravn´s study underline how communities condition the home-school relationship.

Rasmussen (2004) builds on interviews with teachers in his research on educational systems and the conditions that frame schoolwork and possibilities schools have in modern times. His findings show that teachers have many duties other than teaching and the upbringing of their students, and they find the most important of all those duties to be cooperation with parents. "But teachers' opinion of parents is ambivalent: Parents are either a premise or a barrier to successful teaching. These opinions do not exclude one another, but bring forth speculations on the needs for a well-functioning cooperation with parents" (Rasmussen, 2004, p. 156). On the one hand, Rasmussen says, teachers view parents as co-workers or partners. On the other hand, they see parents as consumers or users of schools. This contradiction often leads the teachers to reflect on borders, what teachers find to be right and just towards parents and what they find unacceptable for themselves. At the same time, teachers wish to establish the relationship in such a way that parents support and assist them in their work (Rasmussen, 2004). In other words, teachers reflect on where to draw the line between them and the parents in a good relationship. Thus, Rasmussen´s perspective can be helpful to interpret the relationships between teachers and parents, especially when the relations are rigid or problematic.

Relating with parents can sometimes be difficult, demanding and stressful, seen from teachers' point of view, and can therefore affect

teachers' understanding and experiences of their profession (Bæck, 2015). This was revealed in research interviewing supervisory teachers from lower-secondary schools in Norway. They also said that this part of teachers' job is often deprioritized due to lack of time and resources, even though they find parental involvement and home-school cooperation to be important. The researcher concludes that it is necessary to institutionalise this part of schools' work at the level of school leaders. "The responsibility should rest firmly on the school leaders who should construct and implement strategies and action plans for how the relation between school, teacher and parent should be" (Bæck, 2015, p. 44). These findings are amongst other showing that the responsibility for home-school relations and the work needed for cultivating cooperation too often rests on supervisory teachers only. It also brings the spotlight on leaders' responsibility in this matter.

Another Norwegian study showed that teachers often underestimate parents' dissatisfaction with school; the dissatisfaction has to do with school factors as well as the parent-teacher relationship (Westergård, 2007). The study included 124 teachers and 888 parents from 20 schools and 95 classes in nine municipalities. The overall picture was that teachers thought that fewer parents were disillusioned than was the case. Multiple regression analysis revealed that 42% of the variance in teachers' perceptions of parental disillusionment was explained by classroom variables or teacher pressure variables. Westergård concludes that attempts to understand problems in home-school relations should focus at least as much on aspects of classroom and school life as on the real interactions between teachers and parents.

Westergård (2013) took a closer look at parent-teacher relations and referred to Epstein's model of partnership. The results revealed that 10 of the 16 pairs of parents and teachers managed to establish effective cooperation, but six pairs did not. The interviews also revealed a need for competence-building activities at various levels in schools. Westergård, like Bæck, draws attention to school leaders' role and responsibility in building collective competence at the school level by forming routines and school standards for cooperation with parents. Secondly, Westergård brings forth the need for colleagues' collective competence in cooperating with parents. And thirdly, she says, "each teacher's individual competence in cooperating with parents is an important factor regarding parental cooperation" (Westergård, 2013, p. 91).

The studies presented in this section underline the various relations between the adults in a home-school relationship, and reflect that home-school relations are diverse and sometimes demanding as seen from teachers' point of view. The parents' side is presented later in this chapter.

2.9 The Icelandic context

In Iceland, the majority of compulsory schools (age levels six to 16) is run by local authorities, and all compulsory schools are directed by laws and regulations that frame the work done there and the different roles partners play.

Parents' legal rights are stated in The Compulsory School Act no. 91, that took effect in 2008. One of the main objectives in Article 2 concerns home-school relationship: "The compulsory school shall encourage good cooperation between the school and the home, with the objective of ensuring successful school operation, general welfare and safety for pupils". The policy on joint responsibility of home and school in upbringing and education of children is reinforced in The Icelandic National Curriculum Guide for Compulsory Schools General Section from 2011 (Icelandic national curriculum guide for compulsory schools – With Subject Areas, 2013). According to the Compulsory School Act and the National Curriculum, parents have the right to choose a compulsory school for their children in accordance with the regulation of the municipality and to have special needs of their children met at that school. They also have the right to information about school activities and their children's education.

Every school district has a school board for all the compulsory schools in the municipality. This arrangement came into effect with The Compulsory School Act in 1974, and for the next two decades municipal authorities shared responsibilities with the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture. With the Compulsory School Act from 1995, all responsibilities for the compulsory schools were given to municipal governance. The school board in each district forms the policy, but all major decisions are made by city councils or councils of each municipality. Headmasters, teachers and parents, or parents´ associations in bigger municipalities, elect one representative each to take part in the school board meetings, but without voting rights (see Article No. 6 in The Compulsory School Act, 2008).

Parents' opportunities to influence school practices increased with the Compulsory School Act from 2008; Article 8 states that every compulsory school in Iceland is now required to have its own School Council with two parent representatives:

> The School Council participates in policy making for the school and in devising and developing the school culture. The School Council shall discuss the school curriculum guide, annual operational schedule, financial plan and other plans regarding school activities. The School Council shall have a saying regarding

> any plans for major changes to school operations and activities before a final decision is made thereof. The School Council shall monitor security, conditions and general well-being of pupils. (Compulsory School Act, 91 C.F.R., 2008)

Every compulsory school also has its Parents' Council, an independent organisation for parents of all students. The role of the Parents' Council is defined in Article 9 of the Compulsory School Act: "to support school activities, encourage pupils' welfare and promote the relations between school and home".

Articles 8 and 9 together grant parents significant opportunities to influence their children's schools. New legislation and associated regulations are indicative of the educational policy, which aims to increase parents' impact and responsibility. Therefore, both political and pedagogical arguments support the emphasis on the role of parents and their influence within Icelandic compulsory schools (Finnbogason, 2009). It seems that the development has been rather similar in the neighbouring countries during the last decades. It has not been unproblematic. For example, a Norwegian study showed that parent representatives on school boards and school councils face complicated tasks, since parents are never a homogenous group (Bæck, 2009). In a Swedish study about parental involvement through local school boards, Kristoffersson (2009) found that parental influence has increased in recent years, but she questions if it has had a positive effect on local democracy as intended.

Home-school relations are part of school culture, and teachers are in a pivotal position to develop these relations–just as they hold the key to many other aspects of school development (K. Jónsdóttir, 2005). The special role of the supervisory teacher was described in the first section of this chapter as one of the key concepts, and its importance is somewhat similar in all the Nordic countries.

In Iceland, the supervisory teacher serves as a link between school and home, and as students' special guardian and advisor. This role is well known and verified in different ways in Icelandic society. His or her status is, for example, found on the website for Ombudsman for Children, where it is stated that the supervisory teacher should always be the first person to be consulted when students encounter some kind of problem that affects their studies and well-being at school (Ombudsman for children, n.d.). When students in Icelandic schools use the term *my teacher,* it most often refers to the supervisory teacher and shows more than anything the importance of this role within every school system.

An Icelandic study by Sigurgeirsson and Kaldalóns (2006) in compulsory schools in Reykjavík shows that in schools where teachers had positive attitudes towards parental involvement, disciplinary problems were fewer than in schools where home-school relations were weaker. There were frequent invitations to encourage parents to get involved; great emphasis was on informing parents with newsletters and emails, and the focus was on mediating positive results, successes and victories. Even though one cannot state that there is a causality, the findings reveal that the personnel in the "problem-free" schools managed to blend warmth and openness into their organised cooperation with parents, and this correlated with fewer disciplinary problems.

These findings underpin the value of good home-school relationships, both the structured and honest communication as emphasized by Epstein, and the supportive and warm attitudes highlighted by Jeynes, as described earlier in this chapter. Therefore, teachers as professionals should support and encourage parents in their parental roles. Supervisory teachers play a vital role in this context as the main link between the home and the school (Jeynes, 2011b).

2.10 Families

Improvements in parents' rights and opportunities to influence compulsory schools are prominent in the Compulsory School Act no. 91 from 2008, as described before. This can be interpreted as reflecting increased parents' empowerment in recent years. The concept of empowerment means that every individual is a specialist in his or her own needs, has authority in collaboration with those who provide service to him or her, and the service shall be grounded in equity and mutual respect (Sigurjónsdóttir, 2006). This definition fits well regarding parents of school children. The empowerment of parents in their collaboration with the schools is important since it is considered to have a favourable impact on improving the position their children have in their learning at school (Aðalbjarnardóttir, 2007; Olsen & Fuller, 2008; Sæmundsdóttir & Karvelsdóttir, 2008).

It is a common belief in Iceland that parents contribute to their children's success in compulsory school primarily by participating in school-related activities and assisting with homework. In Norway the curriculum envisions parents as partners, and consequently they must be taken seriously (Westergård, 2013). Parents and their participation do matter; however, how this participation should be supported and organised is not as clear. Both parents' opinions and wishes about the home-school

relationship and their participation in school activities differ. Parental influence in schools has increased (Bæck, 2009; Kristoffersson, 2009), but conflicting interests mark modern life. Marinósson (2002) remarked that it could come in handy for busy parents if schools were to expect only small interventions on their behalf.

Educational research has firmly established that parental involvement in schools has a positive impact on achievement and adjustment (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003; Hattie, 2009; Jeynes, 2005, 2011a). However, parents' support of their children comes in various shapes and sizes. Their involvement in schools is strongly influenced by the family's social class, including economic status, education level of the mother and psycho-social health, single parent status, and, to a lesser degree, ethnicity (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003).

Parents with formal education are more apt to take part in home-school cooperation than those with less education (Bæck, 2009). Also, parents with more capital and capacity, who have the experience of success in school and highly value education, tend to be better able to tackle home-school relationships (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003). Parents with higher education are often more likely to acknowledge that parental support is essential in education. Moreover, parents with a high socio-economic status (SES) are also likely to appreciate the importance of a good education in terms of living a successful adult life, but "ascertaining the causal relationship between parental involvement and SES is a challenging one" (Jeynes, 2011a, p. 71).

In a review of the impact of parental involvement, parental support and family education on pupil achievement and adjustment, Desforges and Abouchaar highlight the following:

> The most important finding from the point of view of this review is that parental involvement in the form of 'at-home good parenting' has a significant positive effect on children's achievement and adjustment even after all other factors shaping attainment have been taken out of the equation. In the primary age range the impact caused by different levels of parental involvement is much bigger than differences associated with variations in the quality of schools. The scale of the impact is evident across all social classes and all ethnic groups (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003, p. 4-5).

In a new study, Bæck (2017) focuses on academic socialisation as a critical component for understanding parents' influence on children´s schooling, as a growing body of research has put forward academic or

educational socialisation as being more important than other forms of parental involvement. “Academic socialisation is what takes place when parents talk to their young ones about the importance of education and about the importance of performing well in school” (Bæck, 2017, p. 125). Bæck concludes that general encouragement to get parents involved in school, may imply increased parental involvement for educated, middle-class parents.

Sociological perspectives also include factors such as gender, class and ethnicity and show how these are related to child-rearing practices, views on academic performance and home-school relations. Studies with these perspectives do not aim to identify the ideal home-school relationship or give the recipe for a perfect relationship. They focus on revealing the social preconditions and circumstances that support or hinder parents’ involvement in their children’s education. Nowadays, Danish research in the field is more in line with this focus, according to Dannesboe, Kryger, Palludan and Ravn (2012). In the research project “Home-school collaboration as a cultural truism–a multi-sited ethnographic study” (d. Skole-hjem-samarbejde som kulturel selvfølgelighed—en multi-sited etnografisk afdækning), the aim is not to identify a defective or ideal collaboration. Rather, it is to give research-based insights into children’s and families’ everyday lives and contribute to discussions in the field without pointing to one correct direction.

Ravn (in Dannesboe et al., 2012) writes about the compensatory rationale as the view of a particular group of parents as being unable to socialize their own children. She mentions, as an example of this rationale, that in Denmark in the year 2010, some millions were allocated to strengthen home-school cooperation with immigrant parents. The danger of school leaders and teachers patronizing parents is apparent despite all good intentions and could explain why some parents turn away from school when their children get older.

Svanbjörnsdóttir (2007) researched whether Icelandic parents of children aged 4-12 years wanted support in their parental role. Almost 70% of respondents said they would like support, but parents who considered themselves well-competent to raise a child wished for less support than did others. One must wonder about the 30% who do not want support and what differentiates them from the parent group in general.

Active parental involvement in school life was seen as a key to children’s success in a study of Finnish parents’ views on responsibility in the home-school relations (Böök & Perälä-Littunen, 2014). The same study showed

that in some discourse, teachers and parents were seen as polar opposites, e.g. teachers as experts – parents as laymen. These findings are in line with Rasmussen´s findings described earlier, stating that teachers' opinions of parents are ambivalent; parents are either a premise or a barrier to successful teaching. It is also important to note that a barrier to parental involvement may occur if teachers do not recognise the social and cultural preconditions that affect participation.

Academic socialisation of children is essential, and educated middle-class parents possess most of the capital parents need to handle that task (Bæck, 2017). It is an advantage for some children that school personnel and middle-class parents communicate easily, having similar capital in their backpacks. But compulsory schools are for every child, so people belonging to other classes or subcultures can be in a vulnerable situation when communicating and cooperating with the schools their children attend.

2.11 The changes when students become teenagers

Cultural pressure on parents to act in the best interests of the child is stronger in present-day society than it was for some decades ago. Ultimately, this means that rather than being accepted as they are, children have become the target of all kinds of educative efforts (Böök & Perälä-Littunen, 2014). In a new study about the growing institutionalization of children's lives, Kryger (2015) finds that there has been an increased adult monitoring of children because of increased coordination or amalgamation of the adults they meet at home (parents) and school (teachers).

Parental responsibility is a topic much discussed in contemporary Finnish society. Böök and Perälä-Littunen (2008) say that responsibility seems to be a key question when drawing a generational line between adults and children, and a key concept in policy-making and public debate about the lives of children and parents. If this metaphor is taken further, one can say that teenagers dance on the line between child life and adult life, developing ideas about what they want and trying to have a say by expressing their opinions. Vinterek (2006) has analysed school practices in Sweden and how they have been influenced by the concept of individualized learning, and developed through several phases since the 1960s. She states that students today are expected to take more individual responsibility and can therefore have more influence on their own learning, but the responsibility has partly been moved from the school to the students and their parents, thereby sometimes accentuating the vulnerability of students who lack resources. Bæck's (2017) conclusions

point in the same direction; she says that changes in learning and teaching methods seem to give certain advantages to students who have good preconditions for learning and for students who can manage well on their own. “This pedagogical model corresponds best to the parenting styles of middle-class parents, and in this way, the national curriculum of Norway has given children of middle-class parents (even) more advantages in school” (Bæck, 2017, p. 129).

These political and pedagogical changes affect teenage students more than the younger ones in compulsory schools, since teens are expected, by all adults, to be able to take on more responsibility in their lives. For teenagers who do not have much support in their families, it is often harder to live up to those expectancies. Therefore, as Bæck and Vinterek argued, the individualised learning pedagogy can in praxis turn against its good intentions and increase negative experiences of school for some teenagers.

Several studies have shown that parents often cease participation in their children’s lives as the children become teenagers. The extent of parental involvement diminishes as the child grows older. This affects teenagers’ lives in many different and sometimes unfortunate ways, says Nordahl (2007). His comparison of parents’ experiences of cooperation with schools shows that it also becomes qualitatively worse as schoolchildren become older. Parents receive less information, have fewer dialogues with teachers, and their influence and knowledge of curriculum and textbooks becomes weaker. Nordahl reports that this may be an expression of the schools and the teenagers´ teachers becoming more autonomous as the students grow older, and are less influenced by parents. Yet students’ influences do not seem to increase significantly.

The expectations for better academic achievement are all around in modern societies and put pressure on teenagers as well as adults. Hattie (2012) points out that it is necessary to distinguish between factors in achievement that can be changed and those that cannot, and between factors that can be easily changed and those that demand very complicated efforts. A longitudinal study by Gregory and Weinstein (2004) on home-school relationships as predictors for growth in achievement in math in eighth through twelfth grade showed, contrary to what the researchers expected, that teachers were not able to compensate for parents, even during a developmental stage when adolescents draw on adult support outside of the home. “Perhaps if adolescents do not experience fundamental relationship qualities with parents, they become disaffected from adults in general and disregard resources offered by other adults”

(Gregory & Weinstein, 2004, p. 422). This adds to the picture of possible explanations of the differences in students' desire for parental participation. Gregory and Weinstein add that teachers and parents should take mutual responsibility for adolescents' academic successes, which would be especially beneficial for low-income adolescents.

Gender differences must be brought to light when discussing equity and diversity in the teenage student group. Gender and class are strong social influences on career choice, for example (Vilhjálmsdóttir & Arnkelsson, 2013). Both gender differences and individual differences within each gender in educational and occupational choices are linked to differences in individuals' expectations of success (Eccles, 2011). Eccles states that gendered socialization practices at home, in the schools, and among peers play a major role in shaping these individual differences in self-perception, which affects teenagers and their wishes regarding parental involvement in schools.

Desforges and Abouchaar (2003) point out that lessening parental involvement as the child gets older is strongly influenced by the child taking an active mediating role. A possible explanation for the dwindling contact may be that teenagers simply need to distance themselves from adults, parents and teachers and need more space as they mature. This decreased participation could be a sign of healthy relationships in general, as Niels Kryger (2012) has suggested. His research on ninth grade students' stories of their interpretation and meaning of the home-school relationship showed that the established forms of cooperation between home and school leave very little space for students' perspectives. He states that it is especially important for teenagers, developing their own identity, to find their own way to deal with parent-teacher cooperation and to be active in creating home-school relationships with adults. Kryger´s study gives a voice to teenagers, describes their opinions of the home-school relationship, and depicts their experience of parental involvement. It has been difficult to find other studies reporting on teenagers' opinions of parental involvement. That may be symbolic of how little attention has been given to students' experience and opinions in this matter, but that is one focus point in this study.

2.12 Research focus and questions

Different findings and arguments regarding parental involvement have been brought forward, going from the vast perspective of theories, models

and critical perspectives, narrowing through Nordic research to the Icelandic context to focus on the students and their families.

Doing the literature review and the research process as a whole revealed the many and diverse perspectives in research on parental involvement in compulsory schools. Bronfenbrenner´s ecological systems theory was chosen as a basis since it explains that schools do not operate in a vacuum; they are bound to many stakeholders, individuals and institutions. Epstein´s school-family-community partnership model builds on Bronfenbrenner's theory and thus served well as a point of departure when the literature revealed the need for mapping out Icelandic practices. Consequently, the main research question was broad and led the research to embrace the main features of parental involvement in Icelandic compulsory schools. Simultaneously, the research process, including my presentations of papers at Nordic conferences and workshops, brought forth other viewpoints and angles. Thus, I bring attention to Nordic research that I believe is valuable for Icelandic research in this field since Nordic societies have much in common and the development of their school systems often follow similar tracks. Also, some critical social perspectives are presented in this literature review, as they influenced the research process considerably, the formation of the second and third underpinning research questions and, consequently, the production of knowledge presented as findings.

In sum, the doctoral project was guided by the overall research question: What part does parental involvement play in compulsory schools in Iceland? Three underpinning questions were addressed:

1. What characterises the home-school relationship and the cooperation between parents and teachers?
2. What do teenagers prefer in parents' participation, and how could their wishes affect the cooperation?
3. Which factors influence parents´ satisfaction with schools, and how do they affect the home-school relationship?

3 Method

This chapter begins with an explanation of the choice of methodology for this doctoral project, *Parental involvement in compulsory schools in Iceland*. Then, the overall research design for the bigger research project, *Teaching and learning in Icelandic compulsory schools,* is described. That includes describing participants, questionnaires and procedures of the bigger research project. In section 3.6, the focus returns to the doctoral project. Methods used for analysing the results presented in the four papers are described, followed by sections about validity and ethical issues.

3.1 The choice of methodology

Two main facts affected the choice of methodology in the doctoral project. Firstly, one of three main aims of the bigger research project was to give an overview of practices in Icelandic compulsory schools at the beginning of the 21st century, including practices regarding parental involvement. Secondly, the research field of parental involvement in Iceland was almost unexplored, as revealed in the literature review. These facts influenced the formation of the research questions and the subsequent choice of placing the research within the quantitative paradigm.

There was an obvious need for an overview of practices in home-school relationships in Icelandic compulsory schools. Quantitative methods are appropriate for the exploration needed to map and describe the current situation, as is the focus of the first underpinning research question, explored in Paper I and II and the chapter on parental involvement in the Icelandic book published about the bigger research project. The second and third underpinning research questions, regarding teenagers´ opinions and factors influencing parents' satisfaction and relation with school, arose from the findings presented in Papers I and II. Consequently, a more thorough analysis of the quantitative data was effected and presented in Papers III and IV. It could be interesting to address these questions further from a different perspective with other methods as mentioned in chapter 5.4 on future research.

3.2 Research design

The research project *Teaching and learning in Icelandic compulsory schools* was conducted in 20 schools in collaboration with their personnel, students and parents (Óskarsdóttir et al., 2014a). A team of around 50 researchers and graduate students participated in the project, 20 faculty members from the School of Education at the University of Iceland and the Faculty of Education at the University of Akureyri, doctoral and master´s level students, and employees from the participating municipalities and two business enterprises.

Data were collected through interviews, field observations and questionnaires, and various documents were analysed, such as school curricula and plans of school buildings. Only the quantitative data from the questionnaires is used in this doctoral project. The project's dataset has been made available and can be used in future research.

3.3 Participants

The participants in the research project were the principals, teachers and other school personnel in 20 compulsory schools in Iceland that accepted an invitation to take part in the project, also the parents of the students attending those schools, and students in grades 7 – 10 (12 to 16 years old) in the 14 schools that had students at the lower-secondary level.

The 20 schools were in four municipalities: Reykjavík, Akureyri, Reykjanesbær and one school in a rural area. At that time 175 compulsory schools were registered in Iceland. Of the 20 schools, 17 were selected randomly, and three schools were selected because of their emphasis on individualized learning. The sample is large; for example, the total number of students in those 20 schools were 7300 and comprised 17% of all students in compulsory schools in Iceland. An overview of numbers of participants that answered the questionnaires is presented in Table 1.

Table 1 Participants that answered the questionnaires

Schools	Professional personnel	Supervisory teachers	Parents	Students
20 schools	823	312	3481	
14 schools[2]				1821

There were 860 school personnel asked to participate: teachers, school leaders, social educators and teacher aides. In all, 823 school personnel answered at least one of four questionnaires. Of those, 81 percent were women, and 19 percent were men. Around 6.6 percent were 29 years old or younger; 24.5 percent were 30 to 39 years, 30.2 percent were 40 to 49 years, 29.2 percent were 50-59 years, and 9.5 percent were 60 years old or older. One group of school personnel gets particular attention in the research: supervisory teachers, and they were 312.

Students in seventh through tenth grade in the 14 participating schools with lower-secondary level participated; a random sample of two classes was drawn if a grade level comprised more than two classes in a participating school. Before visiting the schools, parents in the selected classes received an introductory letter about the students' questionnaires. Parents were given the option of declining their child's participation, and students themselves could opt out. Seven parents did not want their child to participate. The sample consisted of 2119 students, but 1821 answered a questionnaire. The number of students who participated, by gender and age, is shown in Table 2.

[2] An on-site survey was conducted for students in grades 7-10 in the 14 schools that had students at lower-secondary level (8^{th} – 10^{th} grade). Six schools only had students at younger levels.

Table 2 Students that participated, by gender and grade level (n = 1821)

Grade	Girls	Boys	Total	Percentage
7th grade	190	199	389	21.4%
8th grade	228	240	468	25.7%
9th grade	222	216	438	24.1%
10th grade	263	251	514	28.2%
No answer on grade or gender			12	
Total	903	906		
			1821	100%

There were 5195 parents invited to participate. Lists with students' names in the 20 schools were compared with the National Registry, and if parents had siblings attending a participating school, one child was selected randomly. The lists with students' names were then paired with lists of parents´ e-mail addresses obtained from school records. E-mails were chosen by selecting alternately the first e-mail address (often the mother) and the second e-mail address (often the father), and the invitation letter was sent to the selected e-mail addresses. Parents were asked to answer the questionnaire about the child named in the invitation letter, and 3481 participated by answering the questionnaire.

Table 3 shows participating parents in relation to their child's grade level.

Table 3 Parents that participated, by their child's grade level (n = 3481)

Grade level of their child	Participants	Percentage
1st – 4th grade	1322	38%
5th – 7th grade	1077	31%
8th – 10th grade	1065	30%
No answer on grade	17	1%
Total	3481	100%

In Paper IV, the influences of parents' background on home-school relations and parents' opinions was explored. Several variables of characteristics within the parent group were used in the analysis and they are described in Table 4. The great majority (72.1%) of respondents were mothers. Parents

were invited to respond to the questionnaire together, and that opportunity was used by 5.6%. The participants noted that 73% of the children lived with both parents during schooldays, while 13.3% lived in single-mother households. The participants' answers about their education were recoded into four groups of respondents' highest educational levels, as shown in Table 4. The majority (62.7%) of participants had completed education at the university level, but parents that had only completed compulsory school accounted for 7.8%.

Table 4 Characteristics of participating parents, selected for analysis in Paper IV, (n = 2129) (reproduced from Paper IV)

	n	%
All participants	2129	
Who answered the survey (*n* = 2099)		
Mother	1514	72.1
Father	468	22.3
Mother and father together	117	5.6
With whom the child lives, generally during schooldays (*n* = 2098)		
Both parents	1532	73
Single mother	278	13.3
Single father	12	0.6
Mother and stepfather	183	8.7
Father and stepmother	18	0.9
Equally at mother's and father's households	74	3.5
Other	1	0.0
Participants' highest educational levels (n = 2077)		
Compulsory school	162	7.8
Vocational education	357	17.2
Upper-secondary school	256	12.3
University education	1302	62.7

The response rate for the parents' questionnaires was 67% (n = 3481), for school personnel around 82% (n = 823), and for the students it was 86% (n = 1821). The response rate is acceptable for all questionnaires and rather high for some, as the response rate for surveys frequently falls below 50% (Saunders, 2011).

3.4 Questionnaires

The online questionnaires were developed by using guidelines on survey construction from Karlsson (2003) and Þórsdóttir and Jónsson (2007).

A pre-test of all questionnaires, i.e. to school personnel, parents and students, was conducted in a school in Northern Iceland. The questionnaires were revised with regards to results from these pre-tests and comments received from the participants.

The four questionnaires for school personnel included questions about their work conditions, usage of working hours and preferences regarding home-school relationships. The total number of questions was 244, including 612 items. There were some questions for specific groups, for example, supervisory teachers, but 823 participants answered at least one of four questionnaires for school professionals.

Students were asked, for example, about learning styles, use of the Internet, their relationships with teachers, and about what they preferred in parental participation in school activities. There were 32 questions, including 130 items.

The survey for parents included questions about their backgrounds, their cooperation with school personnel, exchange of information and level of satisfaction with the service their child was getting at the school. There were 39 questions, including 159 items.

3.5 Procedure

The survey software QuestionPro was used for online questionnaires.

The four questionnaires to school personnel were all online, and data was collected in the school year 2009-2010. Links to the questionnaires were sent to their work e-mail address in November 2009 and February, April and June 2010. School personnel answered the first and second questionnaires at a time that was convenient for them. As a follow-up, emails were sent to those who had not responded. The school personnel were encouraged to answer the third and fourth questionnaires using meeting hours in their school, and researchers were present in case any problems occurred. This was done to increase the response rate, as some schools had experienced problems when using the survey software. Answers in the four questionnaires were connected by participants' email addresses, but they were removed before analysis began.

The students answered an online questionnaire in the computer room in their own school during one visit from the research team to each school in

Autumn 2010. Only students who were present at the time of the visit had the opportunity to participate. As the sample consisted of 2119 students, and 1821 answered a questionnaire, around 86% were present and willing to participate.

The questionnaire to parents was online and sent to them in April 2011 using email addresses obtained from school records. As a follow-up, emails were sent twice to the parents who had not responded, and the principals of the schools sent letters to parents encouraging participation. If no answer arrived from the parent and another email was on file, the questionnaire was sent to that email address, with two follow-up emails encouraging participation.

3.6 Analysis

The data were analysed with SPSS 20 in Papers I and II, SPSS 22 in Paper III and SPSS 24 in Paper IV. Variables and analysis methods are described for each paper in the following sections.

3.6.1 Variables and analysis in Paper I

In Paper I, data from questionnaires to all parents and school personnel was analysed. Percentages, odds ratios and Spearman's correlation were computed to explore differences and relationships of opinions within the parent group and the group of school personnel.

Spearman's correlation was used for variables measured on an ordinal scale, for example, to measure how satisfaction with school in general, and easy communication between teachers and parents, tended to go hand in hand, according to parents' answers.

Odds ratios were used to compare the likelihood between two groups, for example, to compare satisfaction with school between a parent group saying that their children needed extra support in school and another parent group in no need for special support for their children.

3.6.2 Variables and analysis in Paper II

Data from questionnaires to all parents and school personnel, and the students in seventh through tenth grade in 14 participating schools was analysed in Paper II.

Percentages, Chi-square and Spearman's correlation were computed. Spearman's correlation was used, for example, to see the correlations

between school personnel's answers regarding different ways of parent participation.

Chi-square correlation was computed for categorical variables, for example, to compare parents' interest in assisting with their child's homework, according to the child´s age level in compulsory school, youngest, middle or lower-secondary level.

3.6.3 Variables and analysis in Paper III

In Paper III, only data from students in seventh through tenth grade were analysed (see Table 2).

Spearman's correlations were computed for the ordinal variables, for example, to measure the relations between students answers when they evaluated how desirable it was to have parents participating in different school-related activities.

Multiple regression analysis was performed to provide information on the effect of eight explanatory variables on the outcome variable *Teenagers' wishes for parental participation* using guidelines from Gujarati and Porter (2009). That outcome variable was a scale computed using six questions about students´ evaluation of how desirable parents' participation is in:

1. assisting with homework,
2. assessing students studies,
3. planning student´s studies,
4. being informed about subjects and tasks,
5. attending extracurricular activities or social events, and
6. visiting the school and participate in lessons.

Students´ answers to each question are described in Table 2 in Paper III. Internal consistency of the computed scale was good with $\alpha = 0.87$.

An overview of the variables used in the regression analysis is shown in Table 5.

Table 5 Variables used in regression analysis in Paper III (n = 1821) (reproduced from Paper III)

Outcome variable:	**Categories**	**Mean**	**SD**	**Min.**	**Max.**
Teenagers' wishes for parental participation	1 = very undesirable, 2 = rather undesirable, 3 = neither desirable nor undesirable, 4 = rather desirable, 5 = very desirable	3.71	0.87	1	5
Explanatory variables:					
Respondents' gender	Girl = 1, boy = 0	0.50			
Respondents' grade in compulsory school	1 = 7th, 2 = 8th, 3 = 9th, 4 = 10th grade	2.60	1.11	1	4
Confidence in one's own learning abilities	1 = very poor, 2 = poor, 3 = neither poor nor good, 4 = good, 5 = very good	3.88	0.90	1	5
Teaching quality	1 = very poor, 2 = poor, 3 = neither poor nor good, 4 = good, 5 = very good	3.82	0.88	1	5
Relations with teachers	1 = very poor, 2 = poor, 3 = neither poor nor good, 4 = good, 5 = very good	4.07	0.88	1	5
Students' appreciation of school activities	1= disagree strongly, 2 = disagree, 3 = moderate, 4 = agree, 5 = agree strongly	3.04	0.99	1	5
Discipline and peaceful class environment influence students' learning outcomes	1 = very little, 2 = little, 3 = neither little nor much, 4 = much, 5 = very much	4.05	0.94	1	5
Parents' support influences students' learning outcomes	1 = very little, 2 = little, 3 = neither little nor much, 4 = much, 5 = very much	4.39	0.82	1	5

The regression analysis was done with three models, grouping together the strongest explanatory variables belonging to the same system; the individual in Model 1, the school belonging to the mesosystem, in Model 2; and opinions and values belonging to the macrosystem, in Model 3 (referring to Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory depicted in Figure 2).

Model 1 contains the three personal variables; *gender* a girl or a boy, *grade* from seventh to tenth, and students' *confidence in one's own learning ability* estimated on a scale from 1-5, in which 1 stood for very poor confidence and 5 for a very good confidence.

In Model 2, three variables related to school experience as reported by the students were added: *teaching quality* was estimated on a scale in which 1 stood for very poor teaching and 5 for very good teaching. *Relations with teachers* were estimated on a scale in which 1 meant very poor relations and 5 meant very good relations. The third variable measured *students' appreciation of school activities* by computing three statements into one: I am interested in learning tasks; the homework tasks are interesting; and I am having fun at school. The scale was 1 – 5, where 1 stood for disagree strongly and 5 for agree strongly. Thus, in Model 2, variables of school experience were added to the personal traits in Model 1.

In Model 3, two variables of students´ statements about achievement or learning outcomes were added to Model 2. The first statement was about the *influence of discipline and peaceful class environment on students' learning outcomes*, measured on a scale 1 – 5, in which 1 stood for very little and 5 for very much. The second statement was if *parents' support influences students' learning outcomes*, measured by the students on the same scale.

3.6.4 Variables and analysis in Paper IV

In Paper IV, data from the questionnaires to parents were explored. The same methods as described in 3.6.3 were used to measure correlations, and factor analysis and multiple regressions were used to describe which variables can predict how satisfied participants were with the schools their children attended.

For the analysis, only participants who answered all the questions used in the factor analysis were included, which provided a sample size of 2129 (61.2% of the original sample). The new sample gave a slight overrepresentation of the more-involved parents, which should come as no surprise since only parents who completed all the questions in the analysis were included as part of the sample (detailed information in Paper IV in the appendix). See Table 4 in chapter 3.3 for a description of the characteristics of participating parents selected for the analysis (n = 2129).

Table 6 Variables used in regression analysis of parents´ satisfaction (n=2129) (reproduced from Paper IV)

	Categories	Mean	SD	Min.	Max.
Outcome variables					
Satisfaction: Parents' satisfaction with their child's school (one question)	1 = totally dissatisfied 2 = very dissatisfied 3 = rather dissatisfied 4 = neutral 5 = rather satisfied 6 = very satisfied 7 = totally satisfied	5.39	1.09	1	7
Communication: How easy or difficult it is for parents to communicate with supervisory teachers, other teachers, or school leaders (a factor of three questions computed)	Score from factor analysis	0.00	1.00	-4.26	1.21
Teaching: How do parents evaluate the quality of teaching and assessment their child is receiving at school (a factor of two questions computed)	Score from factor analysis	0.00	1.00	-4.15	1.69
Explanatory variables					
Child's grade level in school	1 = 1st – 4th grade 2 = 5th – 7th grade 3 = 8th – 10th grade	1.95	0.82	1	3
Child's gender	0 = boy 1 = girl	0.49	0.50		
Single-mother household	0 = not a single mother 1 = single mother	0.13	0.34	0	1
Basic education	0 = more than basic education 1 = basic education	0.08	0.27	0	1
Parents' participation in school social activities	1 = totally disagree 2 = very much disagree 3 = rather disagree 4 = neutral 5 = rather agree 6 = very much agree 7 = totally agree	4.80	1.45	1	7
Influence in school decisions and vision (average of two questions)	1 = totally disagree 2 = very much disagree 3 = rather disagree 4 = neutral 5 = rather agree 6 = very much agree 7 = totally agree	4.00	1.33	1	7
Child complains about bullying in school	1 = often every day, 2 = almost every day, 3 = 2 - 4 times a week, 4 = once a week, 5 = 2 - 3 times a month, 6 = seldom, 7 = never	6.43	1.04	1	7
Getting support because of special needs or not needing it	1 = not getting support	0.15	0.35	0	1

Factor analysis was used for data reduction similar to the way Bæck (2009) did to find factors that measured parents' satisfaction with the school their child attended. The two factors found were then used as outcome variables in regression analysis testing.

The factors were called *communication* and *teaching*, and presented different aspects of parents' opinions, explaining 72% of the variability in the scores. The factor *teaching* consisted of two variables that measured how parents evaluated the quality of teaching and the quality of assessment their child was receiving at school. The factor *communication* consisted of three variables measuring the ease of parents' communication with supervisory teachers, other teachers and school leaders. Oblique factor rotation was used because it is unlikely that the two factors were unrelated, which is a prerequisite for using orthogonal rotation (Field, 2013). The third outcome variable, *parents' general satisfaction with school*, was a response to one question to the parent group about their general satisfaction or dissatisfaction with their child's school.

The regression analysis was performed on the two outcome variables produced by the factor analysis, *teaching* and *communication*, and on the question about *parents' satisfaction* with school. The variables were deemed suitable for regression following guidelines in Field (2013).

Three regression models were tested for each of the outcome variables. Model 1 included four variables regarding student background: gender, grade in school, whether the child lived in a single-mother household and whether the parent who answered the survey only had a basic education. In Model 2, two variables about parents' experience were added: whether the parents participated in social activities at school and whether they felt they had any influence on school decisions and the school's vision of the future. In Model 3, two variables regarding the child's needs and well-being were added: whether the child complained about bullying at school and whether the child received sufficient support at school if parents said that special support was necessary.

3.7 Validity and reliability

When the research project Teaching and learning in Icelandic schools was designed by the lead researchers, they were conscious of the importance of validity. Therefore, it was decided to gather data with multiple methods and to compare findings from different perspectives (Óskarsdóttir et al., 2014a).

A group of researchers created the questionnaires, relying on experiences from prior studies of practice in teaching and school development and on respected guidelines about construction of questionnaires (Karlsson, 2003; Þórsdóttir and Jónsson, 2007). That process took a considerable time since definitions of terms are sometimes unclear or lacking in Icelandic school research, and the researchers were from several disciplines with different traditions and norms.

The researchers were cautious when creating the questionnaires, and strived to have them as clear and straightforward as possible, since their validity and reliability was at stake. A pre-test of questionnaire was given in a pilot study in one compulsory school, providing useful feedback for improving the questionnaires, as described in section 3.4.

The questionnaires to the three main groups, parents, school personnel and students, were formed so they partly mirrored each other, to bring forth different perspectives on school practices.

Statistical methods were used to measure the reliability of analysis. Cronbach´s Alpha was calculated to measure the reliability of the scale used as an outcome variable, Teenagers' wishes for parental participation, in Paper III, and it revealed an internal consistency of $\alpha = 0.87$. Values of Cronbach´s Alpha around 0.8 are considered good (Field, 2013).

One member of the research team, Dr. Amalía Björnsdóttir, is a specialist in survey constructions and led the creation and procedures regarding the questionnaires. Dr. Guðbjörg Andrea Jónsdóttir, a specialist from the Social Science Research Institute, also provided feedback during construction of the questionnaires.

3.8 Ethical issues

The research project was registered at the Icelandic Data Protection Authority in autumn 2009, and the four municipalities permitted that data would be gathered in the 20 schools when the schools decided to participate (Óskarsdóttir et al., 2014a).

All participants, including school personnel, parents and students, were informed that they could withdraw from participation at any time during data gathering. In a letter presented to parents and school personnel at the beginning of each online questionnaire, participants were informed about confidentiality and the procedures being followed in the research. The letter said that no one was obliged to participate and that a participant could omit questions if he or she so chose to do so. Students were informed

in a similar way when the research team visited schools to survey them on-site.

When data gathering from the school personnel concluded, only one person from the research team had access to the email addresses identifying participants and could link the four questionnaires before making the file available to others on the research team. Participants were told about this arrangement. This step was important to avoid any suspicion that school leaders could have access to personal answers. The letter also contained information concerning anonymity: names of schools would not be revealed, and answers could never be traced back to participants.

Similarly, parents were informed that their anonymity would be well protected and that their children's anonymity was secured. Anonymity and research procedures were explained to students when the surveys were conducted on-site.

All participating schools were offered presentations with discussions about the results, as the intention was to contribute to research-based discussions about school development. At the same time, project researchers were aware of how important it was that the findings would not be used to rank the participating schools and therefore kept their names confidential at all times. On the other hand, some participating schools that were proud of the outcomes cited and even published the reports they got with statistics from answers belonging to their participants.

Ethical issues regarding this research on parental involvement touched upon several matters. The first pertained to confidentiality regarding schools and school personnel who were often named and criticised in parents' answers to the open questions in the questionnaires. These comments were informative but never used in analysis or cited in the research. It is important to keep confidentiality in research at all times, but it is an especially delicate matter in the small Icelandic society when presenting or discussing the research project with colleagues or stakeholders.

Secondly, conducting, writing and presenting research is an ethical process. Reading analyses of changing perspectives in Danish research of home-school relationships (Dannesboe et al., 2012) and about Norwegian developments in the field (Bæck, 2005, 2009, 2015, 2017) brought attention to the discourse used in the few Icelandic writings about home-school relations. The Danish research team wrote that Epstein and colleagues were known for their research leading the improvement of home-school

relations, meanwhile, they and many other European researchers had a different and more reluctant position, using critical sociological perspectives in their research (Dannesboe et al., 2012). The research position here changed somewhat in the same way. In the beginning, I was rather uncritical of the position that one important aim of research should be to deliberately contribute to improvement, and at that time Epstein's model was chosen. Then as the research progressed and the knowledge base broadened, I learned more about critical perspectives and thus chose to explore social factors and influences in Papers III and IV. So, the journey through different phases of the research project, with impact from readings and researchers, has been an ethical growth process.

Lastly, it is ethically important to use the data participants provided. School personnel often complain about giving their time to participate in research without being notified of any publication of results. Also, Icelandic school research is a rather young research field, so researchers must strive for attention and bring forth how they can make valuable contributions to school development at all levels. Therefore, it is of great importance to use gathered data, present findings to inform school personnel, parents and policymakers, and be open for discussions about the results.

4 Findings

In this chapter, main findings are presented, all contributing to the discussion about the part parental involvement actually plays in compulsory schools in Iceland. The findings are organised into four sections, in the order of the four papers that comprise this doctoral thesis.

First, the overall organization of the home-school relationship is described as in Paper I, with particular attention to supervisory teachers' role in that relationship. Paper II presents what teenagers, parents and school professionals find to be desirable regarding parental participation in school activities. Paper III reveals what teenagers prefer in parents' participation, and what influences their opinions. Finally, Paper IV describes factors that influence parents´ satisfaction with schools and how they affect the home-school relationship.

4.1 Paper I: Home-school relationships and cooperation between parents and supervisory teachers

The first paper was based on data from two online surveys, one for professional personnel in the schools and the other for parents of children in those same schools. It describes the overall organization of the home-school relationship, with a special focus on the role of supervisory teachers.

School professionals and parents agreed that working together is important for children's education. Ninety-nine percent of school professionals and parents found parental support to be rather or very important for children's academic achievement. Moreover, 95% of teachers regarded cooperation with parents as vital to ensuring proper student behaviour in schools.

4.1.1 The responsibility of the supervisory teachers

Supervisory teachers are the school professionals responsible for parent-teacher cooperation, as confirmed in the laws on compulsory education (Compulsory School Act, 91 C.F.R., 2008). Parent-teacher conferences were most often (69%) scheduled and conducted twice each school year by supervisory teachers, where 26% met with parents three times. Around

79% of those meetings took 15 minutes or less, and 89% of the supervisory teachers said that students were always present during these conferences.

Apart from these formal conferences, the majority of supervisory teachers (66%) used two to four hours per week providing information and for cooperation with parents; 24% used an hour or less, and 6% said they used five to seven hours. A large proportion of that time was used on matters concerning individual students, and the focus was more often on behavioural problems than on learning. Around 35% of the teachers said they had weekly or more frequent contact with some parents about their children's behaviour, but 25% of them had weekly contact with some parents about learning.

About 15% of supervisory teachers said cooperation with parents was very easy; 62% found it rather easy, but more than 7% found it rather or very difficult to cooperate with parents.

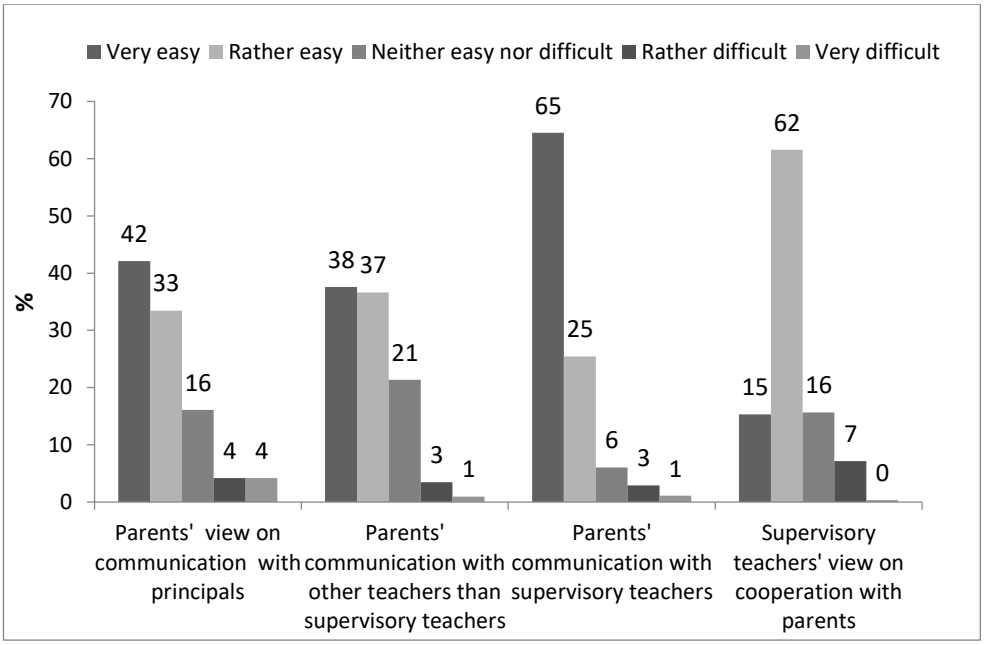

Figure 4 Parents´ (n = 2896) and supervisory teachers´(n = 296) views on cooperation between the groups (reproduced from Paper I)

Conversely, 65% of parents thought it was very easy to communicate with supervisory teachers, much easier than communicating with other teachers or the principals (see Figure 4). Parents' education, child's gender or age did not affect the assessment of whether the parents considered

communication with supervisory teachers to be easy or difficult. However, there was a positive correlation between ease of communication with the supervising teacher and parental satisfaction with school in general ($r_s(2851) = .34$, $p < .001$), meaning that easy communication with the supervisory teacher tends to go hand-in-hand with overall satisfaction with the experience of school.

4.1.2 Children's needs for support influenced opinions

According to the parents' group, a total of 26% of the students were considered to have special needs that affected their schooling. The two largest groups of these students had learning disabilities or behavioural problems, or both. Those accounted for 95% of students with needs for special support. Of parents, 22% said their children, had learning disabilities, and 8% said their children had behavioural problems. More than half of parents in both groups believed the child did not receive sufficient assistance at school, and that affected their satisfaction with school in general.

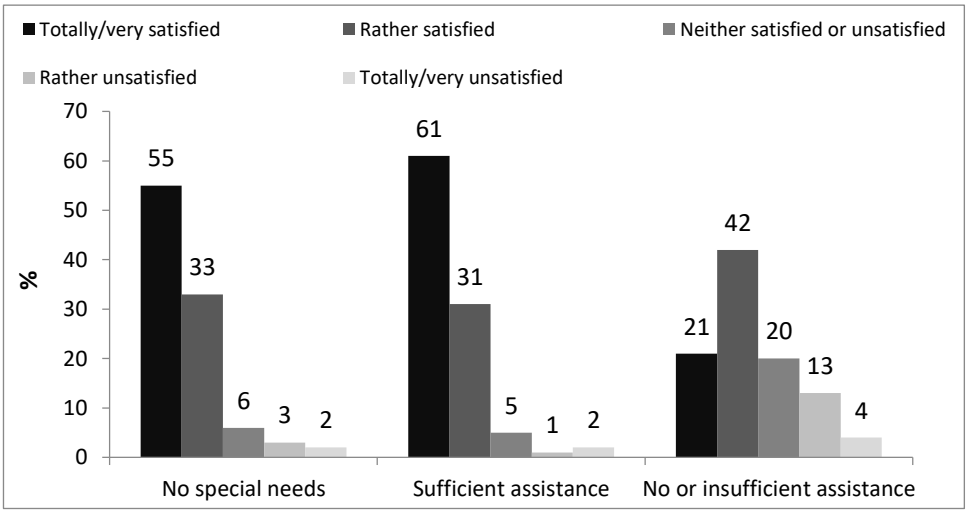

Figure 5 Parental (n = 3243) satisfaction with school by special needs and services provided (reproduced from Paper I)

When parents of children with learning or behavioural problems felt that their needs were not met at school, they perceived the communication with supervisory teachers as difficult, and were dissatisfied with the school in general. What is surprising is that if parents felt the special needs of their child were met, then they were more satisfied and found the

communication to be easier than did parents who had children with no disabilities, see Figure 5. These findings are elaborated on in section 4, as in Paper IV, where the social factors influencing the parent group are unfolded and related to school factors such as the provision of services.

4.1.3 Changes related to students' age

When comparing responses by the age of students in Paper I, the following categories are used: young (6-9 years), middle (10-12 years) and teenagers (13-15 years). Based on the age of their children, there is no difference in how easy or difficult parents find communication with teachers and principals, or how much influence they think parents can have on school practices.

However, when looking at how frequently parents contact the school, there is a difference; parents contact school less as their children get older. Parental satisfaction with school is also lower in the middle age and teenage group than in the young group. There is no difference in satisfaction with the services provided for children with special needs; but, the difference in the percentage of students that parents consider to have learning or behavioural difficulties is quite striking. In the youngest group it is 19%; in the middle group it is 29%, and in the teenage group it is 28%.

According to supervisory teachers, there is no difference in frequency of meetings with parents by grade level, but the frequency of email/paper messages and phone calls decreases as the students get older. The contents and frequency of communication between teachers and parents changes as well. As the students grow older, teachers are less likely to contact parents about behaviour, students' interaction with other students, and homework, but there was no difference in frequency of communication about learning. Therefore, the share of learning as the topic of communication grew as the students grew older.

In sum, the home-school relationship in Icelandic compulsory schools is organized in a rather homogenous way. The practices are systematic and regular. Even if there was almost a complete agreement on the importance of parental support in the educational process, parent-teacher cooperation decreased as students grew older. These results ignited an interest for further exploration that is presented in Papers II and III. Supervisory teachers played a key role as the link between home and school, and some of them said that this task wasn´t so easy. Meanwhile the vast majority of parents were very satisfied with the communication with the supervisory teachers, although the communication became difficult if their child's needs

for special assistance were not met sufficiently in school. Factors influencing students' and parents' opinions will be examined in the following papers to understand if and how to enhance the relationships.

4.2 Paper II: Desirable Parental Participation

Paper II describes what teenagers, parents and school professionals find to be desirable in parental participation. Data derives from questionnaires to parents and school professionals in the 20 compulsory schools participating in the research project, and to students in 7th-10th grade in these schools, i.e. in all schools that had students in the lower-secondary school level.

In Paper I, it became clear that parents and school professionals involved in this study are convinced of the importance of parental participation in school activities. Now, the focus is on what they said were the most desirable ways to participate, and teenagers' opinions; it is appropriate to describe their ideas first.

4.2.1 Students want parents involved in academic activities

In general, the teenagers were positive about parents' participation in school activities. The findings presented in Figure 6 show clearly that students found it most appealing to have parents participating in academic activities of the school rather than social activities.

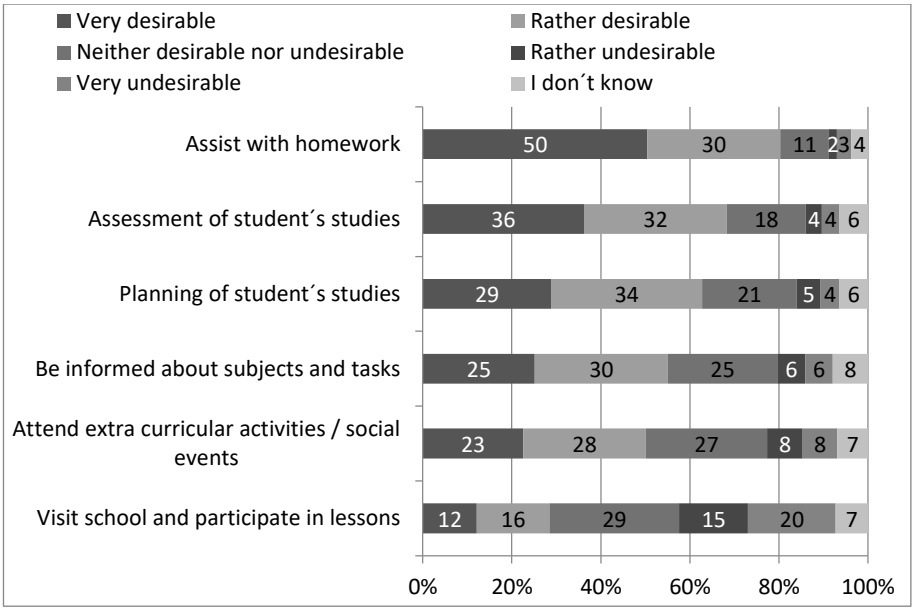

Figure 6 Student (n = 1821) opinions on parental participation in school-related activities (reproduced from Paper II)

Eight out of ten students found it very or rather desirable to have parents assisting them with homework; 68% found it very or rather desirable for parents to participate in assessments of their academic achievement, and 63% found it very or rather desirable for parents to participate in planning their studies. Around 55% of the students thought it would be positive if their parents were informed about the school curriculum and their learning tasks.

Parents' participation in school social activities was not at all as attractive to the teenage students. Just over half of them found it very or rather important for parents to participate in social events such as class entertainment. Having parents visit the school and participating in schoolwork had the lowest score, but 28% of the students found that to be very or rather desirable.

The strongest relationships, displayed in Figure 6, were between answers on participation in assessment and participation in the planning of studies (r_s(1586) = .65, p < .01). This may indicate a great trust in parents by some students, as it indicates that if a student wants parents to be involved in assessing his or her studies, he or she is also very keen on having the parent involved in planning his or her studies. However, there are interesting differences of opinions within the student group that can be

summarized as follows: The students' interest in parent involvement decreased as they got older; the girls were more enthusiastic than the boys about parental participation, and those with more confidence in their learning abilities were more enthusiastic than were those who felt inferior in their studies.

4.2.2 School professionals preferred social participation

School professionals, i.e. all teachers and school leaders, were very positive about parents' participation of the traditional kind in social activities and homework (see Figure 7).

Almost all (98%) found it very or rather desirable that parents attended social events or extracurricular activities organized at school. When it came to helping with homework, 94% of respondents felt it was very or rather desirable, and 84% had the same opinion regarding parents' involvement in planning social activities at school.

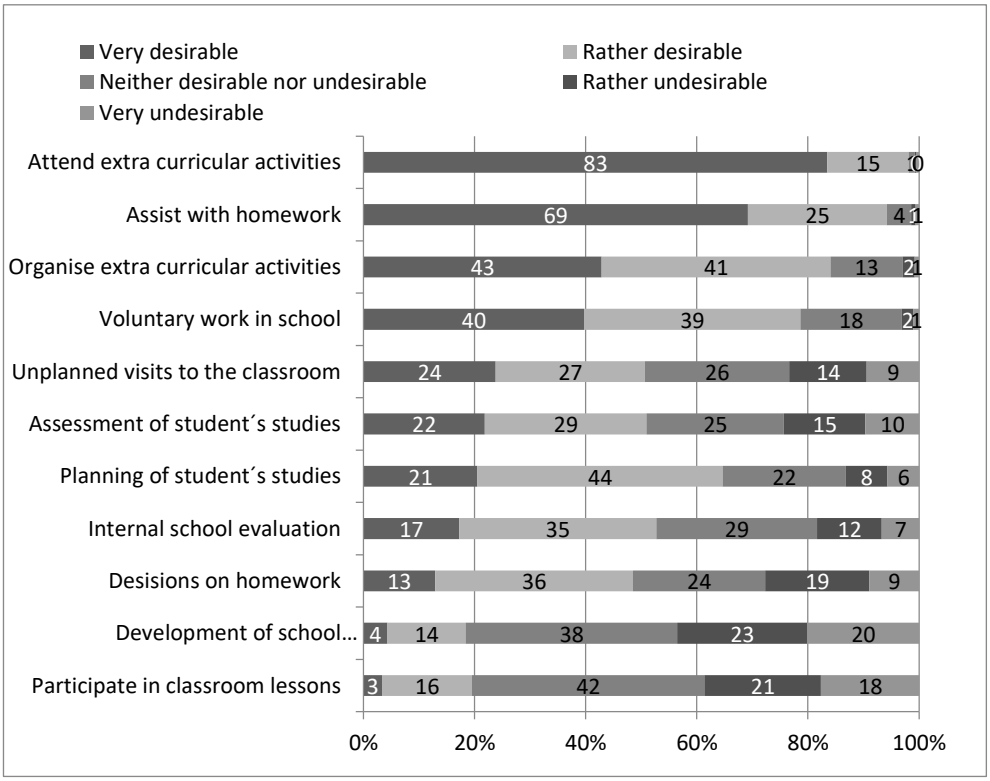

Figure 7 School professionals´(n = 823) opinions on parental participation in school-related activities (reproduced from Paper II)

The opinions changed when it came to parental participation that was closer to school leaders' and teachers' professional work. Less than half of the respondents thought it was very or rather desirable to have parents participate in decisions about homework; 18% believed they should be involved in developing the school curriculum, and 19% of school professionals found it very or rather desirable to have parents participate in classroom lessons.

There were notable differences when comparing responses by the age of the students that the teachers taught. Teachers' interest in cooperation seemed to wane the older the students were, interest in having parents organizing and attending social events alike. The results revealed the same decline in teachers' interest in parental involvement in homework. Figure 7 shows that, in general, 69% of the school professionals find it very desirable. Just 55% of the teachers of teenagers had the same opinion, considerably fewer than the 82% who felt it very desirable at the youngest level and 72% who teach at the middle level (χ^2 (8, N = 376) = 27.6, p = .001).

4.2.3 Parents' desires for participation

Figure 8 shows that 73% of parents thought it was desirable for parents to participate in organising extracurricular activities. They were not as eager about it as were the school professionals, but 84% of them thought so (Figure 7). More than half of all parents also thought it was desirable for parents to participate in internal school evaluations, volunteer at the school, and participate in planning students' studies and in academic assessment.

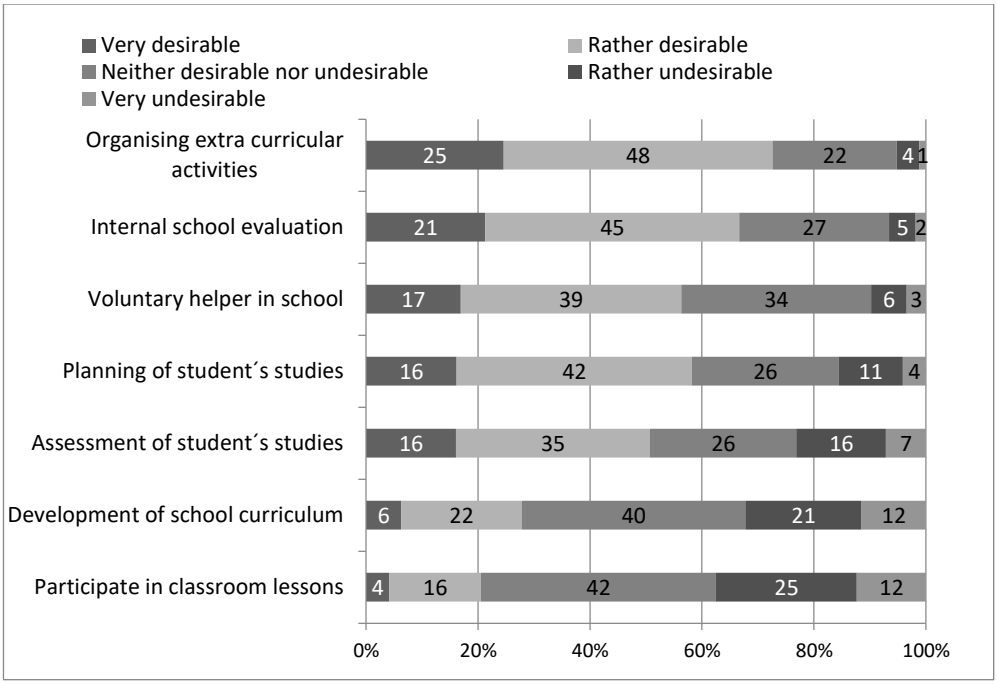

Figure 8 Parents' (n = 3481) opinions about the desirability of parental participation in school-related activities (reproduced from Paper II)

Parents' interest in participation in school activities declined as their children grew older. At the youngest level, 29% of parents thought it was very desirable for parents to participate in organizing extracurricular activities. About a quarter of the parents of children in middle grades said the same, and 18% of parents of teenagers agreed ($\chi^2(8, N = 2978) = 66.9$, $p < .001$). Wishes for participation in academic activities followed the same route. More parents at the youngest level (19%) than at the middle level (13%) found it very desirable to participate in planning their children's studies, but opinions of parents of teenagers (15%) were in-between and not different from the other groups ($\chi^2(8, N = 2925) = 18{,}5$, $p = .018$). Participation in assessment was very desirable to 20% of parents at the youngest level, but only 13-14% of parents of older students agreed.

Correlations between parents' own education and their opinions on parents' participation in school activities were also examined. In general, the trend was that parents with more education favoured parental involvement more than did parents with less education.

In sum, findings in this paper showed that teenagers were positive towards parental participation, preferably in academic activities, but diversity in the student group is apparent and will be investigated further in Paper III. Parents and school professionals were a bit more reluctant; their ideas about desirable participation leaned towards the traditional way of participation in social activities and events. Sociological perspectives will help to clarify factors that affect parents' willingness as well as their satisfaction with school in general, which will be elaborated on in Paper IV.

4.3 Paper III: Teenagers' wishes for parents' participation

Paper III scrutinizes students' wishes for parental participation. Paper II revealed that teenagers' ideas differ from adults' ideas in this matter, and that evoked interest in a deeper understanding of what influences teenagers' opinions. The aim of the paper was also to lend a voice to the teenage students and to discuss whether family-school cooperation should be organized somewhat differently at the lower-secondary school level than at the younger school levels.

Findings in this paper build on the questionnaire to students in 7th to 10th grade in 14 schools. Multiple regression analysis testing was used to reveal factors that influenced the outcome variable Teenagers´ wishes for parental participation as shown in Table 7.

Table 7 Regression analysis on the outcome variable: Teenagers' wishes for parental participation (n =1 821)

MODEL 1	**b**	**SE**		**Sig.**
(Constant)	3.269	.121		<.001
Gender (girl = 1, boy = 0)	.190	.044		<.001
Grade in school (1 = 7th, 2 = 8th, 3 = 9th, 4 = 10th grade)	-.147	.020		<.001
Confidence in one's own learning ability	.189	.026		<.001
Percentage of variance explained (R^2)			.094	
MODEL 2	**b**	**SE**		**Sig.**
(Constant)	2.508	.146		<.001
Gender (girl = 1, boy = 0)	.087	.043		.044
Grade in school (1 = 7th, 2 = 8th, 3 = 9th, 4 = 10th grade)	-.126	.019		<.001
Confidence in one's own learning ability	.051	.027		.056
Teaching quality	.053	.030		.080
Relationships with teachers	.110	.030		<.001
Students' appreciation of school activities	.208	.027		<.001
Percentage of variance explained (R^2)			.182	
R^2 change			.088	
Sig. F change			<.001	
MODEL 3	**b**	**SE**		**Sig.**
(Constant)	1.421	.160		<.001
Gender (girl = 1, boy = 0)	.054	,041		.189
Grade in school (1 = 7th, 2 = 8th, 3 = 9th, 4 = 10th grade)	-.136	.018		<.001
Confidence in one's own learning ability	.020	.025		.429
Teaching quality	.021	.029		.460
Relationships with teachers	.069	.028		.014
Students' appreciation of school activities	.162	.026		<.001
Discipline in class affect students' learning outcomes	.090	.025		<.001
Parents' support affects students' learning outcomes	.298	.028		<0.001
Percentage of variance explained (R^2)			.276	
R^2 change			.093	
Sig. F change			<.001	

According to the results of the testing of Model 1 (see Table 7), personal traits that defined the students explained around 9.4% of the variance (R^2) in students' wishes for parental participation. These personal traits were *gender*, *grade*, and *confidence in one´s own learning ability*; all three variables had a significant effect in this model ($p < .001$).

In Model 2, three variables concerning students' experience at school were added to the original model. They all had positive effects, meaning that if students' estimates rose on the *quality of teaching* and on *relationships with teachers*, they were also more positive towards parents' participation. Furthermore, teenage students that *appreciated school activities*, i.e. were pleased to be in school and took an interest in their learning tasks and homework, found parental participation more desirable than did students who reported poor contact with their teachers or who found their tasks boring. When these school experience variables were added, the explanatory power of the model increased to 18.2%, indicating that school experience variables were responsible for an additional 8.8% of the variance. Here, it is important to notice that the share of teachers and teaching, in students' opinions, on parental participation is almost as big as the share of the personal traits. Age and gender were still significant factors in the second model, which shows how important these factors are for students' opinions.

In Model 3, two variables concerning students' opinions on achievement or learning outcomes were added to Model 2. The first was about the influence of *discipline and peaceful class environment* on students' learning outcomes, and the second was if *parents' support influenced students' learning outcomes*. The overall explanation of the model was raised to 27.6% (R^2). This showed that students belief in the value of parents' support for learning outcomes was the best predictor for students' opinions on the desirability of parents' participation ($b = 0.298$). The second strongest was the variable estimating students' appreciation of school activities ($b = 0.162$), and the third was school grade ($b = -0.136$), and it was significant as a single variable in all three models.

In sum, results showed that students' age proved to be an important factor for students' opinions; students' wishes for parents' participation diminished as students grew older. Gender as a single variable was not as important as the grade but significant in Model 1, and girls were still more positive towards parental participation when variables of school experience were added in Model 2, but then gender was not significant as a single variable. The remaining six variables in the regression (estimating

confidence in one's own learning ability, experience in school, and beliefs about effects on achievement) all pointed in the same direction: Students' more positive opinions and experiences in school went hand in hand with more positive opinions about parental participation. One may not forget the teenagers who didn´t share the positive views of the majority; they are more likely to be boys than girls, have poor relationships with teachers, have low confidence in their own learning abilities, and be bored in school. Paper III brought forth factors influencing teenagers' opinions on parental participation, both very positive and in a certain group also some rather negative opinions. That raised interest in exploring factors affecting parents' experiences to see what would be most influential for parents' opinions and whether some ties with factors affecting students' opinions would be revealed.

4.4 Paper IV: Influential factors behind parents' satisfaction

Paper IV describes factors influencing parents' satisfaction with schools and how they affect the home-school relationship. Some, such as parents' education and marital status, are social factors, while others are school factors that local leaders and school personnel can address.

Findings build on data from an online questionnaire to parents in 20 compulsory schools. Factor analysis generated two factors describing parents' opinions on relations with school, especially regarding communication and teaching. These, together with a question on parents' overall satisfaction with the school, were used as outcome variables in a regression analysis exploring what influences parents' satisfaction with the school.

4.4.1 A portrait of satisfied parents

At first glance, the data portrayed parents as a rather homogenous group who were in a happy relationship, and satisfied, with the schools their children attended (see Figure 9). About 52% of parents reported that they were totally or very satisfied with the school; 35% were rather satisfied, and 7% were unsatisfied.

As with the teenagers, one must not forget the dissatisfied parents while praising the content ones. Therefore, this result called for a description of characteristics of the parent group, presented in Table 5 (in chapter 3.5.4) on variables and analysis in Paper IV and was used to form variables for further analysis. An overview of variables used is in Table 6 (in chapter 3.5.4).

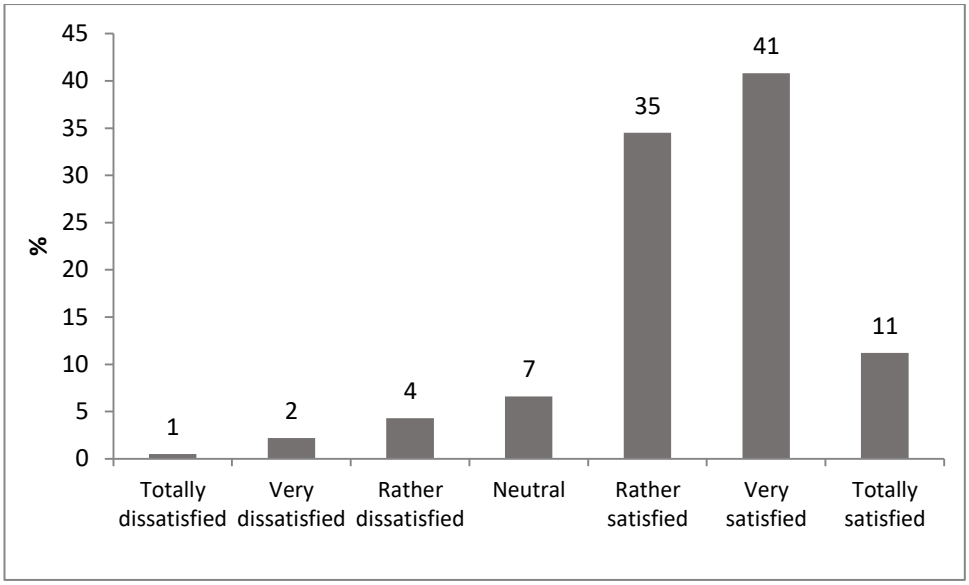

Figure 9 Parents' answers about their general satisfaction or dissatisfaction with their child's school (n = 2113) (reproduced from Paper IV)

4.4.2 Influential factors for parents' opinions

A factor analysis was used to bring forth different aspects of parents' satisfaction with their child's school. It brought forth two factors, *teaching* and *communication*, which showed different aspects of parents' contentedness with school. Variables predicting these factors, as well as *general satisfaction*, indicated differences amongst parents and their opinions in several ways.

Three regression models were tested for each of the outcome variables. The explanatory variables were grouped together in a similar way as in Paper III, i.e. by grouping variables belonging to the same spheres: the personal, the school related, and the sphere of opinions and values, with reference to Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological system theory (see Figure 2).

Model 1 included four variables regarding student background: gender, grade in school, whether the child lived in a single-mother household and whether the parent who answered the survey only had a basic education. In Model 2, two variables about parents' experience of school were added: whether the parents participated in social activities at school and whether they felt that they had any influence on school decisions and the school's vision of the future. In Model 3, two variables regarding the child's needs

and well-being were added: whether the child complained about bullying at school and whether the child received sufficient support at school if parents said that special support was necessary.

As shown in Table 8, multiple regression models were used to examine how the explanatory variables influenced the three outcome variables of *satisfaction*, *teaching* and *communication*. The results revealed that the same variables predicted parents' general satisfaction with school and their opinions of the quality of teaching and assessment, while the variables that predicted ease of communication were somewhat different.

Table 8 Regression analysis on scores of outcome variables (reproduced from Paper IV)

	Parents' satisfaction with their child's school in general				Parents' opinion of the quality of teaching and assessment				Parents' opinion on how easy it is to communicate with school personnel			
	b	SE	β	Sig.	b	SE	β	Sig.	b	SE	β	Sig.
Model 1												
Constant	5.561	0.072		<.001	0.218	0.066		.001	-0.031	0.066		.638
Age level	-0.121	0.032	-0.090	<.001	-0.151	0.029	-0.122	<.001	-0.004	0.029	-0.003	.903
Child's gender	0.164	0.052	0.076	.001	0.162	0.047	0.081	.001	0.102	0.048	0.051	.033
Single mother	-0.220	0.078	-0.067	.005	-0.157	0.071	-0.052	.027	-0.247	0.071	-0.083	.001
Basic education	0.130	0.099	0.031	.192	0.164	0.091	0.042	.073	0.095	0.092	0.025	.303
Percentage of variance explained (adj. R^2)		0.017				0.023				0.007		
Model 2												
Constant	4.583	0.131		<.001	-0.823	0.119		<.001	-1.237	0.120		<.001
Age level	-0.107	0.030	-0.079	<.001	-0.132	0.028	-0.107	<.001	0.021	0.028	0.017	.449
Child's gender	0.125	0.049	0.057	.011	0.123	0.045	0.061	.006	0.061	0.045	0.030	.178
Single mother	-0.211	0.074	-0.065	.004	-0.141	0.067	-0.047	.036	-0.223	0.068	-0.075	.001
Basic education	0.110	0.095	0.026	.246	0.155	0.087	0.040	.075	0.107	0.087	0.028	.221
Participation in social activities	-0.007	0.018	-0.009	.694	0.014	0.016	0.020	.377	0.054	0.016	0.077	.001
Influence in school decisions and vision	0.252	0.019	0.308	<.001	0.240	0.017	0.319	<.001	0.230	0.017	0.306	<.001
Percentage of variance explained (adj. R^2)		0.110				0.126				0.111		
R^2 change		0.094				0.103				0.104		
Sig. F change		<.001				<.001				<.001		
Model 3												
Constant	2.191	0.200		<.001	-3.167	0.180		<.001	-2.718	0.190		<.001
Age level	-0.114	0.029	-0.085	<.001	-0.128	0.026	-0.103	<.001	0.023	0.027	0.018	.406
Child's gender	0.063	0.047	0.029	.178	0.050	0.042	0.025	.227	0.016	0.044	0.008	.713
Single mother	-0.069	0.070	-0.021	.326	-0.004	0.063	-0.001	.953	-0.137	0.066	-0.046	.039
Basic education	0.180	0.090	0.043	.045	0.221	0.081	0.057	.006	0.149	0.085	0.039	.080
Participation in social activities	-0.017	0.016	-0.022	.308	0.007	0.015	0.009	.651	0.049	0.016	0.070	.002

Influence in school decisions and vision	0.216	0.018	0.264	<.001	0.205	0.016	0.272	<.001	0.208	0.017	0.276	<.001
Getting support because of special needs if needed	-0.637	0.069	-0.205	<.001	-0.838	0.062	-0.293	<.001	-0.510	0.065	-0.179	<.001
Child complains about bullying in school	0.222	0.022	0.217	<.001	0.151	0.020	0.160	<.001	0.101	0.021	0.108	<.001
Percentage of variance explained (adj. R^2)		0.213				0.251				0.159		
R^2 change		0.103				0.126				0.050		
Sig. F change		<.001				<.001				<.001		

Three background variables were significant predictors in Model 1 when looking at parents' satisfaction and quality of teaching. As their children became older, parents grew less satisfied with the school, with parents of boys less content than parents of girls, and single mothers less satisfied than other parents. These variables explained a small but significant part of the variability in general satisfaction (1.7%) and quality of teaching (2.3%).

When two variables concerning parents' experience were added to create Model 2, the three previous variables still made a significant contribution to the regression model. Frequent participation in social events and activities at school had no significant effect on parents' general satisfaction or on how they evaluated teaching, but was significant for ease of communication with school personnel. On the other hand, the feeling of having an influence on the school's decisions and future vision predicted parents' general satisfaction, opinion of teaching quality, and of ease of communication. Model 2 explained 11% of the variability in parents' answers about general satisfaction and the same regarding the ease of communication, but even stronger explanatory power on parents' opinions of the quality of teaching ($R^2_{adj.}$ = 12.6%).

When variables concerning the child's well-being and need for support were added in Model 3, the explanatory power of the regression model of parents' satisfaction with school increased substantially. The two new variables also influenced the contribution of the variables in previous models. In Model 3, it remained significant that parents were less satisfied with school when their children became older, but the child's gender and living in a single-mother household were no longer significant. Parents' education levels contributed significantly at this point: parents with more than compulsory education were less content compared to those with less education. The feeling of having an influence was still significant. The two new variables in Model 3 were important: if children complained of bullying, then parents became less satisfied. If parents felt that their child was getting inadequate support because of special needs, their satisfaction with school was substantially lowered. After adding these variables to Model 3, the regression explained 21.3% of the variability in parents' answers to the question of general satisfaction.

The same variables that were significant in the regression model on parents' estimations of the quality of teaching were significant in the regression on general satisfaction. The explanatory factor, however, was even stronger for all three models in the regression on teaching, and Model 3 explained 25.1% of the variability of parents' opinions.

The analysis of how easy or difficult it was for parents to communicate with school personnel highlighted influences of the background variables that differed from their influences in the previous regressions. In Model 1, the child´s age was not significant; parents of boys had more difficulties with communication than did parents of girls, and single mothers were more likely to experience problems with communication compared to other parents. The explanatory power was significant but small.

Only one of the variables from Model 1 was still significant in Model 2: being a single mother made communication more difficult. Parents that frequently participated in social events and activities at school reported more positive communication. The feeling of having an influence on school decisions and the school's future vision had an effect on parents' opinions about communication. Model 2 explained 11.1% of the variability of parents' ease in communicating with school personnel.

In Model 3, the two variables that were added concerning the child's well-being and support changed the significance of the variables in previous models. In Model 3, it was still significant that single mothers experienced more difficulties in communicating with school compared to other parents, but the other background variables were not significant. The feeling of having an influence at school and actively participating in social events was still significant for communication. The two new variables in Model 3 were important. If a child complained of bullying, or if parents felt that the child was getting inadequate support because of special needs, then their communication with school personnel became more difficult. Adding these two variables in Model 3 increased the explanatory power to 15.9%.

The regression analysis revealed different aspects of parent satisfaction. Model 1 draws attention to important background variables: child's grade level, gender, single-mother household and parent education. Though the variables are outside the school's control, schools may want to enlighten the school personnel about conscious and unconscious reactions toward parents and children belonging to different groups.

Model 2 revealed that the feeling of being able to influence school decisions and future vision gave parents confidence and enhanced their general satisfaction. On the other hand, the traditional means of parent participation by attending social events did not have the expected positive influence on parents' opinions. It was not significant in regard to parents' general satisfaction or their evaluation of the quality of teaching. It was, however, significant in regard to communication: participating in social activities at the school made communication with school personnel easier.

In Model 3, it became clear that the most influential variables for parents' opinions concerned the child's well-being and the school's responsiveness if the child needed special support. If children frequently complained about bullying, the consequence was parental dissatisfaction in general, and with communication and teaching. Furthermore, the analysis revealed the urgency to react when parents state that their child needs special support at school, since that variable was very influential for parents' satisfaction in general, and with teaching and communication.

In sum, the majority of parents were satisfied with their child's school, which may make it is easy to overlook those who are dissatisfied. Parents who felt that their children had special needs that were not acknowledged in school were more likely to be dissatisfied than were other parents. Educational background was also influential. The analysis draws special attention to how disadvantaged single mothers are when approaching school compared to others in the parent group. The findings showed differences in educational level: 12.8% of single mothers only had compulsory education, whereas only 7% of other parents were in that situation. The likelihood of a child receiving inadequate support in school was double for single mothers compared to other parents: 25.8% reported that their children were not getting necessary support, while only 12.8% of other parents experienced the same problem. Single mothers' general satisfaction with school was lower than that of other parents, and they experienced difficulties in communication more frequently than did other parents. These findings clearly indicate that social factors influence parents' perceptions of the support services children get at school, home-school relations and communication, and parents' satisfaction with school in general.

5 Discussion

This research project had three main aims: first, to give an overview of parental involvement in Icelandic compulsory schools; second, to bring attention to teenage students' opinions on the home-school relationship; and third, to examine how parental involvement and parents' satisfaction with school are influenced by school services and social factors. Three corresponding research questions underpinned the main research question: What part does parental involvement play in compulsory schools in Iceland?

Findings revealed that parents and school professionals strongly believe that parental involvement in compulsory schools is essential for children's education. How this is manifested in school practices and reflected in adults' opinions will be discussed in the following sections, mainly referring to Papers I and II, as they give an overview of the issue in the Icelandic context. Then the discussion turns to students' opinions, and to social differences amongst students and their families that limit this firm belief, as brought forth in Papers III and IV. The picture of the home-school relationship benefitting all has to be questioned, and the discussion reveals that the home-school relationship is a complex issue.

5.1 Organisation of home-school relationships

What characterises the home-school relationship and the cooperation between parents and teachers?

This is the first underpinning research question. It will be discussed in this chapter, and findings presented in Paper I and Paper II contribute answers to this question.

5.1.1 Home-school relationships are systematic and regular

The organization of the home-school relationship in Iceland runs through conventional channels, as evidenced by the participating schools in this study. The practices are similar to the usual ones in, for example, Denmark and Norway (Dannesboe et al., 2012). There are two (69%) or three (26%) brief parent-teacher conferences per year, and the vast majority of teachers (89%) say that students always accompany their parents to parent-teacher conferences. Parents also attend various social events in school

with their children. In addition, there is communication via letters, emails and phone calls. In short, the organization of parent-teacher conferences and communication seems to be systematic and regular, which is of key importance in keeping parents involved in schools (Christiansen, 2010, Epstein et al., 2002; Epstein, 2007; Nordahl 2007; Sæmundsdóttir and Karvelsdóttir, 2008).

The question arises, though, if this routine way of communication between parents and school personnel is merely a necessary exchange of information and a duty that must be fulfilled, or if it is an indication of cooperation with more profound discussions regarding students' concerns, which certainly is the aim. Each school year, just about half of the Norwegian parents had direct contact with the teachers with only adults present (Nordahl, 2007). As mentioned before, students are frequently present when teachers and parents meet. More than half of the Icelandic parents said that they contacted teachers less than once a year about their child's behaviour or students' interaction, and less than 28% about their child´s learning. This indicates a similar pattern as in Norway, showing that many Icelandic parents are rather distant from the schools just as in Norway, which adds to the question of whether this traditional way of communication can be interpreted as real cooperation. In a discussion about the organisation of home-school relations it is important to beware of "the more, the better" rhetoric and to keep in mind that quality in home-school relationships is also important (Dannesboe et al., 2012). Families have unequal preconditions for fruitful cooperation, and some researchers question the benefits of schools' interference in private lives of families (Bæck, 2005, 2009; Dannesboe et al., 2012; Kryger, 2012, 2015; Palludan, 2012).

It is known that parent-teacher relations are easiest for the more-educated parents, the middle class, those with more capital and capacity, those who have experienced success in school and those who highly value education (Bæck, 2005, 2009; Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003; Lareau, 2000). Obviously, the conventional home-school relationship does not suit all families. Therefore, it is puzzling to realise that the organisation of the relationship tends to be alike, regardless of children´s age, across schools, and even across countries. The findings in this study are no exception; the organisation of the home-school relationship is traditional, and no signs of great exceptions are visible. Official policy programmes for enhancing parent-teacher cooperation tend to uphold certain ways of organising things, like, for example, Epstein´s model of school-family-community partnership. Therefore, subtler ways of supporting parents, that would

benefit a broader group, may be hidden or even missing entirely (Jeynes, 2011a, 2011b).

In Icelandic, the term home-school relationship is *tengsl heimila og skóla* as described in Section 2.1. on key concepts. But the terms *foreldrasamstarf,* which literally translates to "parents-cooperation," and *samstarf heimila og skóla,* meaning "cooperation between home and school," are very much used when referring to the relationship. Therefore, it seems that cooperation is almost included "per definition" when the reality may be more like a mere exchange of information. This metaphoric terminology is not solely an Icelandic problem; it is often taken for granted that communication or any contact between home and school automatically includes cooperation, but that is not necessarily true (Dannesboe et al., 2012).

This research project has revealed the need for a critical discussion about the terms used regarding home-school relations and their content, to unveil hollow phrases. The benefits of fostering equity in communication between parents and teachers are apparent (Deslandes, 2001). Thus, a discussion about the meaning of terms in use should be conducted amongst school professionals and parents, as definitions must be built on mutual respect and grounded in school culture.

5.1.2 Supervisory teachers´ demanding role

The home-school relationship rests upon contact between parents and their child's supervisory teacher. Many parents do not have any contact with other school personnel. Almost all the parents had communicated with supervisory teachers; 65% of them found it very easy, and 25% found it easy, indicating a comfortable relationship for the majority of parents. On the other hand, the teachers did not feel as comfortable about their relationships with parents; only 15% of supervisory teachers found relationships with parents to be very easy. Neither easy nor difficult said 16%, and some 7% said it was difficult. So, one out of four teachers felt that the relationship with parents was not easy. This should not be surprising because a significant part of the communication between parents and supervisory teachers is about issues concerning individual students and on matters that are most likely somewhat problematic, or what has been described as seeking contact when needed (Epstein, 2007, Nordahl, 2007). This can also be interpreted as an indicator that teachers are feeling stressed when communicating with parents, or they are not secure and lack

needed competence as Norwegian researches have indicated (Bæck, 2009, 2015; Westergård, 2007, 2013).

Icelandic teachers spend considerable amounts of time on communication with parents; two-thirds of them spent two to four hours per week providing information and cooperating with parents. They spent more time communicating with parents about poor behaviour or learning difficulties of individual students than they devoted to growing positive relationships with the parent group as a whole. Given these facts, it must become important to assess whether supervisory teachers' time on home-school relations is wisely spent. Also, it should be determined if there is an underlying need for strengthening teachers' individual competencies, as Westergård (2013) has pointed out as very important for positive parent-teacher cooperation.

Findings in Paper I showed that parents' wishes and fulfilment regarding the services their child received at school influenced their assessment of the relationship with supervisory teachers. Parents of children with learning difficulties or behavioural difficulties were more likely to judge the communications as being difficult compared to parents of children without learning or behavioural problems. This may be interpreted as a sign of disappointment; parents' expectations are not fulfilled, and the supervisory teachers take the blame. On the other hand, the group of parents that reported the easiest communication with supervisory teachers were parents of children with disabilities who feel their needs are indeed met at the schools.

When these findings are examined, it becomes evident that supervisory teachers' role in Icelandic compulsory schools is crucial. Supervisory teachers can make the systematic and routine communication both informative and warm. Conversely, communication via emails and letters can be hollow and flat if teachers are merely fulfilling their duties and following their school´s procedures. The supervisory teachers hold the key to good relationships with parents. Good relationships are time-consuming, but rewarding. These relationships are also quite demanding, since teachers also must answer for school decisions, for example, regarding special support, even if they are not in the position of making relevant decisions.

To sum up, the findings seem to reveal that teachers´ competencies in the home-school relationship must be improved since teachers feel that their working conditions often make their duties a burden. It is not likely that teachers will develop their professional capacities in this matter without support. Norwegian researchers (Bæck, 2015; Westergård, 2013)

concluded that school leaders have to be aware and take responsibility for building collective competence. Also, individual teachers need opportunities to build competence along with their colleagues. The results here reveal the same situation and support findings from researchers which state that school systems have to respond and utilise these findings.

Competence-building is a prerequisite for advancement in the field of home-school relationship. This research showed that difficulties in parent-teacher cooperation multiplied if parents were disappointed and felt that the school failed to give their children needed support. Therefore, developing competencies in individualized, differentiated instruction should be included in the discussion on how to define the competencies teachers must possess to succeed in a home-school relationship. Increasing competencies to meet students´ needs and develop fruitful cooperation between parents and teachers would benefit all; teachers and other school personnel, families and the students, who must never be forgotten in the discussion.

5.1.3 Adults prefer traditional parental involvement

Paper II described what teenagers, parents and school professionals found to be desirable in parental participation in compulsory school activities. It revealed a split in opinions between groups and generations. Most adults, parents and school personnel, favour the more traditional kind of parental participation, which primarily involves social activities. Meanwhile, teenagers showed significant interest in relating parental participation to their academic activities. Teenagers' opinions will be discussed further later in this chapter.

The strongest opinions regarding desirable parental participation in general appeared in the answers from school personnel, as 98% found it to be rather or very desirable to have parents attend extracurricular activities such as social events in school, and 84% wanted parents to participate in organising these activities. Parents were almost as eager to contribute to social activities; 73% thought it was desirable to participate in organising them. School personnels and parents priorities were not totally alike (see Figures 7 and 8), but findings clearly pointed in the same direction. This is not surprising and confirms the commitment to traditions of social activities being the core of parental involvement in compulsory schools in Iceland and neighbouring countries.

This preference for parental participation in social activities over participation in academic activities raises questions about how to interpret

the fact that 99 percent of the same parents and school professionals considered parental support to be “rather important” or “very important” for children’s academic achievement, as shown in Paper I. This is, in fact, an interesting contradiction. Why do most adults, who believe that the home-school relationship is very important for achievement, also think parents best support to good achievement is given by participating primarly in extracurricular activities and social entertainment? Why do they hesitate in speaking for parental participation in all activities?

In Icelandic society, the separation between the roles of parents on the one hand and teachers on the other hand in a home-school relationship is formed by a long tradition. This tradition seems to be more effective than the Compulsory School Act (2008) and the Icelandic National Curriculum (2013), both emphasising several opportunities for parents to influence the academic side of school life as well as the social side. This can also be associated with the fact that 90 percent of the parents were satisfied with their interactions with supervisory teachers, which related to their overall satisfaction with the experience of school, as confirmed in Paper I. Parents who are satisfied may feel little need to step out of secure positions and take on new roles related to their child’s studies in their traditional social supporting role.

The contradiction is also an issue of time, or rather of lack of time, as Marinósson (2002) pointed out that it may help busy parents if schools do not demand too much of them. Time is indeed a mysterious factor in a home-school relationship. As discussed before, teachers already spend much time on parent-teacher communication, and many experience this as a burden in their working lives. Therefore, including parents more in academic activities at school can be seen by teachers as an act of taking on more time-consuming tasks, time they do not have available. Teachers may also feel little need for opening up their field of practice, while they see parents both as co-workers and as consumers or users of schools (Rasmussen, 2004). This is controversial and reveals the dilemma many teachers find hard to handle.

The conclusion is that the contradiction in adults’ opinions is an issue of time and tradition and hinders further development in the field. The present consequences are that parents miss opportunities to support their children, and the teenagers believe that parental support is of great importance for their achievement, as discussed later in Chapter 5.2. Furthermore, supervisory teachers continue to carry the primary responsibility for students’ education and well-being in school, even if they sometimes feel they lack time or competence for the tasks (Bæck, 2015; Westergård, 2013).

5.1.4 Small overlap of spheres

When the findings above are compared to the evaluation tool that was influential when we were designing the research project *Teaching and learning in Icelandic compulsory schools* (see Figure 1), they suggest that most of the participating schools are on Stage 3 (Óskarsdóttir et al., 2014b). That means, in short, that parents receive study plans and various information for the whole class, and they take part in social events and attend regular parent-teacher conferences.

It is interesting that parents participating in this research project found participating in internal school evaluation and doing volunteer work at school preferable to participating in planning and assessing student´s studies (see Figure 8). Epstein's (2011) model on overlapping spheres of influence can be useful in interpreting this. Parents may find it easier to take part in activities concerning the school as an institution in the community-sphere than to take steps towards the core of the school-sphere, namely, activities that could challenge teachers' professional practices such as planning and assessing a student's studies. It is worth considering that a genuine home-school partnership is based on mutual trust (Deslandes, 2001), and the findings show that school personnel were reluctant when participation touched upon their expertise in traditional academic activities. Teachers were, however, more positive about having parents participate in planning and assessment than the parents were themselves. Roughly half of the parent group and half of the teacher group deemed cooperation in assessing students' studies to be desirable, and nearly half of the parent group (48%) found participation in planning students' studies desirable, along with 65% of the school personnel.

These findings bring attention to the importance of supporting parental participation in subtle ways, for example, school personnel being loving and encouraging to parents (Jeynes, 2011b). Teachers who have positive attitudes towards parental involvement and encourage parents to become involved in all types of school activities harvest fewer disciplinary problems (Sigurgeirsson & Kaldalóns, 2006). It is the teachers' duty to take the initiative to contact and collaborate with families according to the laws on compulsory school (Compulsory School Act, 91 C.F.R., 2008). The traditional view in the field of education is that school professionals are responsible for initiating and facilitating connections between the home and the school (Christiansen, 2010; Epstein, 2011; Epstein et al., 2002; Nordahl, 2007). That responsibility must be acted upon, of course, but it is equally important for school personnel to bear in mind the diversity of the families

involved, and that overt tutelage could be a two-edged sword (Jeynes, 2011a).

Findings in Paper I about the organisation and common practice of home-school relationship, and findings in Paper II on what parents and school professionals find desirable in parental involvement, can be compared to the Epstein model of school-family-community partnership. Then it becomes apparent that the overlap of spheres is rather small in practice, and the relationship between home and school rests mainly on supervisory teachers' shoulders. Notably, students, parents and school professionals express an interest in having a more fulfilling relationship. Regarding Epstein´s model, one can say that there is potential to have the spheres overlap more.

5.1.5 The surrounding society

Bronfenbrenner's ecological system theory can be useful for interpreting the structure of home-school relationships. Schools and families belong to the microsystem surrounding every child, and the connections between them are in the mesosystem. The findings reveal that the contact between families and compulsory schools needs to be improved, just like the contact between school levels in Iceland (Óskarsdóttir, 2012).

Findings here show that the flow of information in the mesosystem is mainly from schools to families; it is routinized, but for many families, its content does not fulfil the need for real cooperation. The tremendous amount of time and effort teachers spend on preparing and spreading information and dealing with problems related mainly to a few individual students may indeed obscure the fact that the connections in the mesosystem are often too weak. The good influences of parental involvement on learning outcomes (Seginer, 2006) are known by many school authorities and policy makers, situated in the exosystem of society and having influence in schools without direct contact. They set forth wishes and demands with good intentions meant to strengthen the home-school relationship. But almost all responsibility rests on teachers' shoulders, in the Icelandic compulsory schools as elsewhere, and will therefore, sometimes become more of a burden than the support it is meant to be.

With regard to the ecological theory, my conclusion is that national and communal school authorities can, of course, encourage more parental involvement and stronger home-school relationships. But the authorities' good intentions can fall short if they do not understand the structure of

home-school relationships, the work needed to cultivate connections, and if almost all the responsibility continues to be on supervisory teachers' shoulders. School leaders can be an asset; they can take a more active role in the home-school relationship by leading and structuring the communication (Bæck, 2015), and by building competencies amongst school personnel (Westergård, 2013). Furthermore, social circumstances have to be carefully considered, as will be discussed in Chapter 5.3.

5.2 Teenagers' opinions on parents' participation

The second underpinning research question is: What do teenagers prefer in parents' participation, and how could their wishes affect the cooperation?

The discussion in the first section is about teenagers' opinions regarding home-school relations as well as teachers' and parents' opinions regarding teenagers; it builds on findings in Papers I and II. Then, in subsequent sections, the discussion refers to a deeper examination of teenagers' opinions as presented in Paper III.

5.2.1 Teenagers' wish for focus on their studies

Paper II revealed that the majority of students were positive about parents' participation in their school life. Students found parents' participation to be more desirable in activities related to the academic side than to the social side of school life, contradicting the opinions of most adults: both parents and school personnel favoured the more traditional kind of parental participation, which primarily involves social activities. This difference in priorities is one of the main findings of this study and indicates the importance of bringing students' wishes forth in the debate on the home-school relationship, to direct the focus onto the student, who is at the centre of the ecological system theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), and listen to her or his opinions.

The majority of students want parents to assist them with their studies at home and at school. Their answers reveal that students want parents to participate when their studies are at stake rather than having them join social events. This preference can be interpreted in many ways. For example, students may want parents to bring in additional information when teachers are doing assessments or making individualised plans. They may want parents to become better informed about their academic performance and the enacted curriculum in school. In short, teenagers express a belief that parents can help them succeed in school. The sad part of this interpretation is that some parents have better means than do

others to provide support; educated, middle-class parents always seem to be one step ahead. It is difficult to find Icelandic research on compulsory schools that has social class as a variable. However, in the next chapter I discuss results which confirm that class differences exist here, just as in our neighbouring countries. Nordic research shows that changes in prevailing teaching methods and an increased emphasis on individualised learning have even accentuated the vulnerability of students who lack resources, and given students from middle-class families even more advantages in school, and that is most likely the case here as well (Bæck, 2017; Vinterek, 2006).

Both parents and teachers strengthen their focus on learning as students grow older, even if both groups say they prefer parental participation in the social side of school life. Teachers say that they use a greater proportion of time on communication and perhaps cooperation related to learning when the students are older. This indicator of greater emphasis on learning and achievement can be related to what Nordahl (2007) discusses: schools and teachers become more autonomous and less influenced by parents as the students grow older. This also supports the finding that home-school relationships undergo some kind of necessary adjustment, because teenagers need distance from adults to develop their own identities (Kryger, 2012). Another perspective is that, according to findings in Paper I, there seems to be less contact as the children grow older, similar to what Epstein (2007), Desforges and Abouchaar (2003) and Nordahl (2007) found. This is alarming in terms of children with learning difficulties. Parents estimate of the need for special support for their children increases as students get older, rising to 28% of teenagers needing support. Therefore, these changes in home-school relationships are not necessarily negative–except for the teenagers who need more support: for them, increased and more versatile cooperation between parents and teachers would be an advantage.

5.2.2 Teenagers' wish for a changed focus

Paper III elaborated on teenagers' opinions presented in Paper II and explored further what was behind teenage students' wishes regarding parental participation. Findings showed a strong correlation between students' answers about different ways of parental participation (see Figure 6); students were either positive about parents' participation or rather reluctant about all given opportunities. With reference to Epstein's school-family-community partnership model (2011), one can say that, in general,

teenagers were positive towards the overlapping of the spheres, parents' active participation in their school life and a fruitful relationship between their family, their teachers at school, and perhaps even their community. The minority of teenagers who were reluctant or negative towards home-school relationship are also important. Common traits of that group unveiled how difficult it is for teenagers to deal with the lack of belief in one´s own learning abilities and how that relates to being bored with tedious tasks i.e. having a rather negative school experience all in all.

It is noteworthy that students wanted parents to be better informed about school subjects and students' learning tasks. This desire implies that the conventional flow of information from teachers to parents through the communication systems on the Internet does not cover what students think is important for parents to know. The traditional home-school relationship could be stretched to include the community in the partnership, for example, by teaching parents about the aims and learning outcomes described in the national curriculum and about the tasks students work on to achieve the required goals. This could be a community-based project, not restricted to single schools.

5.2.3 Students' personal traits affect their wishes

Model 1 in the regression analysis in Paper III described the effects of gender and grade on teenagers' wishes for parental participation; some differences became clear. Good confidence in one's own learning ability had a positive effect.

The girls favoured parental participation more than the boys did. This difference is not a surprise, since girls and boys often have different expectations. Gendered socialization practices, both in school and at home, affect teenagers in many ways, including their wishes for parental involvement in schools (Eccles, 2011). These findings supported what one would suppose from a gendered point of view: the girls tend to conform more to what is expected of students than the boys do.

The difference between grades was also highly significant; the elder students were less likely than the younger ones to wish for parents' participation. It is tempting to interpret this in line with findings about the different paths teenagers choose when developing their own identities and their need to find their own ways to deal with the parent-teacher relationship (Kryger, 2012). Now, since students find parents' participation much more desirable in activities related to the academic side of school life than to the social side, a greater emphasis on parental involvement in

students' learning should be favoured as the students get older. That would be an action favoured by all partners: a change in the organisation of the home-school relationship when students grow older, but not a withdrawal of parents' participation.

5.2.4 Schools can influence students' interests

Teaching quality, teacher-student relations, and students' appreciation of school activities are the variables of school experience that were added in Model 2 in the regression analysis in Paper III. They explained almost as much of the variability in teenagers' wishes for parental participation as did the personal traits in Model 1. These factors are within the school sphere, referring to Epstein´s three overlapping spheres, so schools have the opportunity to influence and change them.

It is worth recalling here that it is necessary to distinguish between factors that can be changed and those that cannot be changed and between factors that can be easily changed and those that would require complicated efforts (Hattie, 2012). Many municipalities and school leaders have survey information at hand that can be used to measure their students' appreciation of school activities. Based on that measurement, school professionals could then act to better school-related factors, if needed, since they are within the professionals' own sphere. The result would hopefully be that students appreciated school activities more than before, followed by an increase in students' interest in parental participation, with both factors contributing to better academic achievement (Epstein, 2007; Hattie, 2009).

Prior findings from this research project have shown that teenage students find it more important for schools to prioritise good achievement than adults do. Students put achievement in second place on the priority list, while parents put it in fifth place, and school personnel put it in sixth place (Björnsdóttir & Jónsdóttir, 2014). Model 3 in the regression analysis showed that teenagers who believe that discipline and a peaceful class environment contribute to good achievement were more likely to welcome parental participation in school. This adds to the factors of school experience that school professionals should take notice of. Students' belief that parents' support is essential for academic achievement had the most significant effect of all the variables on the outcome variable: *Teenagers' wishes for parental participation*. Teenagers are smart; they want all the help they can get from both teachers and parents to get good grades; they see good grades as something desirable, for example, to open a wider selection of secondary schools to choose between.

5.2.5 The emphasis on good grades

Expectations for better academic achievement are all around us, and the influence of GERM (Global educational reform movement) can be detected in the Nordic countries in many ways, and, for example, in increased control of schools and enhanced interest in competition and comparisons of students' grades. The emphasis on equity and quality is still valued in the Nordic educational systems (Sahlberg, 2015), but it is wise to be careful not to sacrifice it while striving for high student performance.

In Paper III, students who reported positive school experience and confidence in their own learning ability were also more positive towards parental involvement than those with less self-confidence or more negative experience in school. The size of the student group that did not find parental involvement agreeable was sometimes fairly big. Students were most reluctant about unexpected visits; one out of every five students said that parental visits to school and lessons were very undesirable. They clearly preferred to keep home and school apart. This cynical student group needs attention and encouragement, and teachers should reach out to build a relationship with their families.

In some cases it maybe a very difficult task to change these negative attitudes. Findings from a longitudinal study on home-school relationships, as predictors for growth in achievement in math, showed to the researchers´ surprise that teachers can not compensate for parents: if teenagers did not experience fundamental relationship qualities with parents, they would become disaffected from adults in general and disregard resources offered by other adults (Gregory & Weinstein, 2004). The cynical teenage group that clearly wants to keep home and school apart, can be suffering from a general distrust in adults. They will not experience quality and gain equally from their school years as will their fellow classmates in achievement or well-being if the attitudes comprising negative school experience are neglected.

In general, during teenagers' maturation, it is important for them to distance themselves from adults. Therefore, parents' diminishing participation in school-related activities can be a sign of healthy relationships (Kryger, 2012). Anyhow, findings in this study bring focus onto the risks rising when many difficult or negative factors come together in a teenagers life. Since a lack of confidence in one's own learning ability, and a less positive school experience, are related to students' less positive opinions about parental involvement, we might find that a certain group of students is in revolt against both parents' and teachers' influences. This group of teenagers might miss valuable support from adults if their resistance is just accepted.

5.2.6 Students voices in the ecological systems

It is appealing to turn to Bronfenbrenner´s ecological systems theory again and bring it into the discussion. One of the main findings in this research is that the majority of students were positive towards parents´ participation in school-related activities. Even though their preferences differed form adults preferences, one can say that these teenagers placement in the microsystem was fine, and flow of information in the mesosystem was ongoing between families, schools and other services.

On the other hand, the negative and cynical teenage group discussed in previous sub-chapter, experienced some kind of a displacement at the microsystem level which includes important institutions like home and school, and also some interruptions in the mesosystem that should connect these institutions. This fortifies the conclusion that it is necessary to bring forth students´ wishes in the debate on home-school relationship; to direct the focus onto the priorities students have, since they are at centre of the ecological system, and also, to listen to and respect their opinions whether they are in line with adults opinions or not.

5.3 Influential factors for parents' opinions

The third underpinning research question brings the families into focus: Which factors influence parents' satisfaction with schools, and how do they affect the home-school relationship?

The focus on supervisory teachers and students in previous papers evoked questions about factors that influence parents' experiences, both school services and social factors such as parents' education and marital status. Therefore, in Paper IV, factors that influence parents and families were explored, and they will be discussed in the following sections.

5.3.1 An acceptable level of dissatisfaction

Parental satisfaction with their children's school varied, even though in most cases, it was high. More than half of the parent group was totally or very satisfied, and an additional 35% were rather satisfied, as shown in Figure 9. When results are that positive, at first glance, it is easy to overlook the fact that 7% of the parents were dissatisfied and another 7% were neutral, not willing to say they were satisfied. Even though an acceptable rate of dissatisfaction is debatable, it is important to be aware of the groups of parents that are more prone to be dissatisfied than others, especially since these parents share some common traits. It is also important to note

that explanations of parents' dissatisfaction can be diverse and related to many factors other than relationships between parents and teachers (Westergård, 2007).

Parents´ satisfaction is also a complex concept. It seemed to be a straightforward and a rather simple term at the beginning of this research project, but that changed during the research process. Studying different preferences regarding parents´ participation in school while writing Paper II and writing Paper III on teenagers´ opinions, revealed that the face value of participants´ answers is not enough due to various possible interpretations of questions and answers and because participants may not be all equally willing to reveal their opinions. Therefore, in Paper IV, it became essential to explore parents´ satisfaction and to use factor analysis to adduce different viewpoints of satisfaction. Then, multiple regression was done on two factors and on the straightforward question regarding the matter, thereby revealing parents´ satisfaction from three different perspectives.

The results in Paper IV show that the most important factors influencing parents' satisfaction or dissatisfaction with school relate to their children's well-being and needed support. When children complain about being bullied, or when the school is not responsive to children's need for special support, parents experience disappointment and dissatisfaction. The importance of cooperation and coherent effort focused on children's learning and maturation is accentuated by the findings which show that parents' dissatisfaction increases as children get older. Also, the need for special support increases as students get older, as mentioned before. These findings indicate that early interventions to address students' learning difficulties, and a greater emphasis on bullying prevention at school, are of major importance and could diminish parents' dissatisfaction.

5.3.2 The importance of having influence

The feeling of being able to influence the school's decisions and future vision is important to parents. According to the regression analysis in Paper IV, those parents who felt that they were able to influence the school in this way were generally more satisfied with the school, and especially with the teaching, and this feeling made communication with school personnel easier. This result supports studies that find failing to include parents in important decisions in school settings indicating that parents are not treated as equals (Bæck, 2009). Moreover, research shows that teachers' opinions of parents are often ambivalent; they see parents either as supports or barriers to successful teaching (Rasmussen, 2004). The findings

here confirm that holding parents at distance can be costly, lowering parents satisfaction with school.

The relationship between parents and school personnel, with supervisory teachers as key figures, can be sensitive and somewhat personal. Findings here support the notion that encouragement and support for parents is more important than tutelage and guidelines (Jeynes, 2011b), since communication proved to be such an important and somewhat independent factor in the relationship and its quality. Also, findings in Paper IV confirmed that the traditional methods of parental involvement, i.e. attending social events, increased neither general parental satisfaction nor satisfaction with teaching specifically, but did have a positive influence on communication between parents and school personnel. The home-school relationship has to be cultivated with care.

5.3.3 Equity for all but single mothers

International research has shown that parental participation in school-related activities contributes to children's success at school (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003; Hattie, 2009, 2012; Jeynes, 2005, 2011a). Parents experience pressure to participate because they believe it is in their children's best interest (Böök & Perälä-Littunen, 2014). This research echoes these findings: both parents and school professionals believe that parental support is essential for children's academic achievement, as discussed before. Moreover, findings indicated that parents are presented with varying opportunities to become involved, and they might experience several obstacles as discussed before, even if they have several official opportunities to influence in school.

Parents with more formal education are more likely to participate in home-school cooperation and more likely to acknowledge the importance of parental support in education (Bæck, 2009), and the study in Paper IV confirms that Icelandic parents are alike. Researchers have stated that schools are more likely to match middle-class parents' values and involvement styles than those of the working class (Bæck, 2005; Lareau, 2000). Furthermore, academic socialisation seems to be the most important factor in children's success in school, and it is best handled by the middle class (Bæck, 2017). Findings here indicate similarly that social status may affect the extent to which parents' voices are heard when arguing for their children's needs for special support in school. Even though parental assessment of whether their children need special support in school is not the basis for schools' decisions to provide such support, parents' confidence

in speaking on behalf of their children, in a way that the schools consider to be reliable and persuasive, may play a role in the schools' decisions.

It is somewhat harder for schools to please the more-educated parents; those that had completed more than compulsory education. In Paper IV, regression models were used to explore parents' satisfaction from different perspectives, i.e. their satisfaction with communication with school personnel, with teaching, and their general satisfaction. The regressions showed that parents´ education level was a significant variable even when the strongest explanatory variable of parents' satisfaction or dissatisfaction was added, i.e. the variable "getting special support if a child needed it at school". Parents with more education were less satisfied than were those with less education. So, it is possible that the more-educated parents were more demanding on behalf of their children, and their children were more likely to receive adequate support.

Educational level and marital status are social factors that are somewhat intertwined in the findings here. The educational level among single mothers is lower compared to the educational level of other parent groups in this study, and the findings reveal that parental background influences factors such as receiving special support in school. Therefore, it is alarming that single mothers are overrepresented in the group of parents who view their children as needing individual support in school but not getting any or not enough.

When these findings are summed up, one can conclude that children of single mothers with only compulsory education are at risk of being overlooked and unseen in compulsory schools even if they need special support, and their mothers are likely unheard. These mothers are likely to be less able than the parent group in general to lead the academic socialisation that seems to be the most important factor in children's success in school, according to Bæck (2017). Therefore, the disadvantages their children meet at school are apparent. These findings support international research that shows the influence of social and cultural capital on the relationship between home and school, and parents' possibilities to influence school (Bæck, 2005, 2009; Catts, 2009; Lareau, 2000; Palludan, 2012).

A surprising point in this research was that even if single mothers feel powerless compared to other parents, findings show that they are more willing than the other parents to participate in social activities at school; this shows their resilience in supporting their children. Keeping in mind that most teachers in Icelandic compulsory schools are women, the findings call for further research and critical discussions regarding respect and power structures within the school system.

5.3.4 The much-wanted equity in education

It is a common belief that Iceland is a society of educational equity. The present findings pertaining to different levels of access to special support, the influence of parents' educational level, and the importance of feeling that the school appreciates parents' opinions all contest the idea of equity as a major value in the relationship between schools and students' families. One of the major issues to address is probably the illusion of equity, since it is not necessarily a leading value in practice. It is necessary to acknowledge that the social status, gender, educational level and cultural values of parents do, indeed, have an impact on the rationale and practice of parental involvement in Icelandic schools, just as in schools in other countries (Bæck, 2009, 2010).

Parents value their children's well-being in school as much as their achievements, and even though media discussions often seem to suggest otherwise, parents will sometimes value well-being even more (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003). However, policy documents, such as a white paper released by the Icelandic Ministry of Education, Science and Culture (Mennta- og menningarmálaráðuneytið, 2014) show that school authorities do not necessarily seem to be aware of parents' priorities or sufficiently respect parents' opinions, and the position is often ambivalent on the local level, as can be seen in policy documents (Reykjavíkurborg, 2015).

Emphasis on equity and quality in educational systems has been thoroughly discussed by Sahlberg (2014), who questioned whether this emphasis should be called Nordic, fearing that so-called Nordic values could be changing. The findings in Paper IV in some respects sustain this fear. In Iceland, the blame cannot be put on free school choice, but at the same time many other influences of GERM can be traced within the Icelandic compulsory school system, such as stronger measures of control over schools. The illusion of the Icelandic educational system as upholding the values of equity and quality may be one of the reasons for the downplaying of equity in schools' practice, which in turn is displayed in parents' dissatisfaction. Quality and equity are often promoted as values that are emphasized in the Nordic countries (Sahlberg, 2014), but findings discussed here signal the importance of bringing these values forth when working with home-school relations and including them in discussions about school development, where school professionals, parents and students should all have a respected voice.

5.4 Future research

The image of equity in Icelandic compulsory schools is disputable, and findings in this research call for a more in-depth examination of equity within those schools and the opinions of all partners in this regard. Special attention should be given to single mothers, or single parents, and to the less educated in the parent group. Findings of this project show social differences in the parent group and within the student group that are interesting and influential for home-school relationships. Therefore, a better understanding of social factors and power structures is needed and could be of value for school development.

Students´ perspectives on parental involvement are of great interest and should be investigated further and including the younger students could be of value. As this study has shown, students' opinions bring in some new and fresh views on the research topic.

Findings regarding teenagers opinions and several factors influencing parents satisfaction and relation with school, are presented in Paper 3 and Paper 4. It could be interesting to address these questions further by using qualitative methods to get an in depth perspective on the issues.

It is well worth some time and effort to scrutinise the covert and open the aims with parental involvement and bring forth the opinions of school personnel. As for now, school personnel seems to fulfil the duties brought upon them by laws and regulations, but teachers do not feel at ease; young teachers need support, and school leaders need a more definite role. It is essential to investigate how that support could be provided. How the relationship is organised and conducted is remarkably alike between schools, regardless of students' age and other circumstances. If the aim is joint responsibility for students' welfare and education, as often stated, then parental involvement must be discussed and encouraged in many ways, fitting schools' culture in each place.Lastly, it is of great interest to use the data and findings from this project in Nordic or international cooperative studies, to compare organisation and preferences and discover barriers in home-school relations. It would be useful to get a broader perspective on how to develop competencies amongst school personnel and strategies of cooperation according to different situations in diverse schools and municipalities.

5.5 Strengths and limitations

The study described in this synopsis had some strengths and limitations related to the overall research design, sampling, and analyses.

The main strength is that the dataset is big; students in the schools that participated comprise 17% of all students in compulsory schools in Iceland at that time. The data reveals differences that could easily have been missed in a smaller dataset. But the size of the dataset made it possible, for example, to highlight the roots of dissatisfaction within the parent group that we probably would not be able to show as statistically significant in a smaller set.

Another strength is that this doctoral project belongs to a family of studies, all building on some of the quantitative and qualitative data belonging to the same research project. Because there are several studies connected to the main research project, one can discover new sides of known topics or even brand-new topics by following the threads belonging to different research strands or teams. Studies done by other researchers can also throw an interesting light on certain aspects or issues within the topic of parental involvement. Thus, combined efforts, as well as multiple perspectives, can bring about new knowledge and ignite new research interests.

One limitation is that not all the participating schools were chosen randomly, so it is fair if somebody wants to question the validity of the sample being representative of Icelandic compulsory schools in general. The research project's emphasis on studying the development of individualisation justified the stratification done by choosing three schools that explicitly were developing their teaching and student learning in that direction. On the other hand, with regard to other interests such as parental involvement, this way of choosing the sample limits our possibilities to interpret findings.

Another limitation is the compromise that is necessary when so many researchers work together, for example, in creating questionnaires. In this research project, I had no choice but to use some questions from others, which indeed would have been different if they were formed only to serve the interest of this research.

6 Conclusions

In an attempt to answer the main research question – What part does parental involvement play in compulsory schools? – I will highlight the findings and discussion points I find most relevant and surprising and try to tie them together.

First, according to the participants in this research project, parental involvement plays a substantial but rather conventional role in Icelandic compulsory schools. Icelandic parents and school personnel firmly believe that their cooperation is essential for children's education, and more specifically for students' academic achievement. Good grades are highly valued on the surface of the society. For example, the media, but particularly official authorities like, for example, the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture seem to emphasize good grades more than do compulsory school professionals and parents. The expectations regarding good grades on national and international assessment can become a burden or distract school personnel and parents, who seem to agree that they want to prioritize students' well-being. These contradictions point to the importance of framing what home-school cooperation is good for, bearing in mind that it cannot solve all difficult tasks within the school system.

Second, the project has revealed a need for clarification of the terminology used in the field of home-school relationships, at least in Iceland. The terms most used for home-school relationship are, in Icelandic, *samstarf heimila og skóla* or *foreldrasamstarf*, which literally translate to "cooperation between home and school" or "parents cooperation." Therefore, it seems that cooperation is almost included "per definition" when a mere exchange of information is often the reality. The need for a critical discussion is eminent to unveil some hollow phrases and to make room for changes in school practices. A discussion about the meaning of terms to use should occur amongst school professionals and parents, as clear and useful definitions must build on mutual respect and sprout in school culture. I suggest a discussion about the term *tengsl heimila og skóla,* literally translating to "home-school relationships", since it is somewhat neutral and does not contain the word "cooperation" or *samstarf* as it is in Icelandic.

Third, it has been confirmed that supervisory teachers are the main link between schools and families; they were praised more than other school personnel but carried more of the burdens when parents were disappointed with their child's school. This was expected but evidenced here in an extensive dataset. Young supervisory teachers find relationships with parents hard to handle and need support in this role, an important note that must be shared with both school leaders and institutions that provide teacher education.

The fourth point concerns teachers' competencies. Teachers need to be aware that parents can be vulnerable due to their children´s special needs, so cooperating with those parents is likely to be time-consuming and demanding. Teachers and school personnel need enhanced competencies to work with students' families, and school leaders should emphasise competence-building at all levels in schools as it is necessary for advancement in the field of home-school relationship.

My fifth point is that a comparison of these findings with Epstein's school-family-community partnership model clearly showed that a greater overlap between the spheres is needed. Sharing the workload of real cooperation is a precondition to developing the relationship. Epstein's model emphasises schools' responsibility in initiating and cultivating the relationship, and the need for that arrangement is confirmed in my findings, especially when the effects of social circumstances have been explored. The students that would benefit the most from more cooperation are often from families that are not likely to reach out or take the initiative themselves.

The sixth point concerns teenagers in compulsory schools. Parents' participation in school activities is highly desirable by all partners: therefore, teachers and parents have to try to sustain their interest in participation throughout students' adolescent years. Findings indicate that home-school relationships need to be more responsive to diversity in the student group and more sensitive to students' social backgrounds. If students' school experiences are rather negative, it is necessary to reach out to the families and the students, even if they are reluctant to cooperation. At the lower-secondary level, parental involvement should be focused more on inviting parents to participate in students' academic activities, and even include guidance for parents in understanding the tasks and demands that their teenagers face. The organisation of home-school relationships should emphasise respect for students' wishes for cooperation regarding their academic tasks, and state clearly that good

relationships contribute to both student achievement and student well-being at school.

My seventh point touches upon social consciousness and the need for an open discussion in the field of compulsory education about equity and praxis. Findings revealed that social differences influence opinions and practices in home-school relationships. Icelandic legislation, school documents and traditional organisation of home-school relationships, all reflect a policy of equity, but the research project unveils a reality of inequity in praxis. For example, single mothers feel that they are not treated with same respect as couples. Single mothers also seem to get less of a needed support for their children who have learning or behavioural difficulties. Therefore, it is likely that single mothers have a greater share of teenagers who are bored in school and lack confidence in their learning abilities. This can become a vicious cycle that influences students' well-being and achievement, and thereby enhances the disadvantage that children with lower social status already experience. The responsibility for cultivating the relationship between home and school often falls to school professionals. For that reason, it is crucial for these professionals to understand the interrelations in society, as described by Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, and the possible consequences of unfair treatment of families with low socioeconomic status in the community.

The eighth and final concluding point concerns the Nordic model in education and the role that research findings play in policymaking as well as daily practices in schools. The Nordic point of view on education emphasizes quality and equity in education. On the surface, we certainly want the Icelandic compulsory school system to follow the Nordic model. That is visible in official policy documents and in several other documents put forward by teachers' unions, municipalities, and compulsory schools themselves, for example in school mottos. But the praxis points in a somewhat different direction, as treating all children and parents alike does not seem to be of prime concern. A lack of school funding cannot excuse this. Many teachers and school leaders would probably reconsider how they act in home-school relationships, and reform their daily practices, if the discussion about home-school relationships were more often informed by research like this doctoral project and similar studies. My point is that Nordic or Icelandic school systems are far from automatically characterized by fairness in praxis. However, research can fuel the discussion and contribute to school development towards the goals of the Nordic model. The home-school relationship can contribute to that development, if its role is reformed to better serve the emphasis on quality and equity in education.

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Appendix A

Paper I: Jónsdóttir, K., & Björnsdóttir, A. (2012). Home-school relationships and cooperation between parents and supervisory teachers. *BARN, 4*, 109-127

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Home-school relationships and cooperation between parents and supervisory teachers

Kristín Jónsdóttir and Amalía Björnsdóttir

Abstract

Supervisory teachers are responsible for the home-school relationship in compulsory schools in Iceland. According to this study on parental involvement in compulsory schools, the practices in the relationship are systematic and regular, and quite similar to those in Denmark and Norway. Data was gathered using two online surveys, one for professional staff in 20 compulsory schools and another for parents of children in those same schools. Ninety percent of parents find communication with supervisory teachers to be easy. The ease of communication is related to overall satisfaction with the experience of school, which demonstrates the importance of the supervisory teachers' role. Cooperating with parents is more difficult for the supervisory teachers. Two-thirds of them said that they spend 2–4 hours per week cooperating with parents, and a major part of the cooperation is concerning individual students. The results show no difference in parental satisfaction with the cooperation in relation to the age of the child, but teachers use more time on cooperation about learning for the older students, which can indicate greater emphasis on learning and achievement. It should be considered to encourage teachers to spend more time on cooperating with the whole parent group, to increase direct contact with all parents and to be aware that parents can be vulnerable due to their child's special needs. In practice, parent participation and involvement must be encouraged in many different ways if the aim is a joint responsibility of student welfare and education.

Introduction

Parents and teachers spend much precious time discussing children in schools, not only about their achievements and well-being but also their behaviour problems and dissatisfaction[1]. But what characterizes the relationship between home and school? Is it productive or are there some obstacles that need to be overcome for the benefit of the schoolchildren?

New legislation regarding compulsory schools in Iceland took effect in 2008. The general objectives in Article 2 were much debated, but a consensus was reached on this text regarding the home-school relationship:

> The compulsory school shall encourage good cooperation between the school and the home, with the objective of ensuring successful school operation,

> general welfare and safety for pupils (The Compulsory School Act 2008).

The policy on joint responsibility of home and school in upbringing and education of children is reinforced in the The Icelandic National Curriculum Guide for Compulsory Schools. General Section (2012).

The Compulsory School Act, the National Curriculum, and regional policy documents do not clearly define the home-school relationship or the different levels of parental involvement. Built on traditions in the Icelandic school system we have chosen in this research to use the different terms as follows. *Communication* refers to exchange of information including *contact* via phone calls, emails, etc. *Cooperation* refers to discussion between parents and teachers or other school staff about issues regarding a student and it includes the parents' *participation* in events and school work. *Parental involvement* refers to the level of cooperation, that is to which extent a joint responsibility on student welfare and education has been reached. The terms *communication*, *cooperation*, and *parental involvement* are in line with Nordahl's (2007) description of levels in home-school cooperation where he defines the following three stages: 1) exchange of information; 2) meaningful discussion; and 3) shared responsibility of pedagogical decisions.

Parents' support of their children comes in various shapes and sizes. Their involvement in schools is strongly influenced by social class of families including economic status, educational level of the mother and psycho-social health, single parent status, and to a lesser degree ethnicity (Desforges and Abouchaar 2003). Studies have shown that parents commonly cease participation in their children's life as the children become teenagers (Desforges and Abouchaar 2003, Nordahl 2007). This affects teenagers' lives in many different and sometimes undesirable ways. It has also been well established in educational research that parental involvement in schools has a positive impact on achievement and adjustment (Desforges and Abouchaar 2003, Hattie 2009). The question remains how parents' participation can be sustained throughout their children's adolescent years. The answer is probably anchored in different cultural and social premises, but it is widely accepted that schools must nurture the cooperation and aim at involving all parents.

The School Council

Every single compulsory school in Iceland is now required to have its own School Council with two parents as representatives (The Compulsory School Act 2008). As before, every school district has a single school board for all the compulsory schools in the community and the parents' association elected one representative to take part in its activities (The Compulsory School Act 1995).

Parents' obligations have increased as well as their possibilities to influence school practices as stated in Article 8:

> The School Council participates in policy making for the school and in devising and developing the school culture. The School Council shall discuss the school curriculum guide, annual operational schedule, financial plan and other plans regarding school activities. The School Council shall have a saying regarding any plans for major changes to school operations and activities before a final decision is made thereof. The School

> Council shall monitor security, conditions and general well-being of pupils (The Compulsory School Act 2008).

The role of the Parent Council has also changed as defined in Article 9 "to support school activities, encourage pupils' welfare and promote the relations between school and home." Articles 8 and 9 together grant significant possibilities of influence for parents in their children's schools. New legislation and associated regulations are indicative of the educational policy, which aims to increase the impact and responsibility of parents.

Both educational-political and pedagogical arguments support this emphasis on the role of parents and their influence within schools (Finnbogason 2009). But parent representatives in school councils are facing complicated tasks since parents are never a homogenous group. In a Swedish study about parental involvement through local school boards, Kristoffersson (2009) finds that parental influence has increased, but she is concerned if it really has had a positive effect on local democracy as intended.

The supervisory teachers' role

Every parent has legal rights regarding his or her own child. Parents have the right to choose a compulsory school for their children in accordance with the regulation of the municipality and to have special needs of their children met at that school. They also have the right to information about school activities and their children's education. It is affirmed by the new legislation that the contact person for parents is the supervisory teacher who is often the homeroom teacher for a group or class of students. The supervisory teacher role is described as follows:

> Supervisory teachers shall follow closely their pupils' studies and their personal development, their condition and general welfare, they shall guide their pupils in their studies and school work, provide assistance and advice regarding personal matters and thus strengthen the cooperation between school and home (The Compulsory School Act 2008).

The special role of the supervisory teacher as a link between school and home, and as students' special guardian and advisor, is well known and verified in different ways in the Icelandic society. This status is for example affirmed at the official website for *The Office of the Ombudsman for Children* (2012), where it is stated that the supervisory teacher should always be the first person to consult when students encounter some kind of problem that affects their studies and well-being at school.

The supervisory teacher role in a class is rewarded with a wage increase in teachers' contracts (The Association of Teachers in Primary and Lower Secondary Schools 2011). The definition of full-time work for a teacher under the age of 55 includes the following three main components: teaching 26 lessons corresponding to 17.33 hours; preparing and processing instruction, 10.67 hours; and work managed by the school principal, 9.14 hours, which 4.14 of those hours can be scheduled for meetings and group work. It is interesting to see that the tasks to be prioritized within the 9.14 hours are listed in the contract in the following order: "Cooperation between professionals within and out of school, cooperation with parents, registration of information, supervision and control of classrooms, and student interviews."

Home-school relationships in the Nordic countries

The Nordic countries all have long traditions of home-school cooperation and the importance is unquestioned, at least officially. In Denmark, for example, several political campaigns, programs and pedagogical measures during the last 30–40 years have emerged to strengthen the home-school relationship. These actions have been grounded on the rhetoric that this is in the child's best interest, and that cooperation between home and school is good – the more the better (Dannesboe et al. 2012). Dannesboe, Kryger, Palludan and Ravn are critical towards "the more the better" rhetoric and argue that it is time to shift the focus and pay attention to the quality of the relationship. In newly published studies, they focus on students and parents, and on the social significance of the home-school relations in everyday life, with a special interest in the impact of the prevailing practices of cooperation. They find the practices surprisingly similar from one school to another, and describe it as follows:

> The basic elements are to be found in very different schools, from early childhood to graduation. The standardized basic elements are one or two home-school conferences per year, where parents and teachers – and sometimes students – talk about the student, and one or two common parent meetings. Added to this are some letters with information, communication through information systems on the Internet, individual development plans and various social events (Dannesboe et al. 2012).

The features of the cooperation in Norway are described in a similar way. The direct contact between teachers and parents is limited to participation in one common parent meeting and in one parent-teacher conference for 30 minutes per semester (Nordahl 2007). The child is normally present during the conferences. Of the parents, 53.2% say they have had contact with the teachers by telephone; and Nordahl points out that only half of the Norwegian parent group has had a direct conversation with the teachers where solely adults were present, restricting possibilities for real dialogs. The majority of teachers, interviewed by Nordahl, report that they seek contact with parents only when needed, often meaning just when something negative has happened at school. This can easily have negative consequences for the relations between teachers and parents. Nordahl (2007) finds it rather noteworthy and unfortunate that schools and teachers do not focus more on cooperating with parents, and he states that there is a long distance between the ideal and the reality in this matter.

Parental involvement decreases as the child grows older

Epstein (2007) and Desforges and Abouchaar (2003) express that the extent of parental involvement diminishes as the child grows older. A comparison of parents' experiences of their cooperation with the schools shows, according to Nordahl (2007), that it becomes qualitatively worse as schoolchildren become older. Parents receive less information, have fewer dialogs with teachers, their influence becomes weaker and their knowledge of curriculum and textbooks decreases. Nordahl (2007) discusses that this may be

an expression of the schools and the teachers becoming more autonomous as the students grow older, and less influenced by parents. Yet students' influences do not seem to increase significantly.

Kryger (2012) researched ninth grade students' own stories about their interpretation and meaning of the home-school relationship. Kryger concludes that the established forms of cooperation between home and school leave very little space for students' perspectives. He states that it is especially important for teenagers, developing their own identity, to find their own way to deal with the parent-teacher cooperation.

Desforges and Abouchaar (2003) point out that lessening parental involvement as the child gets older is strongly influenced by the child taking an active mediating role. A possible explanation for the dwindling contact may be that teenagers simply need to distance themselves from adults, parents and teachers, and need more space as they mature.

Supporting parents

In the literature about home-school relations one can frequently see that empowering parents is considered important and beneficial for the children (Aðalbjarnardóttir 2007, Christiansen 2010, Epstein 2001, Olsen and Fuller 2008, Sæmundsdóttir and Karvelsdóttir 2008). The professional teacher should support and encourage parents in their role as parents (Christiansen 2006, Nordahl 2007). The good intentions are very clear, but how to go about managing the delicate task of support and empowerment is not as clear.

Parents with more capital and capacity, who have experience of success in school and highly value education tend to be better able to tackle home-school relationships (Dannesboe et al. 2012). Birna María Svanbjörnsdóttir (2007) researched whether parents wanted support in their parental role or not, and asked parents of children aged 4–12 years in Iceland. Almost 70% of respondents would like support in their parenting role but parents who considered themselves well competent to raise a child wished for less support than others. One has to wonder about the 30% in the group that does not want support and what differentiates them from the parent group in general.

Birte Ravn writes about *the compensatory rationale,* as the view of a particular group of parents as being unable to socialize their own children (Dannesboe et al. 2012). An example from 2010 of this rationale is the allocation of 56 million Danish kronor to strengthen the home-school cooperation with immigrant parents (Dannesboe et al. 2012). The danger of teachers patronizing parents is apparent despite all of the good intentions, and it may explain why some parents turn away from school when their children get older.

Monika Vinterek (2006) has analyzed how school practices in Sweden have been influenced by the concept of individualized learning, and developed through several phases since the 1960s. Vinterek states that students today are expected to take more individual responsibility and can therefore have more influence on their learning, but the responsibility has partly been moved from the school and onto the students and their parents' shoulders, thereby sometimes accentuating the vulnerability of students with lack of resources.

A model of partnership

Joyce L. Epstein has been researching and advising on how to build partnerships with parents, using the NNPS Partnership Model. The model consists of the following six keys or types of involvement: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with the community (Epstein 2002). The communicating key is described as: "Two-way communicating activities keep families informed about and involved in school programs and students' progress." The partnership framework has its version for middle and high schools so "schools can create programs that enable all parents to remain engaged with their teens and their schools." Epstein (2007) states the following:

> Studies are accumulating that show that family involvement through high school is important for student success. The growing literature yields three main conclusions:
>
> - Parents want more and better information to guide their students through middle level and high school
> - Students benefit from family and community involvement in high school
> - Educators in middle level and high schools must take responsibility for developing goal-linked partnership programs that reach all families and that help students succeed

It is clear that in the NNPS frameworks, the school professionals have the responsibility of initiating and facilitating two-way communication. This view on the responsibility is revealed in many writings about parental involvement and home-school relations (Nordahl 2007, Christiansen 2010). Maybe it is to counter the fact that many middle level and high school teachers report that the only time they contact families is when students are in trouble (Epstein 2007).

Subtle ways of support

Parental involvement is considerably broader and more complicated than earlier parental involvement theories have acknowledged, states William H. Jeynes (2011) in a meta-analytic research and advices that "parental involvement programs should incorporate more of the subtle components in order to maximize the efficacy of these initiatives." Traditionally, parental engagement is viewed as a set of deliberate, overt actions such as frequently attending school events and helping children with their homework. Jeynes' results from three meta-analyses have challenged that traditional image and indicate that the most powerful aspects of parental involvement are frequently subtle such as maintaining high expectations of one's children, communicating with children and parental style. Moreover, Jeynes finds an increasing body of research suggesting that the key qualities for fostering parental involvement in schools may also be subtle:

> In other words, whether teachers, principals, and school staff are loving, encouraging, and supportive to parents may be more important than the specific guidelines and tutelage they offer to parents (Jeynes 2011).

The meta-analyses done by Jeynes (2011) confirm that parental involvement is more complex and a considerably broader issue than earlier research indicated.

Desforges and Abouchaar's review about the impact of parental involvement, parental support and family education on pupil achievement and adjustment stresses:

> The most important finding from the point of view of this review is that parental involvement in the form of "at-home good parenting" has a significant positive effect on children's achievement and adjustment even after all other factors shaping attainment have been taken out of the equation. In the primary age range the impact caused by different levels of parental involvement is much bigger than differences associated with variations in the quality of schools. The scale of the impact is evident across all social classes and all ethnic groups (Desforges and Abouchaar 2003).

An Icelandic study by Sigurgeirsson and Kaldalóns (2006) in compulsory schools in Reykjavík shows that in those schools where teachers had positive attitudes towards parental involvement the disciplinary problems were fewer than in schools where home-school relations were weaker. There were frequent invitations for encouraging parents to get involved; great emphasis was on informing parents with newsletters and emails and the focus was on mediating positive results, successes and victories. Even though causality is questionable in this context, the findings reveal that the staff in the "problem-free" schools managed to blend warmth and openness into their organized cooperation with parents, and this correlated with fewer disciplinary problems.

The review above shows that parents' role in their children's learning and in school practices is complex, and changes when the child grows older. Thus, the questions set forth in this article are as follows:

- How is the home-school relationship organized?
- What characterizes communication and cooperation between parents and supervisory teachers?
- What affects parent satisfaction with home-school relations?
- Is cooperation different depending on the age of students?

Method and analysis

The participants were all teachers, principals and other staff members in 20 compulsory schools in Iceland that were willing to take part in the project, and the parents of the children attending those schools. The schools were in four municipalities; 17 were selected randomly and three schools were selected because of their emphasis on individualized learning. The sample is large; for example, the students in those 20 schools were 17% of all students in compulsory schools in Iceland.

Some of the questions were answered by all the staff, but some were answered only by supervisory teachers. Of the staff members, 312 were supervisory teachers. An online questionnaire using QuestionPro online survey software was developed by the research team using guidelines on survey construction from Karlsson (2003) and Þórsdóttir and Jónsson (2007). A questionnaire was developed for parents, which included questions about parents' background, the special needs of their child, their cooperation with school staff and satisfaction with the service their child is get-

ting at the school. Questionnaires for the school staff included questions for supervisory teachers about their cooperation with parents. All questionnaries were pretested in a pilot study in one compulsory school and all reviewed by an expert in survey construction.

Teachers and other staff answered an online questionnaire that was sent to their work email address. They answered four questionnaires in the school year 2009–2010. An online questionnaire was sent to parents in April 2011 using email addresses found in school computer files. If two email addresses were on file, for example, for both the mother and the father, one was selected randomly. If a parent had more than one child in the school, the child the parents should answer for was selected randomly. To follow-up, emails were sent twice to the parents who did not respond, and the principal of the school also sent letters to parents encouraging participation. If no answer arrived from the parent and another email was on file with the school, the questionnaire was sent to that email address, with two follow-up emails encouraging participation.

The response rate for the parents was 67% (n=3481) and for staff it was around 82% (n=823). The response rate is good, but the response rate for surveys frequently falls below 50% (Saunders 2012).

The data was analyzed with SPSS 20. Percentages, odd ratio and Spearman correlation was computed. Spearman correlation is used for variables measured on ordinal scale and odd ratios are used to estimate probabilities when dealing with dichotomous variables.

Results

Parents and school professionals agreed that working together is important for the education of children. Overall, 99% of parents and school professionals considered parental support to be rather or very important for academic achievement of children. Furthermore, 95% of teachers considered cooperation with parents as being vital to ensuring proper behavior in schools. Despite almost complete agreement on the importance of parental support in the educational process, opinions were split on the parents' possibilities to influence school practices. About a quarter (26%) of parents said that parents could have little or very little impact on school practices, 39% said they could have neither great nor little impact, and 35% said they could have a great or very great impact on school practices.

The cooperation between parents and supervisory teachers

Parents were asked how easy or difficult it was to communicate with school principals, supervisory teachers, and teachers in general. Among the parents who had been in contact with those school professionals, 65% thought it was very easy to communicate with supervisory teachers, 38% thought it was very easy to communicate with other teachers, and 42% thought it was very easy to communicate with school principals (see also Figure 1). On the other hand, when supervisory teachers were asked if they found cooperation with parents to be easy or difficult, 15% said it was very easy, 62% found it rather easy, but over 7% found it rather or very difficult to cooperate with parents.

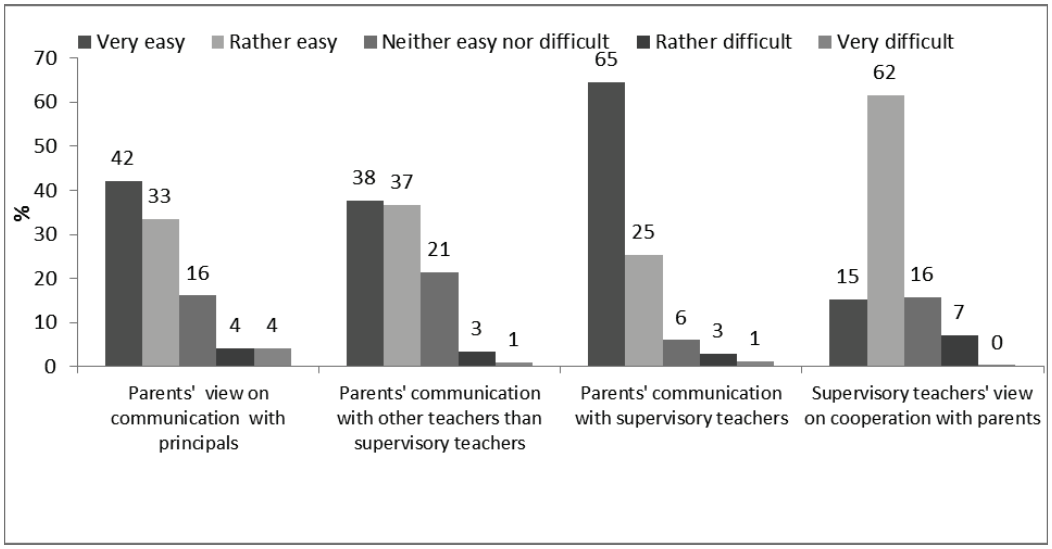

Figure 1. Parents' (n=2896) and supervisory teachers' (n=296) views on the ease or difficulty of cooperation between the groups.

Most of the responsibility for parent-teacher cooperation in Icelandic schools falls on the shoulders of supervisory teachers. On average, each supervisory teacher (n=312) was responsible for 22.0 (SD=6.62) students, and 70% of them had 18 to 26 students in their homeroom.

Almost all parents (99.5%) said that they had communicated with supervisory teachers, 89% with school principals and 85% with other teachers.

Most of the supervisory teachers (69%) had scheduled parent-teacher conferences twice each school year, where 26% met with parents three times. According to the supervisory teachers, 79% of those meetings took 15 minutes or less, and 89% said that students were always present during these conferences.

Supervisory teachers were asked how many hours per week they used for providing information to parents and on the cooperation with them. The majority, or 66%, said they used 2–4 hours per week, 24% said they used 1 hour or less per week and 6% said they used 5–7 hours. Questions regarding the proportion of time supervisory teachers used on providing information and for cooperation revealed that a large proportion of time was used on matters concerning individual students. About 21% of the teachers said that more than half (51–75% or 76–100%) of the time was used on matters of individual student behavioral problems, and 18% said that more than half of the time was used on individual student learning (see also Figure 2).

Supervisory teachers were asked to estimate how often they communicated with parents on matters concerning individual students through phone calls, written messages or meetings. The frequency of communication is shown in Figure 3. Sending written messages to parents was the most common form (74% did so at least weekly), followed by talking with some par-

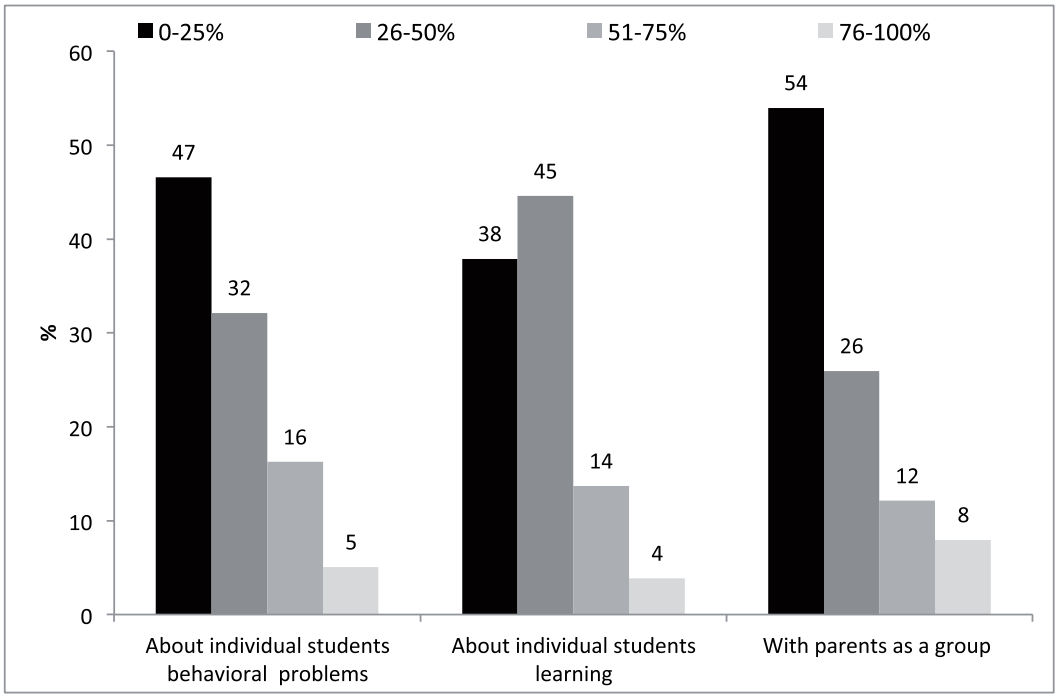

Figure 2. Proportion of time used on different topics of communication; supervisory teachers' (n=293) estimates.

ents on the phone (41%) and 13% met with some parents at least weekly.

Supervisory teachers were asked about the contents of the communication they initiated with parents. The results can be seen in Figure 4. Of the teachers, 35% said they had weekly or more frequent contact with some parents about their children's behavior, and 34% said they had weekly or more frequent contact with some parents about their children's homework. A quarter of teachers had weekly or more frequent contact with some parents about learning.

Parents were also asked about the contents of communication they initiated (see Figure 5). Of the parents, 2–3% said they had at least weekly contact with teachers about their child's learning, behavior or interaction with other students. Over half of the parents said they contacted teachers less than yearly about their child's behavior or interaction with other students, and 28% said they contacted teachers less than yearly about their child's learning. Parents were not asked about contact regarding homework.

What affects parents' satisfaction with home-school relations?

Parents' education, child gender or age did not affect the assessment of whether the parents considered communication with supervisory teachers to be easy or difficult.

There was a positive correlation between how easy communication with the supervising teacher was and parental satisfaction with school in general ($r_S(2851)=0.34$, $p<0.001$). This means that

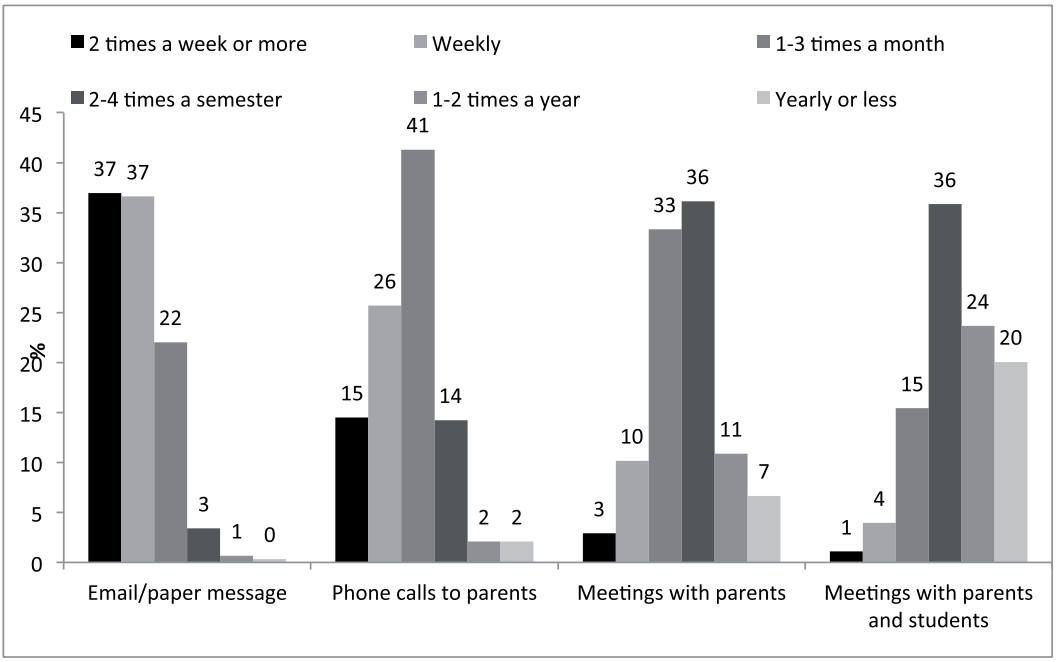

Figure 3. Frequency of communication with parents; supervisory teachers' (n=293) estimates.

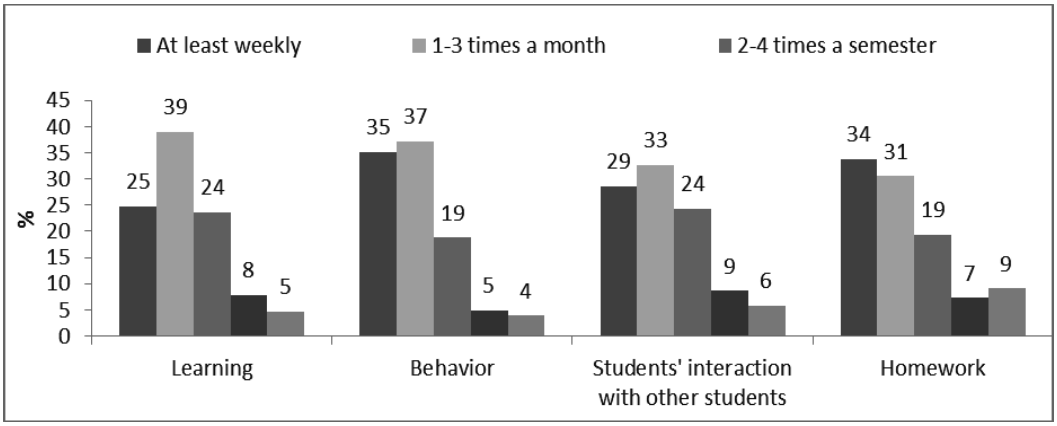

Figure 4. Frequency of supervisory teachers' (n=290) initiated communication with parents regarding different issues.

easy communication with the supervisory teacher has a tendency to go hand-in-hand with overall satisfaction with the experience of school. There is a similar correlation between the overall satisfaction with school and the easiness of communication with other teachers and the principals.

In general, parents were satisfied with the school but the attitude of parents toward the services their child received at

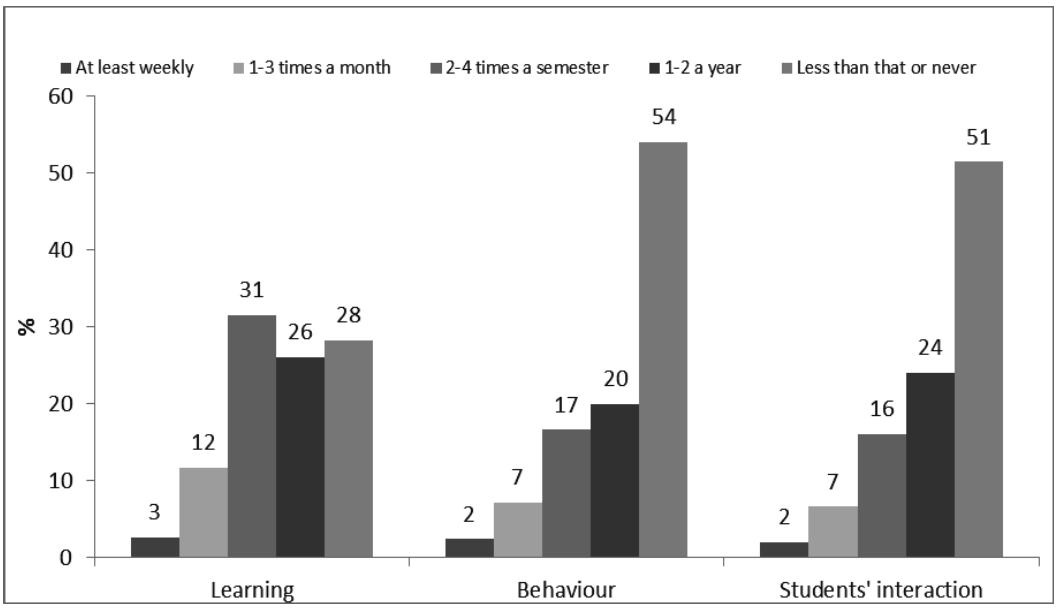

Figure 5. Frequency of parents' initiated communication with teachers; parents' (n=2885) estimates.

school seemed to be related to the assessment of how easy or difficult it is to communicate with supervisory teachers (see Figure 6).

This means that easy communication with the supervisory teacher has a tendency to go hand-in-hand with overall satisfaction with the experience of school.

According to the parents, a total of 26% of the children were considered to have special needs that affected their schooling. The two largest groups of children had learning disabilities and/or behavioral problems. Those accounted for 95% of students with special needs. Of parents, 22% said their child had learning disabilities and 8% said their child had behavioral problems. More than half of parents in both groups believed the child did not receive sufficient assistance at school.

If the child had no learning disabilities, 3% of the parents said the communication with the supervisory teacher was rather or very difficult. If the child had learning disabilities and received the service he or she needed, only 0.7% found communication difficult; but, if the child had a disability and the parents judged the service as insufficient, 13% found the communication with the supervisory teachers to be difficult. In other words, parents of a child with a learning difficulty, and who perceived their child's service as inadequate, were 4.5 times more likely to find the communication difficult (OR 4.5 CI-95% 3.0-6.7) than parents of a child with no learning difficulties.

The same pattern can be seen when viewing the responses of the parents of

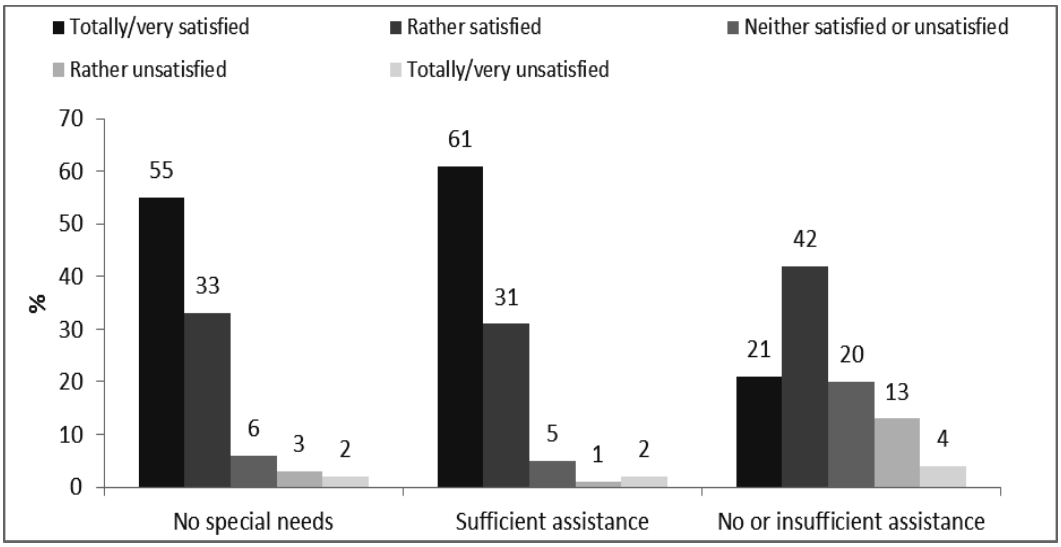

Figure 6. Parental (n=3243) satisfaction with school by special needs and services provided.

children with behavioral problems. Of those that were not satisfied with the way the school responded, 18% said the communication with supervisory teachers was difficult, compared to only 1% of those who said the school responded in a satisfactory manner. Parents who were not satisfied with the services were 6.2 times more likely to judge the communications as being difficult than parents of children without behavioral problems (OR 6.2 CI-95% 3.7-10.5).

These results show that when parents of children with learning or behavioral problems feel that their needs are not met at school they perceive the communication with supervisory teachers as difficult and are dissatisfied with the school in general. What is surprising is that if parents feel the special needs of their child is met, then they are more satisfied and find the communication to be easier than parents that have children with no disabilities.

Home-school relations and age

When comparing responses by the age of students, the following categories are used: young (6–9 years), middle (10–12 years) and teenagers (13–15 years). There is no difference in how easy or difficult parents find communication with teachers and principals, or how much influence they think parents can have on school practices, based on the age of the children.

However, when looking at how frequently parents contact the school, there is a difference (see Figure 7). About 65% of parents of teenagers contact the school less than yearly about their child's behavior, and 47% of parents of the youngest students have so little contact. A similar pattern emerges about student interaction with other students: 42% of parents of the students in grades 1–4 have less than yearly contact, and 68% of the parents of teenagers. No difference was found in the frequency of contact concerning the child's learning.

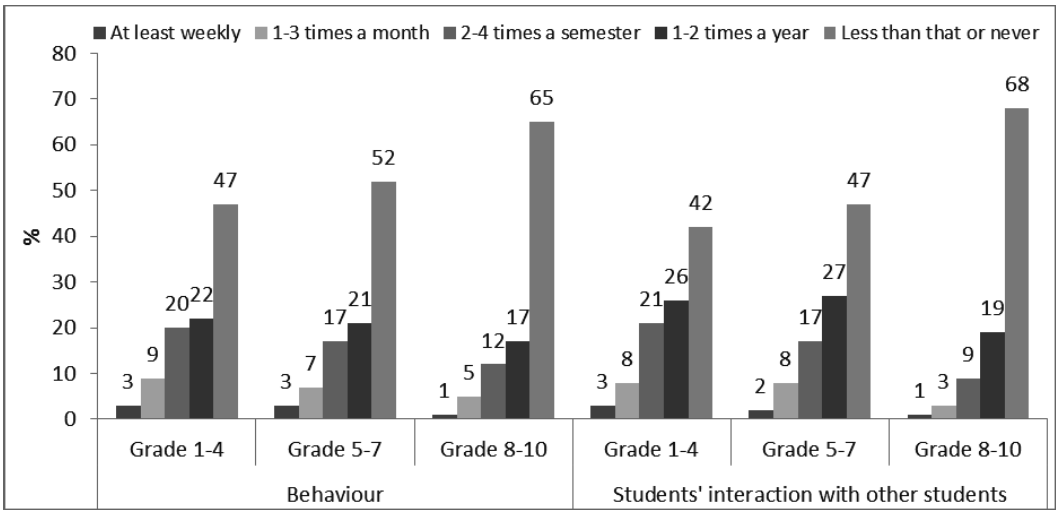

Figure 7. Frequency of parent contact with the teacher by student's grade; parents' (n=2867) estimates.

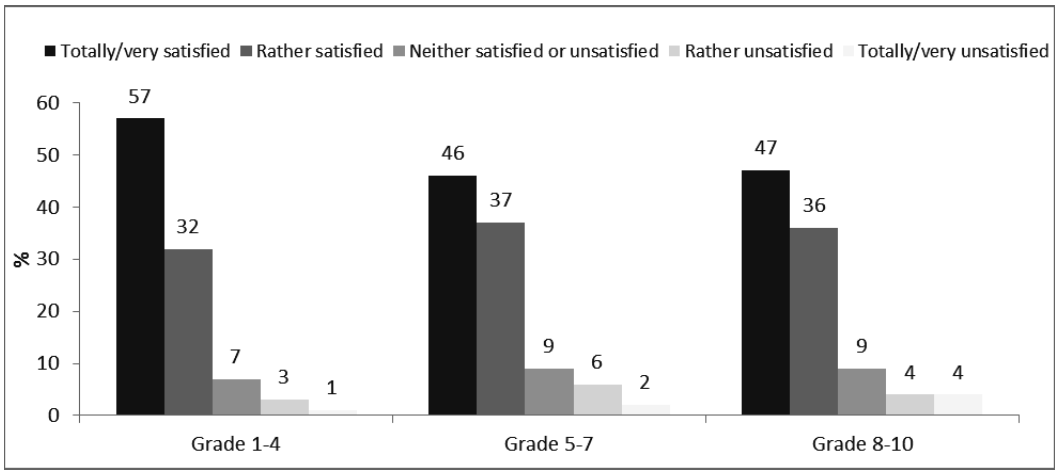

Figure 8. Parental (n=3431) satisfaction with school by students' age group; parents' estimates.

Parental satisfaction with school in general is lower in the middle age and teenage group than in the youngest group (see Figure 8). There is no difference in satisfaction with the services provided for children with special needs; but, the difference in the percentage of students that parents consider to have learning or behavioral difficulties is quite striking. In the youngest group it is 19%, in the middle group 29% and in the teenage group it is 28%.

Supervisory teachers were asked about the proportion of time they used on cooperation with parents as a group, as well as with individual parents. There was no significant difference in the proportion of time spent on cooperation about individual students' behavioral problems, or giving infor-

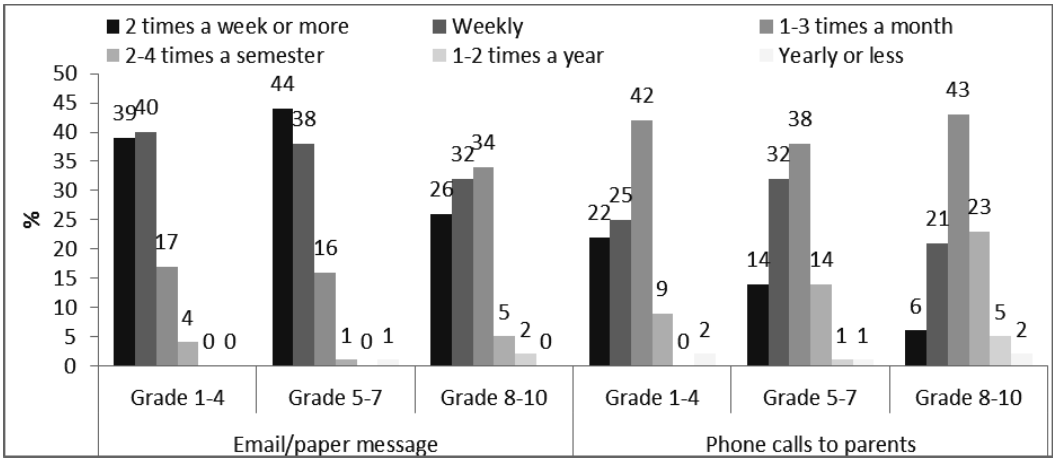

Figure 9. Frequency of communication with parents outside of scheduled meetings by grade level; supervisory teachers' (n=266) estimates.

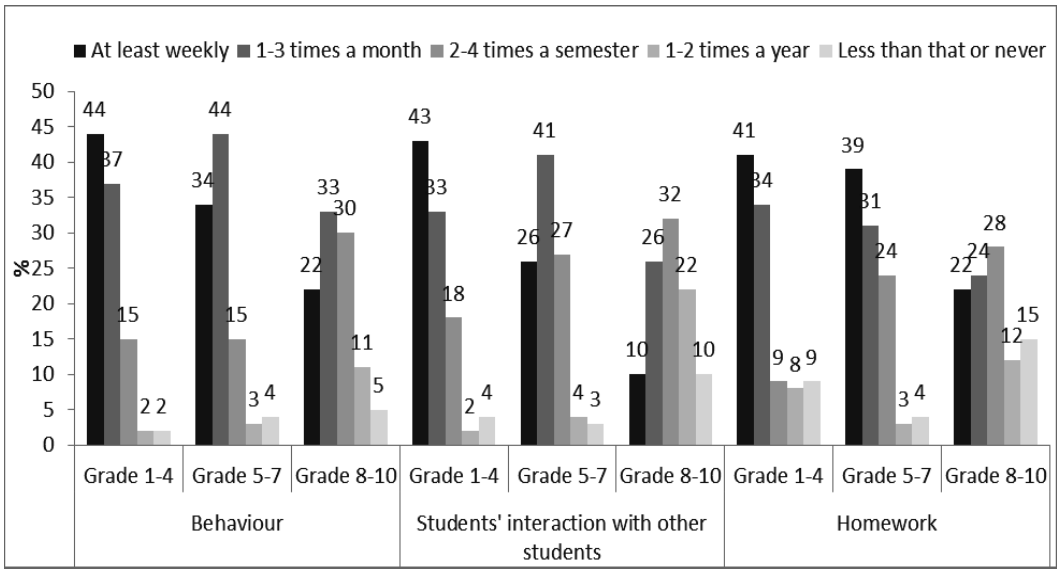

Figure 10. Frequency of communication with parents outside of scheduled meetings by grade level; supervisory teachers' (n=268) estimates.

mation to parents as a group by grade level. But more time seems to be spent on cooperation about individual students' learning the older the student is: 10% of supervisory teachers in grades 1–4, 22% in grades 5–7 and 24% in grades 8–10 said they use more than half of the total time used for cooperation on this task.

There is no difference in frequency of meetings with parents by grade level. On

the other hand frequency of email/paper message and phone calls decreases as the students get older (see Figure 9).

The contents and frequency of communication between teachers and parents by grade level can be seen in Figure 10. As the students grow older the teachers are less likely to contact parents about behavior, students' interaction with other students and homework, but there was no difference in frequency of communication about learning.

Discussion and conclusions

The findings show that both parents and school professionals find parental involvement in compulsory schools to be essential. The home-school relationship rests mostly upon the contact between parents and the supervisory teachers of their child. But what do those findings mean? The parental involvement is a young research field in Iceland and the relevant terms are not clearly defined in official documents such as the National Curriculum or in this research project. When writing about this research it became apparent that it is necessary to clarify the terms in use and link them to concepts in Nordic and international discourse. For example, there is no clear or common distinction between communication and cooperation as terms in discourse about parents in education in Iceland. When answering the research questions on the home-school relationship and parental involvement, the study conducted here tries to clarify the terms in use.

The answer to the first research question regarding the organization of the home-school relationship is that it seems to run through conventional channels. The usual practices in the home-school relationship in Iceland are similar to those described in Denmark and Norway (Dannesboe et al. 2012, Nordahl 2007). There are two to three brief parent-teacher conferences per year in addition to communication via letters, emails and phone calls. Parents also attend various social events. The organization of communication seems to be systematic and regular, which is of key importance in empowering parents and keeping them involved in schools (Christiansen 2010, Epstein 2002, Epstein 2007, Nordahl 2007, Sæmundsdóttir and Karvelsdóttir 2008). The question arises if this traditional way of communication between parents and school staff is a necessary exchange of information or an indication of cooperation with more profound discussions regarding students in concern.

Nordahl (2007) pointed out that for each school year just about half of the Norwegian parents had direct contact with the teachers with only adults present. Over half of the Icelandic parents said that they contacted teachers less than annually regarding their child's behavior or students' interaction, and less than 28% about their child's learning. This indicates that many Icelandic parents are rather distant from the schools just as the Norwegian ones, which adds to the question whether this traditional way of communication can be interpreted as cooperation.

> ***A major part of the communication between parents and supervisory teachers is about issues concerning individual students.***

The second question concerns characteristics of the communication and cooperation

between parents and supervisory teachers. Almost all the parents had communicated with supervisory teachers and two out of three parents found it very easy and 25% found it to be easy. This indicates a comfortable relationship for the vast majority of parents. The supervisory teachers were asked about cooperation with parents and some of them found it to be difficult. That should not be surprising because much of their time for cooperation with individual parents is used for things that are most likely somewhat problematic or what has been described as seeking contact when needed (Epstein 2007, Nordahl 2007).

A large proportion of teachers' work time outside of teaching is used for cooperation with parents. According to teachers' contracts (The Association of Teachers in Primary and Lower Secondary Schools 2011), near five hours per week are assigned for other responsibilities than teaching-related tasks and scheduled meetings. Two-thirds of the teachers said that they spend 2–4 hours per week on the cooperation, which is a considerable part of those five hours. The recording of a wide variety of information is time consuming and so is work on individual development plans. A major part of the communication between parents and supervisory teachers is about issues concerning individual students. Apparently Icelandic teachers spend more time on communicating with parents about poor behavior or learning difficulties rather than on growing positive relationships with the diverse parent group or in real cooperation. Given these facts, it must be important to assess whether supervisory teachers' time on home-school relations is wisely spent.

But what affects parent satisfaction with home-school relation? According to Desforges and Abouchaar (2003), the parents' involvement in schools is strongly influenced by the social class including economic status and the mother's educational level. In this study, parental education did not affect the assessment of whether the parents' communication with supervisory teachers was considered easy or difficult. On the other hand, the attitude of parents toward the services their child received at school seemed to influence their assessment of the relation with supervisory teachers. Parents of children with learning difficulties or behavioral difficulties were more likely to judge the communications as being difficult compared to parents of children without learning or behavioral problems. It is surprising that the group of parents that reports the easiest communication with supervisory teachers are parents of children with disabilities that feel their needs are met at the schools. Parents' educational background did not matter but quality of school services had a great impact. This may be interpreted as a sign of disappointment and the supervisory teachers take the blame. Parents communicate with the supervisory teachers and they answer for much of the school's obligations towards students according to the second paragraph of The School Act 2008, which is reflecting the educational discourse and expectations in the society.

The last research question is concerned with the difference in cooperation depending on the age of students. There is no difference in parental satisfaction about the parents' communication with the supervisory teachers in relation to the age of the child. But similar to what Epstein (2007), Desforges and Abouchaar (2003) and Nordahl (2007) found, there seems to be less contact as the children grow older.

This is alarming in regards to children with disabilities, as our findings show that parents of older children are more likely to believe that their child has disabilities than parents of younger children.

There is no difference in proportion of time used by supervisory teachers for contact about behavior problems and sending information to the whole parent group, but they use a greater proportion of time on cooperation about learning when the students are older. This can be an indicator of greater emphasis on learning and achievement and can be related to what Nordahl (2007) discusses: schools and teachers become more autonomous and less influenced by parents as the students grow older. This also relates to what Kryger (2012) stated about teenagers needing distance from adults to develop their own identities. Therefore, these changes in home-school relationships are not necessarily negative, except for teenagers that need more support.

This discussion revealed some important points. Even though parents have more options to influence school practices by virtue of the new legislation from 2008 and their participation has been encouraged (Finnbogason 2009), only 35% of the parents feel they can have a great impact on school practices. The policy of moving toward a more individualized teaching and learning has emphasized increased parental involvement (Vinterek 2006, The Compulsory School Act 2008, Teaching and Learning in Icelandic Schools). In this regard the practices have not changed as much as preferred, and "the more the better" rhetoric that has been widely promoted in Iceland, like in Denmark (Dannesboe et al. 2012), sounds rather simplistic.

Easy communication with supervisory teachers is related to overall satisfaction with the experience of school, which demonstrates the importance of that role. The supervisory teacher is in a key position to nourish the more subtle ways of parental involvement such as encouraging parents to maintain high expectations of their child and communicate with their child (Jeynes 2011). Furthermore, an Icelandic study revealed that those schools that managed to blend warmth and openness into their cooperation with parents had fewer disciplinary problems (Sigurgeirsson and Kaldalóns 2006), and in developing that relationship the supervisory teachers are key figures.

The findings suggest that teachers should be encouraged to spend more time on cooperating with the whole parent group, to increase direct contact with parents and to be aware that parents can be vulnerable due to their child's special needs. Communication is necessary between parents and supervisory teachers for cooperation to occur, but the study has revealed a tendency to assume that communication between parents and teachers automatically should be named cooperation. In practice, parents' participation and involvement in education must be encouraged in many different ways if the aim is a joint responsibility of student welfare and education.

Funding

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Notes

[1] *Parental involvement in schools* is one of six strands in a larger research project called *Teaching and Learning in Icelandic Schools*, which deals with teaching and learning in 20 compulsory schools for age level 6 to 15. The project's aim is to contribute to the body of knowledge on teaching and learning with a special emphasis on the development towards individualized and cooperative learning. The aim of *Parental involvement in schools* is to explore the role of parents in their children's learning and the relation of schools with their communities. The findings presented here are built on data from questionnaires given to school staff and parents (Björnsdóttir and Jónsdóttir 2010, Sigurðardóttir and Hjartarson 2011, Teaching and Learning in Icelandic Schools).

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Appendix B

Paper II: Jónsdóttir, K. (2013). Desirable parental participation in activities in compulsory schools. *BARN, 4*, 29-44.

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Desirable Parental Participation in Activities in Compulsory Schools

Kristín Jónsdóttir

Abstract

This study on parental involvement in 20 compulsory schools in Iceland reveals what school professionals, teenagers and parents think is desirable parent participation. The majority of the students want their parents to participate, but primarily only in the academic portion of their school activities. The school staff was very positive towards traditional parents' participation in social activities, but reluctant when participation touched upon their expertise in academic activities. The parents also found it most desirable to participate in social activities, and generally the more educated parents favoured parental involvement more than the parents with less education. In all groups, the interest in parents' participation declined as the students grew older. The findings are discussed in light of Epstein's family-school-community partnership model (Epstein 2011, Epstein et al. 2002), some critical perspectives, and Jeynes' (2011) meta-analytical research which claims that supporting parents in subtle ways is most effective.

Introduction

Most people believe that parents contribute to their children's success in compulsory school by participating in school-related activities. Parents and their participation do matter; however, how this participation should be supported and organised is not as clear. Parents' opinions and wishes about the home-school relationship differ widely and their participation in school activities differs likewise. Teachers and other school professionals have their own preferences regarding this relationship and so do students. Parental influence in schools has increased (Kristofferson 2009). Conflicting interests mark modern life and Marinósson (2002) remarked that it could come in handy for busy parents if schools were to expect only small interventions on their behalf.

The expectations that parents, school staff and students have concerning parents' participation is the main focus of this paper. It elaborates upon findings from research by Jónsdóttir and Björnsdóttir (2012) that were focused on the organization of home-school relationships, cooperation between parents and homeroom or supervisory teachers and the satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the relationship. Both contribute to a research on parental involvement in schools within a larger research project.[1]

> *What do teenagers, parents and school professionals find to be desirable in parental participation in school activities?*

Expectations about the home-school relationship are shaped by habits and traditions within schools and communities, but also by

several other factors, some of which can be influenced or at least clarified for a better understanding of parental involvement. The key question here is: What do teenagers, parents and school professionals find to be desirable in parental participation in school activities?

Home-school relationships

Empowering parents is considered to have great favourable impact on their children (Aðalbjarnardóttir 2007, Christiansen 2010, Epstein 2011, Olsen and Fuller 2008, Sæmundsdóttir and Karvelsdóttir 2008). However, not all parents do want support in their parental role (Svanbjörnsdóttir 2007). Teachers as professionals should support and encourage parents in their parental role, and homeroom or supervisory teachers play a key role in this context as the main link between the home and the school (Christiansen 2006, Nordahl, 2007). These notions, so frequently found in the literature, are clearly supported in findings from this research by Jónsdóttir and Björnsdóttir (2012). Two important parts of these findings are worth recalling.

Firstly, around 90% of the parents found communication with the homeroom or supervisory teachers to be easy. The ease of communication was related to the overall satisfaction with the experience of the school, which demonstrates the importance of the homeroom or supervisory teachers' role. The parents and the professional school staff agreed that working together was beneficial for the education of children. 99% of the parents and the school professionals considered parental support to be rather or very important for the academic achievement of children and 95% of the teachers found cooperation with the parents to be vital for proper behaviour in schools (Jónsdóttir and Björnsdóttir 2012).

This fits with what has been firmly established in educational research, that parental involvement in schools has a positive impact on achievement and adjustment (Desforges and Abouchaar 2003, Hattie 2009).

> *Family involvement programs nowadays often go beyond linking children's home and classroom learning experiences to include the communities where the families live*

Secondly, results on differences in home-school relationships that were related to the age of students showed that the focus of the contact seemed to change as the students grew older; the contact between parents and teachers was less frequent, but teachers used a greater proportion of time cooperating with parents about learning when the students were older. Jónsdóttir and Björnsdóttir (2012) interpreted this as an indicator of greater emphasis on learning and achievement, but it can also be related to teenagers needing distance from adults to develop their own identities (Kryger 2012). Therefore, Jónsdóttir and Björnsdóttir (2012) conclude that these changes in home-school relationships – less contact but more focus on learning – are not necessarily negative, except for teenagers that need more support.

Terms and words in use

In Iceland, the different levels of parental involvement are not clearly defined in The Compulsory School Act (2008), The National Curriculum (2011), or in regional policy documents. It seems to be taken for granted that stakeholders have some or the same idea of what the home-school relationship means. This foggy way of handling home-school relations can have consequences

such as misunderstandings between the people involved and confusion in the debate about the issue. One of the interesting findings by Jónsdóttir and Björnsdóttir (2012) was that it "revealed a tendency to assume that communication between parents and teachers automatically should be named participation". This serves as a warning when it comes to writing in a field so drenched with common sense.

The terms used in this research have been defined in line with corresponding terms in English and Nordic languages, as follows: *Communication* refers to an exchange of information including *contact* via phone calls, e-mails, etc. *Cooperation* refers to discussion between parents and teachers or other school staff about issues regarding a student and it includes the parents' *participation* in events and schoolwork. *Parental involvement* is a broad term and here defined as "parental participation in the educational processes and experiences of their children" (Jeynes 2005).

These terms are also in line with common usage by Icelandic parents and teachers, and fit with Icelandic research done on policy making in the field (Guðmundsson 2003, Finnbogason 2009). The terms *communication*, *cooperation*, and *parental involvement* are useful with Nordahl's (2007) description of levels of home-school cooperation where he defines the following three stages: 1) exchange of information; 2) meaningful discussion; and 3) shared responsibility of pedagogical decisions.

Epstein's family-school-community partnership model

Genuine home-school partnership is based on mutual trust, common goals and two-way communication, according to Deslandes that has compared different conceptual frameworks (2001). In the current international research on home-school relationships, there are two main approaches: one wanting to contribute to the strengthening and improvement of home-school relations, and the other marked by a more critical analytical interest (Dannesboe et al. 2012).

Family involvement programs nowadays often go beyond linking childrens home and classroom learning experiences to include the communities where the families live (Coleman 2013). These programs are meant to strengthen home-school relations.

The family-school-community partnership model by Joyce Epstein and her colleagues best reflects that contemporary comprehensive approach to family involvement (Coleman 2013). For years, Epstein and colleagues have been researching and advising on how to build partnerships with parents, using the family-school-community partnership model, which is also called the NNPS Partnership Model in their earlier writings.

As the title *family-school-community partnership model* suggests, three "overlapping spheres of influence" form the core of the model, and point out the importance of the family (one sphere), the school (a second sphere), and the community (the third sphere) working together to support children's development and education (Coleman 2013). Maximum overlap among these three spheres is reached when there is a true partnership that reflects frequent family-school-community communication and a program that is responsive to the needs of all families and children (Epstein 2011). In contrast, she says, the spheres minimally overlap when families, school, and communities operate with very little communication and mutual planning.

The model consists of six keys or types of involvement: Parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision-

making, and collaborating with the community (Epstein et al. 2002). Each of the six keys can serve to encourage six types of involvement or partnerships, each of which includes multiple activities that are responsive to the needs and interests of all families (Epstein 2011, Epstein et al. 2002).

Epstein's focus on developing models aiming at raising student achievement is in line with many other researchers' models in this field in the Anglo-Saxon world (Dannesboe et al. 2012). Despite the fact that the spheres are expected to work together, school professionals have the responsibility of initiating and facilitating communication between home and school. The same view on responsibility is also revealed in many other writings about parental involvement and home-school relations (Christiansen 2010, Nordahl 2007). Teachers must be encouraged to take on this important task of building relationships and counteract the fact that many middle level and high school teachers admit that the only time they contact families is when students are in trouble (Epstein 2007). The family-school-community partnership framework has been widely used in primary schools, but has also been adapted to middle and high schools so it can be used to keep parents engaged with their teens as well as the younger ones.

The more subtle ways of support

The other main approach in current international research on the home-school relation is of a more critical analytical interest. Sociological perspectives bring in factors that affect parental involvement, such as gender, class and ethnicity, and show how these are related to child-rearing practices, views on academic performance and home-school relations (Dannesboe et al. 2012). The aims of studies with these perspectives are not to identify the ideal home-school relationship and thereby give the recipe to the perfect relationship. Rather, they focus on revealing the social circumstances and conditions that support or limit parental opportunities for involvement in their children's education.

Nowadays, Danish research in the field is more of this kind according to Dannesboe and colleagues (2012). In their research project "Skole-hjem-samarbejde som kulturel selvfølgelighed – en multi-sited etnografisk afdækning" (e. Home-school collaboration as a cultural truism – a multi-sited ethnographic study) their aim is not to identify the defective or the ideal collaboration. Rather, they want to give research-based insights into children's and families' everyday life and thereby contribute to discussions in the field without pointing in one correct direction.

Parental involvement programs should incorporate more of the subtle components in order to maximize the efficacy of these initiatives, as Jeynes (2011) concludes after doing meta-analysis on research findings about home-school relationships. He claims that parental involvement is more complicated and broader than a set of deliberate, overt actions such as helping students with their homework or participating in social activities. Jaynes uses results from three meta-analyses to address and criticise the traditional image of good home-school cooperation, and to indicate that the most powerful aspects of parental involvement are frequently subtle such as maintaining high expectations of one's children, communicating with children, and parental style. An increasing body of research suggests that the key qualities for fostering parental involvement in schools may also be subtle:

> In other words, whether teachers, principals, and school staff are loving, encouraging, and supportive to parents

> may be more important than the specific guidelines and tutelage they offer to parents (Jeynes 2011).

It is useful to relate Jeynes' results to the more sociological critical perspectives in research on home-school relationships. Findings contributing to the knowledge and understanding of families and children's everyday life can become useful in the discussions about practice and how to understand and encourage cooperation with diverse parent groups.

Vinterek (2006) pointed out that Swedish students today are expected to take on more individual responsibility and that sometimes has accentuated the vulnerability of students who lack resources.

An Icelandic study showed that in compulsory schools where teachers had positive attitudes towards parental involvement, disciplinary problems were fewer than in schools where home-school relations were weaker (Sigurgeirsson and Kaldalóns 2006). In those schools, there was a great emphasis on keeping parents updated on what was happening and the focus was on mediating positive results and success. Parents were also encouraged to get involved in all types of school activities, not just social events. Causality is questionable; however, the findings in Sigurgeirsson and Kaldalóns' (2006) research revealed that in schools where the staff managed to blend warmth and openness into their organized cooperation with parents, this correlated with fewer disciplinary problems.

Presenting alternative and perhaps more critical perspectives on parental involvement is, of course, more fragmented than presenting coherent partnership programs. It merely emphasises that understanding the differences and unique circumstances in every school, community, parent group and in every student group is the prerequisite to cooperation.

Several studies have shown that parents often cease participation in their children's lives as the children become teenagers (Desforges and Abouchaar 2003, Epstein 2007, Nordahl 2007). This affects teenagers' lives in many different and sometimes unfortunate ways. On the other hand, this ceasing participation could be a sign of sound relationships in general as Kryger (2012) has suggested. His research on ninth grade students' own stories about their interpretation and meaning of the home-school relationship showed that the established forms of cooperation between home and school leave very little space for students' perspectives. He states that it is especially important for teenagers, developing their own identity, to find their own way to deal with the parent-teacher cooperation.

The review above shows that parents' participation and involvement in school activities is a complex matter. How to handle it should not be taken for granted. The question set forth in this article is: *What do teenagers, parents and school professionals find to be desirable in parental participation in school activities?*

Method and analysis

The participants in this research were the principals, teachers and other school professionals in 20 compulsory schools in Iceland that accepted an invitation to take part in the project; the parents of the children attending these schools; and students in 7th-10th grade in 14 schools, i.e. in all of those schools that had students in the lower-secondary level. The schools were in four municipalities; 17 were selected randomly and three schools were selected because of their emphasis on individualized

learning. The sample is large; for example, the students in those 20 schools comprised 17% of all of the students in compulsory schools in Iceland.

The online survey software QuestionPro was used for online questionnaires, which were developed by using guidelines on survey construction from Karlsson (2003) and Þórsdóttir and Jónsson (2007). One questionnaire was developed for the parents, which included questions about the parents' background, their cooperation with school staff and satisfaction with the service their child was getting at the school. Questionnaires for the school professionals included questions about their work conditions, usage of working hours and preferences regarding home-school relationships. Questionnaires for students included questions about learning styles, their relations with the teachers and about what they preferred in parental participation in school activities. A pretest of questionnaires was conducted in a pilot study in one compulsory school. Multiple methods were used for data gathering, including interviews and notes from field observations which made it possible to triangulate the data in the research project, but findings in this article are build on the questionnaires.

Teachers and other professionals answered online questionnaires sent to their work e-mail address. They answered four questionnaires in the school year 2009-2010. The students answered an online questionnaire in the computer room in their own school when members from the research team visited the participating schools in autumn 2010. A more detailed description of the questionnaires is in the article by Jónsdóttir og Björnsdóttir (2012).

The response rate for the parents was 67% (n=3481), for the students it was 86% (n=1821) and for the school professionals it was around 82% (n=823). The response rate was high, as the response rate for surveys frequently falls below 50% (Saunders 2012).

The data was analysed with SPSS 20. Percentages, Chi-square and Spearman correlation were computed. Spearman correlation is used for variables measured on an ordinal scale and Chi-square for categorical variables.

The interest of all those participating in the research is protected by keeping all data confidential. Furthermore, the participating schools were all offered a feedback, including presentations and discussions about the results, as the intention is to contribute to research based discussions about school development.

Results

Parents and school professionals involved in this research are convinced of the importance of parental participation in school activities. Now it is time to discover what those involved find desirable in that matter. As students, i.e. teenagers, also participated in this study, it is appropriate to describe first the results of their opinions.

Students want parents to join in school activities

Students in 7th-10th grade in the 14 schools with a lower-secondary school level were asked about their opinions on parents' participation in school activities. In general, the teenagers were positive towards parents' participation in school activities (see Figure 1).

Eight out of ten students found it very or rather desirable to have parents assisting them with homework, 68% found it very or rather desirable that parents participated in assessments of their academic achievement, and 63% found it very or rather desir-

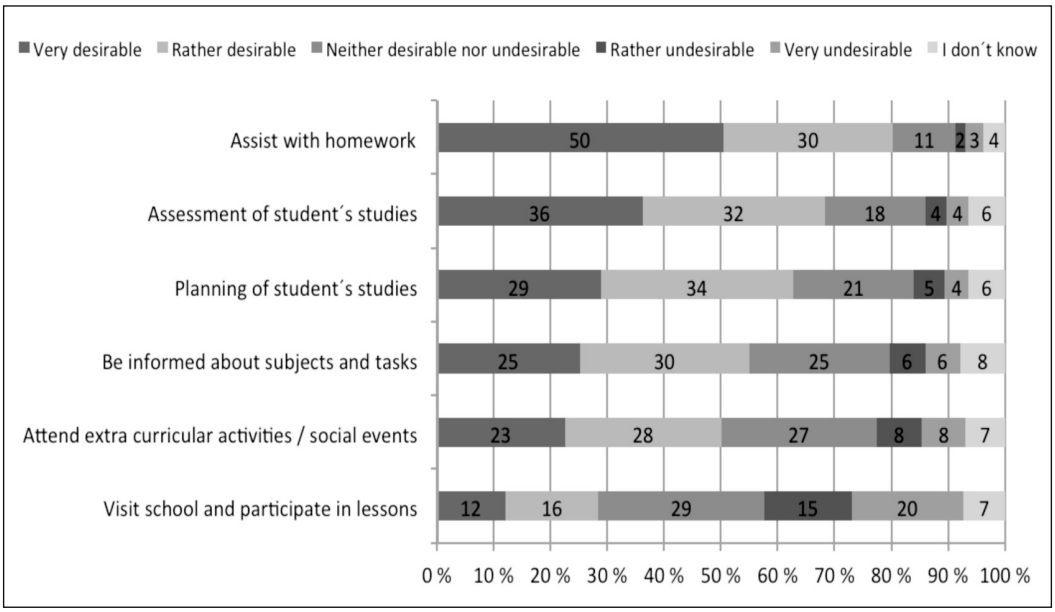

Figure 1. Student (n=1821) opinions on the desirable parental participation in school-related activities.

able that parents participated in planning their studies. The results presented in Figure 1 show clearly that students find it most appealing to have parents participating in the academic activities of school life rather than social activities. Ranking below those three statements are statements relating to the social activities of school-life, which has been the more traditional way that parents have participated. Just over half of the student group found it very or rather important that parents participate in social events in school such as class entertainment. Having parents visit the school and participating in schoolwork had the lowest ratings, but 28% of the students found that to be very or rather desirable.

The correlations between answers to those statements in Figure 1 are all positive and statistically significant. The strongest relations were between answers on participation in assessment and participation in planning of studies (r_S(df 1586)=.65 p<.01)). However, despite these correlations, there are interesting differences of opinions within the student group, as described in Table 1.

The results in Table 1 can be summarized by three concluding statements. The students' interest in parental involvement decreased the older they were, the girls were more enthusiastic than the boys about parental participation, and those with more confidence in their learning abilities were more enthusiastic than those who felt inferior in their studies.

School professionals

The questions directed to teachers, principals and other school professionals were in line with those for the students. There were questions added that were aimed at parental participation in tasks that are of a more professional nature such as school management, internal school evaluation and curriculum development. The results are presented in Figure 2.

Table 1. Proportion of students (%) that found parental participation to be *very desirable* in different school activities.

	Grade					Gender			Confidence in their learning ability		
	7%	8%	9%	10%	χ^2	Boy	Girl	χ^2	Good	Very or rather poor	χ^2
Assist with homework	65	58	46	44	63.8***	45	60	34.0***	56	45	32.2***
Assessment of student's studies	49	40	35	32	40.6***	32	45	33.9***	42	31	31.1***
Planning of student's studies	41	34	28	23	46.6**	26	35	22.1***	33	27	22.9***
Be informed about subjects and tasks	35	29	25	23	22.5*	25	30	16.7**	29	22	41.2***
Join in social events/extracurricular activities	38	28	18	16	100.2***	23	25	8.9	25	21	32.8***
Visit school and participate in lessons	17	16	9	12	42.6***	12	14	21.2***	13	12	12.8*

*p<0,05, **p<0,01, *** p<0,001

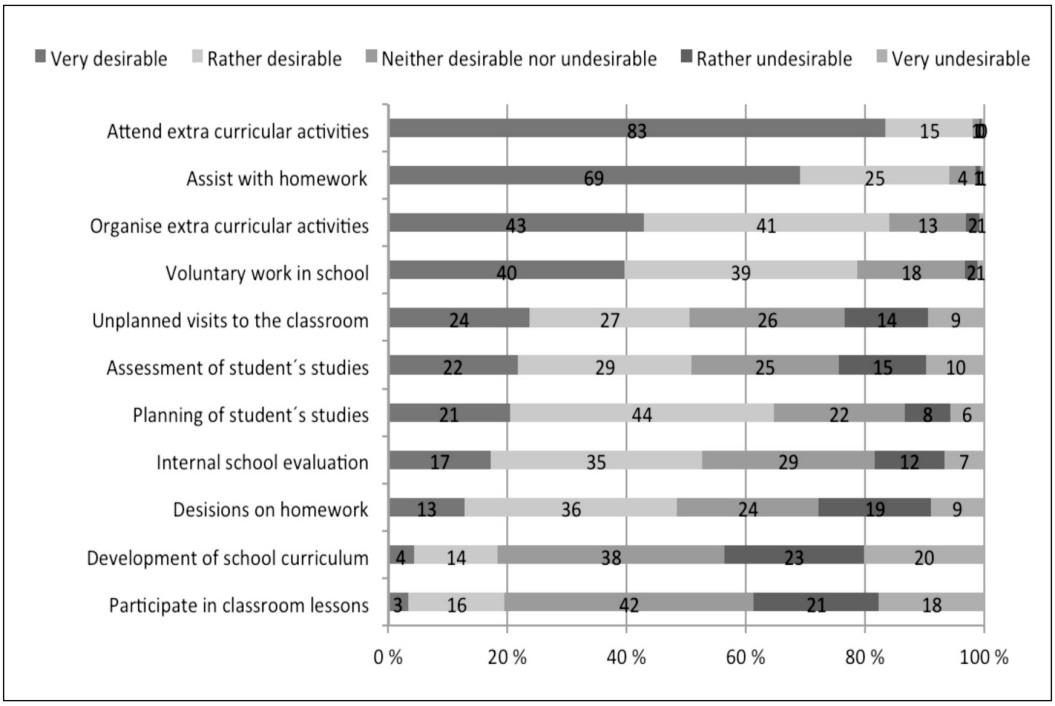

Figure 2. School professionals' (n=823) opinions on the desirability of parental participation in school-related activities.

School professionals rated the desirability of parental participation in eleven activities. They found it most desirable that parents attended social events or extracurricular activities organized at school, but 98% said it was very or rather desirable. When it came time to help with homework, 94% of the respondents felt it was very or rather desirable and 84% had the same opinion about the involvement of parents in planning social activities at school. The school-staff was very positive towards parents' participation of the traditional kind around social activities and homework. On the other hand, less than half of the respondents thought it was very or rather desirable to have parents participating in decisions about homework, 18% believed they should be involved in developing the school curriculum and 19% of school professionals found it very or rather desirable to have parents participating in the classroom lessons.

The teachers' age had no impact on their answers but there were notable differences when comparing responses by the age of the students they taught. Teachers' interest in cooperation seemed to wane the older the students were, just like parents' interest seemed to wane as their children grew older. Around 54% of teachers of students in 5th-7th grade (intermediate level) found it highly desirable that parents organise extracurricular activities, 49% of teachers of the youngest students (grades 1-4) had the same opinion but only a third of the teenagers' teachers (grades 8-10) found it very desirable (χ^2 (8, N = 375) = 21.9, p = .005). The majority of teachers at all levels considered it very desirable for parents to attend scheduled events but that also declined with the increasing age of the students; 92% of teachers in grades 1-4 considered it highly desirable, 87% in grades 5-7 and 71% of those teaching teenagers (χ^2 (8, N = 375) = 25.5, p = .001).

The same decline can be seen in teachers' interest in parental involvement in homework. Figure 2 shows that, in general, 69% of the school professionals find that very desirable. Just 55% of the teachers of teenagers had the same opinion, considerably fewer than the 82% who felt it very desirable at the youngest level and 72% who thought it very desirable teaching at intermediate level (χ^2 (8, N = 376) = 27.6, p = .001). Although a minority of the teachers deemed unexpected visits of parents highly desirable, there were even fewer teachers of teenagers (16%) of that opinion, than that of the other levels or 27% in the intermediate level and 31% in the youngest level (χ^2 (8, N = 376) = 28.1, p = .010).

Parents' desires for participation in school

Parents found it most desirable to participate in school activities by organising extracurricular activities such as class entertainment. Figure 3 shows that and parent opinions about the other six alternative ways of collaboration.

Figure 3 shows that 73% of the parents thought it was desirable for parents to participate in organising extracurricular activities. Over half of the parent group also thought it was desirable for parents to participate in internal school evaluations, volunteer at the school, and participate in planning students' studies and in academic assessment. Only 20% of the parents thought it was desirable for parents to participate in classroom lessons.

Parents' interest in participation in school activities declined as the children grew older. At the youngest level, 29% of parents thought it was very desirable that parents participated in organizing extracurricular activities. About a quarter of par-

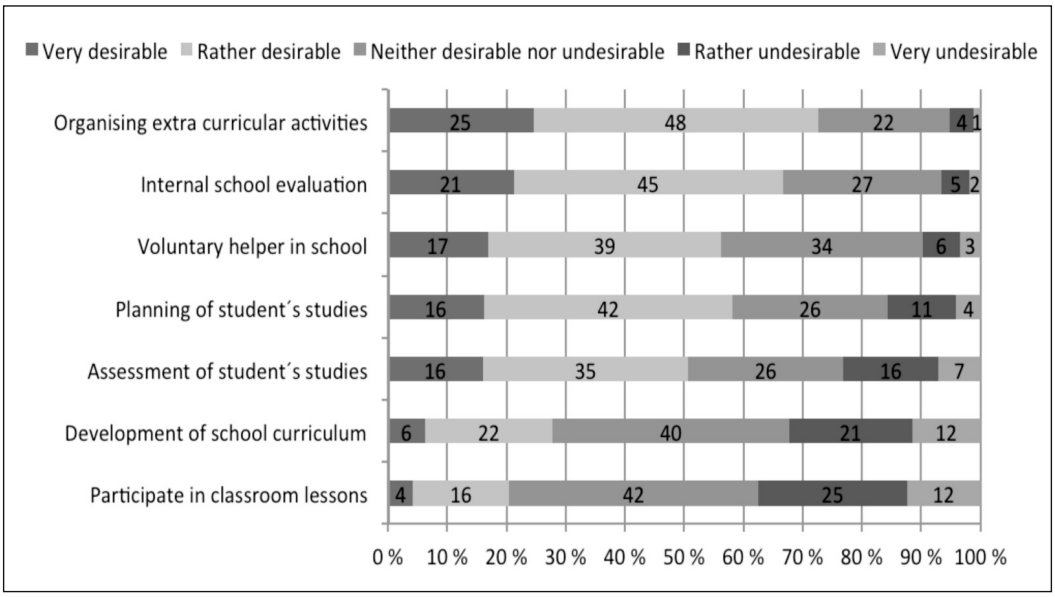

Figure 3. Parents' (n=3481) opinions about the desirability of parental participation in school-related activities.

ents of children in grades 5-7 said the same and 18% of parents of teenagers agreed (χ^2 (8, N=2978)= 66.9, p<.001).

The majority of adults, parents and school staff, favour the more traditional kind of parental participation which primarily involves social activities

More parents at the youngest level (19%) than at the intermediate level (13%) found it very desirable to participate in planning their child's studies, but opinions of parents of teenagers (15%) were in between and not different from the other groups (χ^2 (8, N=2925)= 18,5, p=.018). There were relations between student age and how desirable parents found it to participate in internal school evaluation (χ^2 (8, N=2792)= 39,4, p<.001) and in the assessment of their child's academic performance (x^2 (8, N=2911)= 28,6, p<.001). Around 17% of parents of teenagers said it was very desirable to participate in school evaluation; 20% of parents of students in 5th-7th grade, and 26% of parents at the youngest level agreed. Participation in assessment was very desirable to 20% of parents at the youngest level but 13-14% of parents of older students agreed to that.

Correlations were also examined between parents' own education and their opinions on parents' participation in school activities. In general, the trend was that parents with more education favoured parental involvement more than parents with less education. This applied to volunteer work in the schools, 19% of parents with a university degree find participation very desirable but 13% of parents with vocational education and 10% of parents with primary education agree (χ^2 (12, N = 2659 = 40.6, p <.001). The pattern was similar regarding parents taking part in planning their child's studies;

18% of parents with higher education felt it very desirable but only 9% of parents with primary education (χ^2 (12, N = 2697 = 57.4 p <.001) agreed. Participation in curriculum development was very desirable according to 8% of parents with higher education, but only 2% of parents with primary education (χ^2 (12, N=2664= 66,6 p<.001) agreed. Taking part in internal school evaluation was very desirable according to 24% of parents with higher education, a significantly larger group than the 17% of parents with vocational education and 10% of parents with primary education sharing that opinion (χ^2 (12, N=2571= 89,0, p<.001).

Discussion and conclusions

This research reveals a split in opinions between groups or even generations. The majority of adults, parents and school staff, favour the more traditional kind of parental participation which primarily involves social activities. However, teenagers have other preferences and really show an interest in relating parental participation to their academic activities.

The strongest opinions appear in the answers from school staff, as 98% found it to be rather or very desirable to have parents attend extracurricular activities such as social events in school, and 85% wanted parents to participate in organising these activities. Parents were almost as eager to contribute to social activities as 73% thought it was desirable to participate in organising them. Just over half of the students in 7th-10th grade found it desirable to have parents attend social events or extracurricular activities; however, the opinions of the younger students might be somewhat different.

This preference for parental participation in social activities over participation in academic activities raises questions about how to interpret the fact that 99% of the very same parents and school professionals considered parental support to be rather or very important for the academic achievement of children (Jónsdóttir and Björnsdóttir 2012). Is it possible that the adults believe that the home-school relationship is very important for achievement and think it is best served by parental participation in extracurricular activities and social entertainment? Why do they hesitate in speaking for parental participation in all activities? This can be a question of time, or rather of lack of time, as Marinósson (2002) pointed out, because parents must spend precious time on collaboration and it may be helpful for the busy parents if schools do not demand too much of them. This can also be associated with the fact that 90% of the parents were satisfied with their cooperation with homeroom or supervisory teachers and that related to their overall satisfaction with the experience of school (Jónsdóttir and Björnsdóttir 2012). Parents that are satisfied may also feel little need for stepping out of secure grounds and adding to their traditional social supporting role some new roles more related to their child's studies; and teachers may also feel little need for opening up their field of practice.

It is interesting that parents in this research found participation in internal school evaluation and voluntary work at school preferable to participation in planning and assessing students studies. Epstein's (2011) theory on overlapping spheres of influence can be useful in interpreting this. My suggestion is that parents may find it easier to take part in activities concerning the school as an institution in the community, than to take steps towards the core of the school-sphere, namely the activities that could challenge teachers' professional practices

like planning and assessing a student's studies.

It is worth considering that genuine home-school partnership is based on mutual trust (Deslandes 2001). The findings show that school staff was reluctant when participation touched upon their expertise in traditional academic activities. Teachers were, however, more positive about having parents participate in planning and assessment than the parents were themselves. Roughly half of the parent group and half of the teacher group deemed cooperation on assessing students' studies to be desirable, and also nearly half of the parent group (48%) found participation in planning students' studies desirable along with 65% of the school staff.

We can have different opinions about whether these groups of adults with positive attitudes are small or big enough; the findings concern the delicate relations between parents and school-staff. It brings attention to research findings about the importance of supporting parental participation in subtle ways, for example the school staff being loving and encouraging to parents (Jeynes 2011). Teachers that have positive attitudes towards parental involvement and encourage parents to become involved in all types of school activities harvest fewer disciplinary problems (Sigurgeirsson and Kaldalóns 2006). These findings can also serve as a reminder that someone has to take the initiative to contact and collaborate and the traditional view is that the school professionals have the responsibility of igniting and facilitating cooperation between the home and the school (Christiansen 2010, Epstein 2002, Epstein 2011, Nordahl 2007). That responsibility must be acted upon but it is equally important for school staff to bear in mind the diversity of the families involved and that overt tutelage could be a two-edged sword (Jeynes 2011).

Students view parental participation differently than their parents and the school staff. Eight out of ten students found it desirable to have parents assisting them with homework, 68% found that they wanted parents to participate in assessments of their academic achievement, and 63% want parents to participate in planning their studies. It is clear that the teenagers find it most appealing to have parents participating in their academic activities but just about half of the student group finds it desirable to have parents attending social events, and less than one-third wants them to visit and participate in lessons. The majority of students want parents to assist them with their studies at home and at school, and their answers reveal that they prefer parents to participate when their studies are at stake, rather than having them joining social events.

This preference can be interpreted in many different ways. For example, students may want parents to bring in additional information when teachers are doing assessments or making individualised plans; they may also want parents to become better informed about their academic performance and the enacted curriculum in school. It was somewhat surprising that students' opinions were so positive towards parental participation in school activities in general, as it is quite common to blame ceasing parental participation on students' dwindling interests or even on their presumed opposition against it. Predefined views of that kind bring attention to the need for research to focus on teenagers within the critical analytical research perspective in the field (Dannesboe et al. 2012).

Teachers' interest in home-school cooperation seemed to wane the older the students were, just like parents' interest

seemed to wane as their children grew older; these findings confirm a general notion in the literature (Desforges and Abouchaar 2003, Epstein 2007, Nordahl 2007). Jónsdóttir and Björnsdóttir (2012) concluded that the changes in home-school relationships – less contact but more focus on learning – were not necessarily negative, except for teenagers that need more support. Students' priority for parental participation in the academic portion of their school life can therefore also be interpreted as a sensible support of the adults strengthening their focus on learning.

The established forms of cooperation between home and school leave little space for students' perspectives but it is important for teenagers developing their own identity to find ways to deal with parent-teacher cooperation (Kryger 2012). In this research, the students' interest in parent involvement decreased the older they were; the girls were more enthusiastic than the boys about parental participation, and those with more confidence in their learning abilities were more enthusiastic than those who felt inferior in their studies. This emphasizes the diversity in the student group. Therefore, ceasing parents' participation can also be interpreted as a positive sign of respect for teenagers' need to emancipate and develop as individuals.

A comprehensive approach to family involvement goes beyond linking children's home and classroom learning experiences and Epstein's family-school-community partnership model best reflects the relations between the three spheres embracing a school child (Coleman 2013). When the findings presented here are compared to the model, it's apparent that Epstein's six keys or types of involvement are all in use in Icelandic schools. A follow up could be to use the model's practical advice on how to enhance cooperation in each of the six types of partnership. The model is of a practical nature with overt aims and strategies and can be criticised for rigid structures (Jeynes 2011). Epstein and colleagues would not agree with that; on the contrary, they emphasize that the model is responsive to the needs and interests of all families (Epstein 2011, Epstein et al. 2002).

Findings in this paper show, for example, diversity in the student group, changes in opinions related to the age of the students, and that parents with more education favoured parental involvement more than parents with less education. Sociological perspectives bring in factors that affect parental involvement, such as gender, class and ethnicity, and show how these are related to child-rearing practices, views on academic performance and home-school relations (Dannesboe et al. 2012). They make a valuable contribution to research and practice using Epstein's partnership model.

In conclusion, the findings show that parental participation in school activities is highly desirable; nevertheless teachers and parents have to make an effort to sustain their interest in participation throughout students' adolescent years. Collaboration relates to students' academic performance, it is therefore important to empower parents and strengthen trust between them and school professionals. Epstein's model can be useful in evaluating and cultivating parental involvement in schools. However, analytical critical perspectives have to be brought into the discussion as well as they emphasise the necessity of understanding diversity and the unique circumstances in every school, community, parent group and class or student group.

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Notes

[1] *Parental involvement in schools* is one of six strands in a larger research project called "Teaching and Learning in Icelandic Schools", which deals with teaching and learning in 20 compulsory schools for age levels 6 to 15. The project's aim is to contribute to the body of knowledge on teaching and learning with a special emphasis on the development towards individualized and cooperative learning. The aim of *parental involvement in schools* is to explore the role of parents in their children's learning and the relationship between schools and their communities (Björnsdóttir and Jónsdóttir 2010, Sigurðardóttir and Hjartarson 2011, *Teaching and Learning in Icelandic Schools*).

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Appendix C

Paper III: Jónsdóttir, K. (2015). Teenagers' opinions on parental involvement in compulsory schools in Iceland. *International Journal about Parents in Education, 9*(1), 24-36.

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Teenagers' Opinions on Parental Involvement in Compulsory Schools in Iceland

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Students' voices in research on parental involvement in schools are rather weak since many studies report only on opinions of parents and school personnel. This paper draws on findings from a study in 14 compulsory schools and uses data from questionnaires from students in 7th to 10th grade (n=1821). The issue, students' wishes for parents' participation, is approached from a systemic perspective; Bronfenbrenner´s ecological systems theory, Epstein´s model of family-school-community partnership, and Pasi Sahlberg´s Nordic point of view are applied. Multiple regression analysis testing revealed that gender, grade, and student confidence in his or her learning ability explained 9.4% of the variance (R^2) in students' wishes. School experiences were added in a second model and explained an additional 8.8% of the variance (R^2 change). Believing that parents' support is important for achievement and believing that discipline and peaceful class environment affects achievement were the two variables added in the third model of the regression analysis, and the overall explanation of the model was raised to 27.6% (R^2). Implications are that home-school cooperation on a lower-secondary level should focus more on activities related to the academic side of school life. Also, schools should take action in bettering the quality of factors related to students' school experience since that could result in an increase in students' interest for parental participation, which in turn contributes positively to academic achievement.

Keywords: Parental involvement, students' opinions, parent participation, teenagers, Bronfenbrenner´s ecological systems theory

Introduction

The vast majority of the teenagers who participated in a study in compulsory schools in Iceland wanted their parents to be involved in their education (Jónsdóttir, 2013; Jónsdóttir & Björnsdóttir, 2014; Óskarsdóttir et al., 2014b). It is as if they knew that parents' participation could have a significant, positive effect on their achievement and well-being at school (Bæck, 2005; Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003; Hattie, 2009; Jeynes, 2011).

The Nordic countries all have long traditions of home-school cooperation. The features of the cooperation are described, at least officially, in a similar way in these countries, and the importance is unquestioned. Practices are also surprisingly similar from one school to another and from early childhood to graduation, no matter what kind of ideology or school policy is prevalent (Christiansen, 2010; Dannesboe, Kryger, Palludan, & Ravn, 2012). The exception in this pattern is that parents often cease participation in their children's lives as students grow older and the children become teenagers (Epstein, 2007; Nordahl, 2007). That change could affect teenagers' lives in many different and sometimes unfortunate ways. Yet this cessation of participation could also be a sign of sound relationships as it is especially important for teenagers, developing their own identity and autonomy, to find their own way to deal with parent-teacher cooperation (Kryger, 2012).

This paper focuses on teenagers' opinions about parental participation in school and how they differ according to personal traits, such as age and gender and factors related to their school experiences. The latter aspects, those relating to

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school experiences, include questions about interest in academic activities, teenagers' views on teaching quality, student-teacher relations, and how important the teenagers believed parents' support to be for their learning outcomes and achievement. The topic will be approached from a systemic perspective, using Urie Bronfenbrenners´ ecological system theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Coleman, 2013; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997) and Joyce Levy Epstein´s model of family-school-community partnership (Epstein, J. L. 2001, 2007; Epstein, J. L., Sanders, Mavis, G., 2000; Epstein, J. L., Sanders, Salinas, Jansorn, & Van Voorhis, 2002). The findings will also be discussed from a Nordic point of view, as described by Pasi Sahlberg (2011, 2014, 2015), emphasising quality and equity as the strengths of the educational systems in the Nordic countries.

Home-School Cooperation in Nordic Countries

Home-school cooperation has developed in a rather similar direction in all the Nordic countries. Legislation and policy documents emphasise its importance, and steps have been taken in recent years to allocate parents a more significant position in schools (Bæck, 2009; Jónsdóttir & Björnsdóttir, 2012; Kristofferson, 2009; Risku, Bjork, & Browne-Ferrigno, 2012). Political campaigns have emerged to strengthen the home-school relationship, for example in Denmark, and Dannesboe et al. (2012) explained that these are grounded on the rhetoric that home-school cooperation is always in the child's best interest – the more the better.

The features of the cooperation are described very similarly in the other Nordic countries: one or two home-school conferences per year, where parents and teachers – and most often the students – discuss matters deemed relevant. Added to this communication is information exchange through systems on the Internet, via emails or letters, and various social events. Even if the "more the better" rhetoric is prevalent, a Norwegian study brought forth that the direct contact between teachers and the majority of parents is limited to participation in one common parent meeting and in one parent-teacher conference for 30 minutes per semester (Nordahl, 2007). And parents' social and cultural capital affects their view on participation and readiness to cooperate with schools (Bæck, 2005, 2009; Palludan, 2012). Findings in an ethnographic study in Denmark (Palludan, 2012) showed that parents tend to adapt to the social and cultural organization of home-school relations without questioning it or without trying to influence it. The adaption was easier for couples than for single parents and easier for parents living in a middle class neighbourhood than for those living elsewhere.

In a preceding study, I focused on the organization of home-school relationships and the communication between parents and teachers, and it revealed that parental participation is limited and rather similar to that in the other Nordic countries as described above and that the largest share of the time supervisory teachers spend on communicating with parents is about issues concerning a few individual students (Jónsdóttir, 2013; Jónsdóttir & Björnsdóttir, 2012, 2014).[1]

Findings also showed that the majority of both parents and school staff favoured the more traditional kind of parental participation, which primarily involves social activities (Jónsdóttir, 2013). Generally, the more educated parents favoured parental involvement more than the less educated, implying the importance of social class (Palludan, 2012). However, teenagers have other preferences from the adults and really showed more interest in relating parental participation to their academic activities (Jónsdóttir, 2013). A key concept here is *parents' participation*, that is, parents come to school to attend some social events or take part in other school activities such as planning and assessment. Parents can also participate in students' education outside of

[1] The study *Parental involvement in compulsory schools in Iceland* is founded on one of six strands in a larger research project called *Teaching and Learning in Icelandic Schools*, which deals with teaching and learning in 20 compulsory schools for age levels 6 to 15. The research project's aim is to contribute to the body of knowledge on teaching and learning, with a special emphasis on the development towards individualized and cooperative learning (Teaching and Learning in Icelandic Schools; Óskarsdóttir et al., 2014b). The overall aim of this study on *parental involvement* is to explore how parental involvement contributes to student´s education in compulsory schools. The main questions concern the organisation of home-school relationships; what parents, students, and school personnel find to be a desirable parent participation; and if home-school relations should be organised somewhat differently on a lower-secondary school level than on the younger levels in compulsory school (Björnsdóttir & Jónsdóttir, 2010, 2014; Jónsdóttir & Björnsdóttir, 2012, 2014).

school, for example by assisting their children with homework and in policymaking and management (Guðmundsson, 2003; Kristofferson, 2009). Therefore parents' participation can refer to a rather inactive role as passive attendants at social events but also to an active participation and shared responsibility of pedagogical decisions regarding their child.

Students' Role and Placement within the (School) System

Relationships between compulsory schools and their communities are growing in the 21st century (Hargreaves, 2000). Parenting is not restricted to the family anymore and contemporary families often work in cooperation with a variety of childcare and family professionals, such as daycare and healthcare staff and teachers (Böök & Perälä-Littunen, 2014). The ecological systems theory describes how an individual's development is affected by his social relationships and the world around him (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The theory identifies four environmental systems with which an individual interacts, the microsystem, the mesosystem, the exosystem, and the macrosystem; see Figure 1 (Hchokr, 2012).

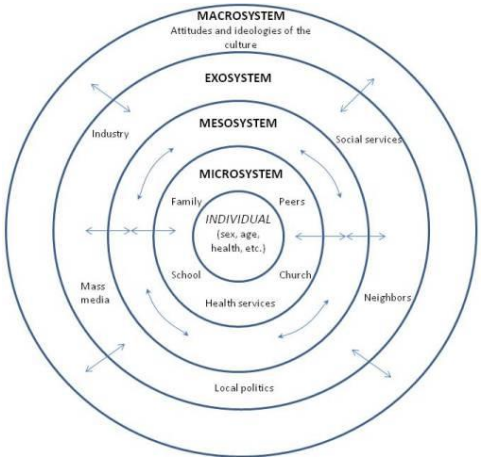

Figure 1 Bronfenbrenner´s ecological systems theory

Children live and mature in many microsystems, such as at home and in school, and these systems are connected in the mesosystem, for example by mails and meetings. The mesosystem in turn is a part of the exosystem, which includes systems of institutions, such as the social system and the school system in a community. Individuals are affected by the exosystems; for example, students are affected by the school system, but they have no direct influence on it themselves. Finally all these systems are surrounded by the macrosystem of culture, traditions, customs, rights, and duties in a society. In later versions, Bronfenbrenner added the chronosystem to his model to acknowledge that, like physical ecologies, human ecologies change over time (built on Coleman, 2013; Martínes-Gonzáles, 2001; Óskarsdóttir, 2012).

The family-school-community partnership model by Joyce Levy Epstein and colleagues (2002) has been widely used to explain the relationship between three "overlapping spheres of influence", the family, the school, and the community, which have to work together to support children´s development and education (Coleman, 2013; Epstein, 2011). The model is a framework for schools to keep parents engaged in home-school cooperation regarding their teenagers as well as their younger children (Epstein, 2001, 2007; Epstein, & Sanders, Mavis G., 2000; Epstein et al., 2002). Sanders (2007) claims that adding community to the family-school partnership adds resources and support that are needed for students' academic success and networks that can respond to students at risk. When middle schools and high schools implement partnership programs, more students benefit than just those whose families become involved, says Epstein (2011) since several studies confirm "that when families are involved, more students earn higher grades in English and math, improve their reading and writing skills, complete more course credits, set higher aspirations, have better attendance, come to class more prepared to learn, and have fewer behavioral problems" (Epstein, 2007, p. 18).

In this study, the student in a compulsory school is the individual at the centre of the Bronfenbrenner model. The systems interact and affect each other and the student´s development and education. Epstein's framework has proved to be efficient in strengthening home-school relations and the theory of the overlapping spheres is useful when interpreting findings regarding students' wishes about parental involvement. But even though Epstein (2001) refers to the ecological systems theory, the individual student is neither very visible nor described as an actor in home-school relationships. Therefore

Bronfenbrenner's theory is necessary as an analytical tool that sharpens up the student's role and central placement when exploring the home-school relations from a systemic perspective.

Equity and Teenagers Need for Space

Pasi Sahlberg (2014) has described the emphasis on equity and quality in educational systems and has suggested that it could be called the Nordic point of view, since the Nordic countries in general have emphasized these values. The improvement of education systems is now a global phenomenon, and the sixth element of GERM – the Global educational reform movement – is the increased external control of school, says Sahlberg (2011). He warns that inequalities in Finnish society and in its education system are increasing and says that the challenge for Finland is "not just to try to maintain high student performance but to strive to keep the country an equal society and hold onto its leading position as the most equitable education system in the world" (Sahlberg, 2015, p. 195). This is an important reminder, since family-school-community cooperation isn´t just to serve these institutions of society and their goals, but to empower every student and uphold his or her rights to mature and to respect each student's families' choices and preferences. Equity and diversity within a teenage student group can be discussed from different perspectives, such as achievement, identity or self-perception, and social class and social capital as mentioned before.

The expectations for better academic achievement are all around in modern societies, and they put pressure on teenagers as well as adults. John Hattie (2012) pointed out that it is necessary to distinguish between factors in achievement that can be changed and those that cannot. Furthermore, it is important to distinguish between factors that can be easily changed and those that demand very complicated efforts. It is well known that parental involvement has a positive effect on achievement and well-being at school (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003; Hattie, 2009), so it is a question of which aspects of parental involvement could be easily changeable factors.

Desforges and Abouchaar (2003) point out that lessening parental involvement as the child gets older is strongly influenced by the child taking an active mediating role. A possible explanation for the dwindling contact may be that teenagers simply need to distance themselves from adults, parents, and teachers and need more space as they mature. This cessation of participation could be a sign of sound relationships as Kryger (2012) has suggested in his research on ninth grade students' interpretation of the home-school relationship. The study describes teenagers' different positions as three different voices. The first voice is the school adaptive voice of teenagers that tries to live up to the expectations the students have at home and at school. Second is the youth cultural voice that wants to keep home and school apart but also to have space to create individual cultural scenes across the microsystems. The third voice is the generational voice of teenagers who are creating their identity as independent individuals in relation to adults and finding themselves with regard to their relations between the adults, teachers, and parents. The conclusion is that the established forms of cooperation between home and school leave very little space for students' perspectives, and teenagers have to find their own way to deal with the parent-teacher cooperation because it is a part of their maturation process (Kryger, 2012).

The aim of this paper is to lend a voice to the teenage students and to discuss if family-school cooperation should be organised somewhat differently at the lower secondary school level than at the younger school levels. The research question set forth in this article is: *What do teenagers prefer in parents´ participation, and how could their wishes affect the cooperation?*

Data and Method

Data derives from a mixed method research project *Teaching and Learning in Icelandic Schools* (Óskarsdóttir, 2014). The participants were the principals, teachers, and other school professionals in 20 compulsory schools in Iceland who accepted an invitation to take part in the project. Also participants were the students and the parents of the children attending these schools. The sample is large; for example, the students in those 20 schools comprised 17% of all of the students in compulsory schools in Iceland (Óskarsdóttir et al., 2014a).

Participants

Findings in this paper build on the questionnaire to students in 7th to 10th grade in 14 schools; six of the 20 participating schools didn´t have students in the lower-secondary level. The

response rate for the students was 86% (n=1821). Boys were 49.6% (n=904) and girls 49.8% (n=907). Students in 7th grade were 21.4% (n=389), in 8th grade 25.7% (n=468), in 9th grade 24.1% (n=438) and 10th graders were 28.2% (n=514). The response rate was high in this research as the response rate for surveys frequently falls below 50% (Saunders, 2011).

Materials

A questionnaire was developed for students using guidelines on survey construction (Karlsson, 2003; Þórsdóttir & Jónsson, 2007). The questionnaire included questions about learning styles, students' relations with the teachers, and about what they preferred in parental participation in school activities; a pretest of questionnaires was conducted in a pilot study in one compulsory school (Jónsdóttir & Björnsdóttir, 2012).

Variables

Table 1 gives an overview of the variables used in the data analysis. The outcome variable is *Teenagers' wishes for parental participation*. It is a scale computed out of six questions into one dependent or outcome variable. The questions are about how desirable students find parents' participation, such as assisting them with homework and participating in assessment and planning of student´s future studies, if parents should be informed about curriculum and student's tasks, and how desirable it is to have parents attend social events at school or participate in lessons. A reliability analysis revealed an internal consistency of α = 0.87.
The explanatory variables that are shown in Table 1 touch upon personal traits such as age and gender, school experience, and upon students' opinions on what affects achievement.

Table 1.
Overview of the variables used in regression analysis, n=1821

	Categories	Mean	SD	Min.	Max.
Outcome variable:					
Teenagers' wishes for parental participation	1 = very undesirable, 2 = rather undesirable, 3 = neither desirable nor undesirable, 4 = rather desirable, 5 = very desirable	3.71	0.87	1	5
Explanatory variables:					
Respondent´s gender	Girl = 1, boy = 0	0.50			
Respondent´s grade in compulsory school	1 = 7th, 2 = 8th, 3 = 9th, 4 = 10th grade	2.60	1.11	1	4
Confidence in one's own learning abilities	1 = very poor, 2 = poor, 3 = neither poor nor good, 4 = good, 5 = very good	3.88	0.90	1	5
Teaching quality	1 = very poor, 2 = poor, 3 = neither poor nor good, 4 = good, 5 = very good	3.82	0.88	1	5
Relations with teachers	1 = very poor, 2 = poor, 3 = neither poor nor good, 4 = good, 5 = very good	4.07	0.88	1	5
Students' appreciation of school activities	1= disagree strongly, 2 = disagree, 3 = moderate, 4 = agree, 5 = agree strongly	3.04	0.99	1	5
Discipline and peaceful class environment influence students' learning outcomes	1 = very little, 2 = little, 3 = neither little nor much, 4 = much, 5 = very much	4.05	0.94	1	5
Parents' support influences students' learning outcomes	1 = very little, 2 = little, 3 = neither little nor much, 4 = much, 5 = very much	4.39	0.82	1	5

Procedure

The online survey software QuestionPro was used for data collection. The data was collected in an on-site survey conducted by researchers who visited the schools in November and December in 2010.

The data was analysed with SPSS 22. Percentages and Spearman correlation were computed, and Spearman was used to measure the correlation between the variables on an ordinal scale (Field, 2013). A multiple regression analysis was performed to provide information on the effect of the explanatory variables on the outcome variable (Gujarati & Porter, 2009).

The regression analysis was done to test three models in order to group together the strongest explanatory variables belonging to the same spheres: the personal, the school related, and the sphere of opinions and values.

Model 1 contains the three personal variables; *gender* a girl or a boy, *grade* from 7th to 10th, and *confidence in one's own learning ability* estimated on a scale from 1-5, in which 1 stood for very poor confidence and 5 for a very good confidence.

In model 2, three school experience variables were added: *teaching quality* was estimated on a scale in which 1 stood for very poor teaching and 5 for very good teaching. *Relations with teachers* were estimated on a scale in which 1 meant very poor relations and 5 meant very good relations. The third variable measured *students' appreciation of school activities* by computing three statements into one: I am interested in learning tasks, the homework tasks are interesting, and I am having fun at school. The scale is 1 – 5, where 1 stood for disagree strongly and 5 for agree strongly. Thus, in model 2, variables of school experience were added to the personal traits in model 1.

In model 3, two variables with statements about achievement or learning outcomes were added to model 2. The first statement was about the influence of discipline and peaceful class environment on students' learning outcomes, measured on a scale 1 – 5, in which 1 stood for very little and 5 for very much. The second statement was if parents' support influences students learning outcomes, measured on the same scale.

Results

Teenagers were positive towards parental involvement in their education and parents' participation in school-related activities (see Table 2). The teenagers were most eager to have parents helping them with their homework; around 84% of teenagers found help with homework to be very or rather desirable. 73% found it very or rather desirable to have parents collaborate with teachers in assessing students' work, and 67% thought positively about parents' participation in planning. Almost 60% of the students thought it would be positive if their parents were informed about the school curriculum and their learning tasks.

Table 2

Students' evaluation of how desirable parents' participation is in school-related activities, percentages, n=1821

Variable	Very undesirable %	Undesirable %	Neither desirable nor undesirable %	Rather desirable %	Very desirable %
Assist with homework	3.3	1.9	11.4	31.0	52.5
Assessment of student´s studies	4.2	3.9	18.9	34.3	38.7
Planning of student´s studies	4.6	5.7	22.7	36.2	30.8
Being informed about subjects and tasks	6.7	6.8	26.7	32.4	27.3
Attend extracurricular activities / social events	8.3	8.5	29.3	29.6	24.2
Visit school and participate in lessons	21.2	16.7	31.4	17.6	13.1

These four questions, all related to student academic activities, scored higher than the two questions related to the social side of school. Just over half of the teenage group, or 54%, found it desirable to have parents attend extracurricular activities or social events at school; the group that found it neither desirable nor undesirable was rather large, or 29%, and almost 17% of students found it undesirable to have parents attend social events. The students formed three rather equal groups when asked if they wanted parents to visit school and join lessons; around 38% said undesirable; 31% said it does not matter; and 31% of the students said it was desirable to have parents come for visits to school.

The correlations between the six questions in Table 2 were positive and statistically significant. The strongest relations were between answers on participation in assessment and in the planning of studies (r_s (1586) = .65, p < .001), but the lowest were between assistance with homework and visits to school (r_s (1608) = .31, p < .001).

According to the results of the multiple regression analysis testing Model 1 (see Table 3), personal traits that defined the student explained around 9.4% of the variance (R^2) in students' wishes for parental participation. These personal traits were *gender*, *grade*, and *confidence in one´s own learning ability*, and all three variables had significant effect in this model (p < .001).

In model 2 (see Table 3), three variables concerning students' experience at school had been added to the original model. They all had positive effects, meaning that if students' estimates rose on the quality of teaching and on relations with teachers, they were also more positive towards parents' participation. Furthermore, teenagers who were pleased to be in school and took interest in their learning tasks and homework, found parental participation more desirable than students who reported poor contact with their teachers or who found their tasks boring. When these school experience variables were added, the explanatory power of the model increased to 18.2%, indicating that school experience variables were responsible for an additional 8.8% of the variance. One can say that the share of teachers and teaching, in students' opinions, on parental participation is almost as big as the share of the personal traits. Age and gender were still significant factors in the second model, which shows how important these factors are for students´ opinions.

In model 3 (see Table 3), two variables concerning students' opinions on achievement or learning outcomes were added to model 2. The first one was about the influence of discipline and peaceful class environment on students' learning outcomes, and the second one was if parents' support influenced students' learning outcomes. The overall explanation of the model was raised to 27.6% (R^2). There is no doubt that students believing in the value of parents' support for learning outcomes made parents' participation desirable. This variable was the strongest one in the regression analysis, with b value of 0.298. The second strongest is the variable estimating students' appreciation of school activities (b value 0.162), and the third one was school grade (b value -0.136), and it was significant as a single variable in all three models.

To sum up what the multiple regression analysis testing shows, we can say that school grade proved to be an important factor for students´ opinions and notably the only factor with a negative b value, meaning that students´ wishes for parents' participation diminished as students grew older. Gender was not as important as grade, but it was still a significant one as a single variable in the second model when variables of school experience had been added. The remaining six variables in the regression (estimating confidence in learning ability, experience in school, and beliefs about effects on achievement), all point in the same direction: Students' more positive opinions and experiences in school went hand in hand with more positive opinions towards parental participation.

It is important also to remember the answers from teenagers who didn't share the positive views of the majority. See Table 2. The percentage of those who found parents' participation very undesirable varies from 3.3 – 8.3% in five of the questions, but more than one out of five students (21.2%) found it very undesirable to have parents visiting school and participating in lessons.

Table 3
Regression analysis on the outcome variable: Teenagers' wishes for parental participation (n=1821)

MODEL 1	**b**	**SE**		**Sig.**
(Constant)	3.269	.121		<.001
Gender (girl = 1, boy = 0)	.190	.044		<.001
Grade in school (1 = 7th, 2 = 8th, 3 = 9th, 4 = 10th grade)	-.147	.020		<.001
Confidence in one's own learning ability	.189	.026		<.001
Percentage of variance explained (R^2)			.094	
MODEL 2	**b**	**SE**		**Sig.**
(Constant)	2.508	.146		<0.001
Gender (girl = 1, boy = 0)	.087	.043		0.044
Grade in school (1 = 7th, 2 = 8th, 3 = 9th, 4 = 10th grade)	-.126	.019		<0.001
Confidence in one's own learning ability	.051	.027		0.056
Teaching quality	.053	.030		0.080
Relations with teachers	.110	.030		<0.001
Students' appreciation of school activities	.208	.027		<0.001
Percentage of variance explained (R^2)			.182	
R^2 change			.088	
Sig. F change			<0.001	
MODEL 3	**b**	**SE**		**Sig.**
(Constant)	1.421	.160		<0.001
Gender (girl = 1, boy = 0)	.054	,041		0.189
Grade in school (1 = 7th, 2 = 8th, 3 = 9th, 4 = 10th grade)	-.136	.018		<0.001
Confidence in one's own learning ability	.020	.025		0.429
Teaching quality	.021	.029		0.460
Relation with teachers	.069	.028		0.014
Students' appreciation of school activities	.162	.026		<0.001
Discipline and peace in class affect students' learning outcomes	.090	.025		<0.001
Parents' support affects students' learning outcomes	.298	.028		<0.001
Percentage of variance explained (R^2)			.276	
R^2 change			.093	
Sig. F change			<0.001	

Discussion and Conclusion

The study revealed that the majority of students were positive towards parents' participation in school-related activities. Students found parents' participation to be more desirable in activities related to the academic side of school life than to the social side, contradicting the opinions of the majority of adults: both parents and school staff favoured the more traditional kind of parental participation, which primarily involves social activities (Jónsdóttir, 2013). This is one of the main findings of this study and indicates the importance of bringing students' wishes forth in the debate on home-school relationship, i.e., direct the focus onto the student at the centre of the ecological

system theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) and listen to her or his opinions.

Findings also showed a strong correlation between students' answers about different kinds of parental participation, so one can say that there was a tendency for students to be either positive or negative towards parents' participation in all types of activities. With reference to Epstein´s family-school-community partnership model (2011), one can say that teenagers were positive towards the overlapping of the spheres, parents' active participation in their school life and a fruitful relationship between their family and their teachers at school. Students also wanted parents to be informed about school subjects and students' learning tasks. This desire implies that the conventional flow of information from teachers to parents through the communication systems on the Internet does not cover what students think is important for parents to know. The traditional home-school relationship should thus be stretched to include the community in the partnership, for example, by teaching parents about the aims and learning outcomes described in the national curriculum and about the tasks that students work on to achieve the required goals. This could be done on a community basis and not restricted to single schools.

Teaching quality, teacher-student relations, and students' appreciation of school activities are the variables of school experience that were added in Model 2 in the regression analysis. They explained additionally almost as much of the variability in teenagers' wishes for parental participation as the personal traits of Model 1 did. These factors are within the school sphere, referring to Epstein´s three overlapping spheres, so schools have opportunity to influence and change them. This influence implies that teachers and school leaders should examine these students' wishes for parental participation with a close regard to the situation in their own school. It is worth recalling that it is necessary to distinguish between factors that can be changed and those that cannot be changed and also between factors that can be easily changed and those that demand very complicated efforts (Hattie, 2012). Many communities and school leaders have survey information at hand (for example in "Skólapúlsinn," 2015) that can be used to measure their own students' *appreciation of school activities*. Based on that measurement, school professionals could then take action in bettering the school-related factors, if needed, since they are within their own sphere. The result would most likely be that students appreciated the school activities more than before, and there would be an increase in students' interest for parental participation, both factors contributing to better academic achievement (Epstein, 2007; Hattie, 2009).

Prior findings have shown that these students find it more important for schools to prioritise good achievement than the adults do: Students put achievement in second place on the priority list while parents put it in fifth place and school staff in sixth place (Björnsdóttir & Jónsdóttir, 2014). Model 3 in the regression analysis showed that teenagers who believe that discipline and a peaceful class environment contributes to good achievement were more likely than those who did not believe it to welcome parental participation in school. This adds to the factors of school experience that school professionals should notice. Students' belief that parents' support is important for academic achievement had the biggest effect of all the variables on the outcome variable: *Teenagers wishes for parental participation*. No doubt, teenagers are smart; they want all the help they can get from both teachers and parents to get good grades, for example to gain status or to be able to choose the upper secondary school they want to attend.

The expectations for better academic achievement are all around us, and the influence of GERM can be detected in the Nordic countries. The emphasis on equity and quality is prominent in the Nordic educational systems, and Pasi Sahlberg (2015) advises us to be careful not to sacrifice equity and quality in the strife for high student performance. According to the findings of this study, students who reported positive school experience and confidence in their own learning ability were also more positive towards parental involvement than those with less self-confidence or more negative experience in school. The size of the student group that was negative towards parental involvement is rather big; one out of every five students said that parental visits to school and lessons were very undesirable; they clearly preferred to keep home and school apart. This cynical student group needs attention and encouragement, and teachers should reach out to build up a relationship with their families

also. These students will not experience quality and gain equally from their school years as their fellow classmates in achievement or well-being if the attitudes comprising negative school experience are neglected. Researchers report that parents' social class, social and cultural capital, and parents´ education (Bæck, 2005, 2009; Jónsdóttir, 2013; Palludan, 2012) affect their opinions about parental involvement, and parents opinions at home influence students' opinions (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003). My conclusion here is that teachers and school leaders should note which parents do not participate in the regular parent-teacher conferences and seldom attend the traditional social events. If these are parents of students who lack confidence in their learning abilities and do poorly in school, the school professionals should deliberately reach out to those families, encourage them to participate, and explain to them the value of cooperation.

It is important for teenagers' maturation to distance themselves from adults, and, therefore, parents' diminishing participation in school-related activities could be a sign of sound relationships (Kryger, 2012). Findings in this study bring in another perspective. Since a lack of confidence in one's own learning ability and a less positive school experience are related to students' less positive opinions about parental involvement, we might find that a certain group of students is in revolt against both parents' and teachers' influences. Furthermore, the effects of gender and grade on teenagers' wishes for parental participation were clear in the regression analysis. The girls favoured it more than the boys did. The difference between grades was also highly significant; the elder students were less likely than the younger ones to wish for parents' participation. It is tempting to interpret this in line with Kryger´s findings about the different paths teenagers choose when developing their own identity and their need to find their own way to deal with the parent-teacher cooperation. Now referring back to the first paragraph in this discussion, since students find parents' participation much more desirable in activities related to the academic side of school life than to the social side, a greater emphasis on parental involvement in students' academic activities should be favoured as the students get older.

Some implications for research on parental involvement and school practice have already been mentioned. In summary, findings indicate that the family-school cooperation should be more responsive to diversity in the student group and sensitive to students' social background. If students' school experiences are rather negative, it is necessary to reach out to the families and the students, even if they are reluctant towards cooperation. The cooperation at the lower-secondary level should focus more on learning outcomes and school-related activities, including guidance for parents in understanding the tasks and the demands that their teenagers are dealing with. A refresher course in the organisation of home-school relationships should emphasise respect for students' wishes for cooperation with their academic tasks, but should also be clear that good relationships contribute to student achievement and well-being at school.

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Appendix D

Paper IV: Jónsdóttir, K., Björnsdóttir, A., & Bæck, U.-D. K. (2017). Influential factors behind parents' general satisfaction with compulsory schools in Iceland. *Nordic Journal of Studies in Educational Policy*, *3*(2), 1-10. doi:10.1080/20020317.2017.1347012

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Influential factors behind parents' general satisfaction with compulsory schools in Iceland

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ABSTRACT

Parents' experiences and satisfaction with their child's compulsory school are affected by several factors. Some, such as parents' education and marital status, are social factors, while others are school factors that local leaders and school personnel can address. Findings build on data from an online questionnaire to parents in 20 compulsory schools in Iceland (n = 2129). Factor analysis generated two factors: communication and teaching. These, together with a question on parents' overall satisfaction with the school, were used as outcome variables in a regression analysis exploring what influences parents' satisfaction with the school. The majority of parents were satisfied, which may make it is easy to overlook those who are dissatisfied. Parents who felt that their children had special needs that were not acknowledged in school were more likely to be dissatisfied than other parents. Educational background was also influential. Single mothers were overrepresented in the group of unsatisfied parents; they experienced more difficulties in communicating with school personnel, believed less in the possibility for parents to influence the school, and more frequently experienced that their child's need for special support was not met in school. The findings imply that equity in Icelandic schools is disputable.

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Parental involvement; social factors; single mothers; parent satisfaction

Background

The topic for this article is parental involvement in school in Iceland and the possible factors that influence parents' satisfaction with school.

Schools are under pressure: International large-scale assessments indicate that schools in most Nordic countries are scoring lower than before, and that schools have become more segregated in terms of students' academic results (Skolverket, 2009, 2012). Reports from PISA 2012 show that the within-school variations in student results in Iceland are amongst the highest in the world, although the between-school variations are very small (Halldórsson, Ólafsson, & Björnsson, 2013).

In response to pressure instigated by the high-profile PISA results, as well as other social and economic circumstances, compulsory school systems in Nordic countries have been undergoing several structural changes in recent years (Östh, Andersson, & Malmberg, 2013; Sahlberg, 2011, 2015). One aspect focuses on an increased consumer orientation with regards to the educational system. From the Finnish context, Poikolainen and Silmäri-Salo (2015) pointed out that global education policy has brought national education closer to the consumer to whom the educational goods should be available. With reference to the Norwegian context, Bæck (2009) pointed out that parents have been allocated a more significant position in schools, both in regard to decision making and as partners in their children's learning processes, at least in the formal sense. However, Sahlberg (2011, 2014) noted that the ideology of open market-based education has expanded parental choice and school autonomy, but has also introduced stronger measures of control over schools. Sahlberg claimed that the sixth element of the global educational reform movement (GERM) was indeed the increased control of schools. The influence of GERM is also visible in Iceland; for example, in the most recent *White paper on educational reform* (Mennta- og menningarmálaráðuneytið, 2014), where measures and measurable goals for improving schools are described. It is also visible in the yearly plans set forth by school authorities, for example in Reykjavík, where myriad indicators for evaluating school practices are defined (Reykjavíkurborg, 2015). At the same time, however, equity and quality are emphasized as important values in the Icelandic educational system. Among other things, this study focuses on how the ideal of equity in education is being challenged through practices connected to parent and school relationships.

Cultural pressure on parents to act in the best interest of their children is stronger in present-day societies than it was in the previous century, as

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shown by Böök & Perälä-Littunen (2015) in their study of Finnish parents' views on responsibility in home–school relations. They found that active parental involvement in school life was seen as a key to children's success. Ultimately, this means that rather than being accepted as they are, children have become the target of all kinds of educative efforts. It is important to remember, however, that success in school is not only about academic achievement. Well-being, social relations, maturity and personal development should also be central success criteria. An Icelandic study showed that parents and school professionals consider these factors to be more important than academic achievement (Björnsdóttir & Jónsdóttir, 2014). Yet, the expectations for better academic achievement are pervasive in modern societies and put pressure on all parties, including students, teachers and school administrators – and increasingly also on parents.

It is a common belief that parents contribute best to their children's success in compulsory school by participating in school-related activities, and this has been repeatedly supported in international research literature (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003; Hattie, 2009, 2012; Jeynes, 2005, 2011a). However, this traditional image of what good home–school cooperation should entail has been criticized. For example, Jeynes (2005, 2011a) concluded that the most powerful aspects of parental involvement are often subtle, such as maintaining high expectations in children, communicating with them about school, and parental style. Interestingly, Jeynes claimed that an increasing body of research has suggested that the key qualities for fostering parental involvement in schools may also be subtle: 'Whether teachers, principals, and school staff are loving, encouraging, and supportive to parents may be more important than the specific guidelines and tutelage they offer to parents' (Jeynes 2011b, p. 10).

The relationship between home and school can sometimes be challenging, as reported in a number of studies. Böök and Perälä-Littunen (2015) described discourses where teachers and parents were seen as polar opposites: teachers as experts and parents as laymen. Bæck (2009, 2010) described the relationship between home and school as sometimes a distanced one. Similarly, Bæck (2013) and Jónsdóttir and Björnsdóttir (2012) described the relationship between teachers and parents as occasionally stressful. Furthermore, teachers' opinions of parents are often ambivalent; parents are either a support or a barrier to successful teaching (Rasmussen, 2004). As pointed out by Bæck (2009), failing to include parents in important decisions in school may indicate that they are not respected as equal partners. It is important to note that it can be a barrier to parental involvement if teachers do not recognize the social and cultural preconditions that affect participation, and respect the differences in the parent group.

From the Icelandic context, research has shown that parents and school professionals agree that working together is essential for children's education and academic achievement in school (Jónsdóttir & Björnsdóttir, 2012). That does not mean, however, that parental support in education is unproblematic, or even that all parents have the same expectations when it comes to their role in education. Parents should therefore not be viewed as a homogenous group (Bæck, 2009), and school culture, and parents' characteristics such as social status, gender, educational level and cultural values, have a great impact on the rationale and practice of parental involvement (Bæck, 2010; Pepe & Addimando, 2014). Formal education plays a part in whether and how parents cooperate with school. According to a Norwegian study, parents in lower-secondary schools with more formal education are more likely to take part in home–school cooperation compared to those with less education (Bæck, 2009). These parents are also often more likely to acknowledge that parental support is important in education. Findings from an Icelandic study have shown that parents prefer to participate in social activities, rather than, for example, school evaluations or planning students' studies, and also that more educated parents favour parental involvement more compared to parents with less education (Jónsdóttir, 2013; Jónsdóttir & Björnsdóttir, 2014). The expectations of schools regarding parental involvement are more likely to match the values, capacities and involvement styles of middle-class parents than those of working-class parents (Bæck, 2005). Lareau (2000) showed that working-class parents are often intimidated by the teachers' professional authority. Parents' status in society also has an effect: parents of high socio-economic standing are more likely to appreciate the importance of a good education in terms of living a successful adult life (Jeynes, 2011a). Parents with more capital and capacity, and who had their own success in school and highly value education, tend to be better able to tackle home–school relationships (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003). As pointed out by Desforges and Abouchaar (2003), the impact of such socio-economic factors can be counteracted by schools and parents through parental involvement in the form of 'at-home good parenting'. This has proven to have a significant positive effect on children's achievement and adjustment, even after all other factors shaping attainment have been removed from the equation.

This study explored how parents experienced the relationship with schools, and the way that the previously described background factors affected these

relationships. The following research questions were explored:

(1) How do parents experience different aspects of their relationship with school?
(2) Which factors influence parents' experiences and satisfaction with school?
(3) To what extent is equity a significant quality characterizing home–school relationships in Iceland?

Method

The data was derived from a mixed-methods research project called *Teaching and Learning in Icelandic Schools* (Óskarsdóttir, 2014). The strand of parental involvement within the larger project was concerned with providing an overview of what characterizes a home–school relationship in Icelandic schools, and discovering what parents, school personnel, and teenage students find desirable in parental participation (Jónsdóttir, 2013, 2015; Jónsdóttir & Björnsdóttir, 2012, 2014). The main focus of this study was to illuminate the factors influencing parents' experiences with school.

Participants

Participants were parents of students in 20 compulsory schools. With a sample size of 3481, this comprised parents of 17% of all students in compulsory schools in Iceland (Óskarsdóttir et al., 2014). The response rate was 67%, but some participants did not answer the whole questionnaire or skipped some questions. Parents were asked to respond to the questionnaire according to the child that was mentioned in an e-mail invitation, but they were also given the option to write comments concerning the experiences of other children they had in compulsory schools.

For the analysis, only participants who answered all the questions used in the factor analysis were included, which provided a sample size of 2129 (61.2% of the original sample). A comparison of this group with the original sample showed no significant differences when it comes to the following variables: child's gender (χ^2 (1, n = 3481) = 0.04, p = .834), whether the child lived in a single-mother's household or not (χ^2 (1, n = 2878) = 3.00, p = .083), parents' educational level (χ^2 (3, n = 2837) = 1.55, p = .670), whether the child had special needs or not (χ^2 (1, n = 3309) = 1.65, p = .199), to what degree the child's special needs were met by extra support (χ^2 (1, n = 3161) = 0.39, p = .530), and bullying (χ^2 (6, n = 3099) = 5.76, p = .454).

A significant difference was found between the two samples in four variables: the child's grade level, parents' general satisfaction with school, parents' participation in social events in school, and parents' assessment of their influence on school decisions. Parents of children scoring at the middle level (grades 5–7) were slightly overrepresented in the new sample. Regarding general satisfaction with school, parents that were either happy or unhappy were better represented than those who were neither happy nor unhappy with school. Parents who participated in social events were overrepresented (χ^2 (6, n = 3186) = 66.38, p < .001), as were parents who reported that they experienced being able to influence school decisions and vision (t(2976) = 3.94, p < .001). All in all, the new sample gave a slight overrepresentation of the more involved parents, which should come as no surprise considering that only those parents who completed all the questions in the analysis were included as part of the sample.

Characteristics of the participants are shown in Table 1. The great majority (72.1%) of respondents were mothers. Parents were invited to respond to the questionnaire together, and that opportunity was used by 5.6%. The participants noted that 73% of

Table 1. Characteristics of participants.

	n	%
All participants	2129	
Who answered the survey (*n* = 2099)		
Mother	1514	72.1
Father	468	22.3
Mother and father together	117	5.6
With whom the child lives, generally during schooldays (*n* = 2098)		
Both parents	1532	73
Single mother	278	13.3
Single father	12	0.6
Mother and stepfather	183	8.7
Father and stepmother	18	0.9
Equally at mother's and father's households	74	3.5
Other	1	0.0
Participants' highest educational levels (n = 2077)		
Compulsory school	162	7.8
Vocational education	357	17.2
Upper-secondary school	256	12.3
University education	1302	62.7

the children lived with both parents during schooldays, while 13.3% lived in single-mother households.

The participants' answers about their education were recoded into four groups of respondents' highest educational levels, as shown in Table 1. The majority (62.7%) of participants had completed education at the university level, but parents that had only completed compulsory school accounted for 7.8%.

Materials

The questionnaire was developed for parents in 20 compulsory schools in Iceland using guidelines on survey construction (Karlsson, 2003; Þórsdóttir & Jónsson, 2007). The questionnaire included questions about parents' opinions on teaching, communication, and cooperation with school staff; students' well-being and need for support; parents' general satisfaction with school and their ideas about desirable parent participation. Questions about parents' background were, for example, about education and family structure. The questionnaire was tested in a pilot study in one compulsory school (Jónsdóttir & Björnsdóttir, 2012).

Variables

Three different outcome variables related to different aspects of parents' satisfaction with their child's school were used in the analysis. Table 2 shows an overview of all variables used in the analysis. Two of the outcome variables were generated through a factor analysis of the answers given to a battery of survey questions concerning parents' experiences. Similar to Bæck (2009), factor analysis was used for data reduction purposes, meaning that a small number of factors were identified to explain as much of the observed variance as possible. Two factors, *communication* and *teaching*, presented different aspects of parents' opinions by exploring their answers to five questions, explaining 72% of the variability in the scores. The factor *teaching* consisted of two variables that measured how parents evaluated the quality of teaching and assessment their child was receiving at school. The factor *communication* consisted of three variables measuring the ease of parents' communication with supervisory teachers, other teachers and school leaders. Oblique factor rotation was used because it is unlikely that the two factors were unrelated, which is a prerequisite for using orthogonal rotation (Field, 2013). The third outcome variable was a response to a direct question to the parent group about their general satisfaction or dissatisfaction with their child's school.

Procedure

The online survey software Question Pro was used for data collection. The data was collected in the spring of 2011, and parents were sent invitations to participate via e-mail.

The data was analysed with SPSS 24. A multiple regression analysis was performed to provide information on the effect of the explanatory variables on the outcome variables (Gujarati & Porter, 2009).

The regression analysis on parents' satisfaction with school was performed on the two outcome variables produced by the factor analysis, *teaching* and *communication*, and on the question about *parents' satisfaction with school*. There was no indication of collinearity, with the highest variance inflation factor = 1.093, and tolerance was above .9 for all variables. The variables were deemed suitable for regression following guidelines in Field (2013).

Three regression models were tested for each of the outcome variables. Model 1 included four variables regarding student background: gender, grade in school, whether the child lived in a single-mother household and whether the parent answering the survey had only basic education. In Model 2, two variables about parents' experience were added: whether the parents participated in social activities at school and whether they felt that they had any influence on school decisions and the school's vision of the future. In Model 3, two variables regarding the child's needs and well-being were added: whether the child complained about bullying at school and whether the child received sufficient support at school if parents said that special support was necessary.

Factors that influence parents' opinions

At first glance, the data portrayed parents as a rather homogenous group who were in a happy relationship, and satisfied, with the schools their children attended (see Figure 1). About 52% of parents reported that they were totally or very satisfied with the school; 35% were rather satisfied and 7% were unsatisfied.

As previously mentioned, the factor analysis brought forth two factors, *teaching* and *communication*, which showed different aspects of parents' contentedness with school. Variables predicting these factors, as well as the general satisfaction, indicated differences amongst parents and their opinions in several ways. Parents' marital status and education explained some of the variability in parents' opinions. Being active in attending school events and having an opportunity to influence the school were also important. More influential, though, were variables concerning the children,

Table 2. Overview of variables used in the analysis (n = 2129).

	Categories	Mean	SD	Min.	Max.
Outcome variables					
Satisfaction: Parents' satisfaction with their child's school (one question)	1 = totally dissatisfied 2 = very dissatisfied 3 = rather dissatisfied 4 = neutral 5 = rather satisfied 6 = very satisfied 7 = totally satisfied	5.39	1.09	1	7
Communication: How easy or difficult it is for parents to communicate with supervisory teachers, other teachers or school leaders	Score from factor analysis	0.00	1.00	−4.26	1.21
Teaching: How parents evaluate the quality of teaching and assessment their child is receiving at school (a factor of two questions computed)	Score from factor analysis	0.00	1.00	−4.15	1.69
Explanatory variables					
Child's grade level in school	1 = 1st – 4th grade 2 = 5th – 7th grade 3 = 8th – 10th grade	1.95	0.82	1	3
Child's gender	0 = boy 1 = girl	0.49	0.50		
Single-mother household	0 = not a single mother 1 = single mother	0.13	0.34	0	1
Basic education	0 = more than basic education 1 = basic education	0.08	0.27	0	1
Parents' participation in social activities in school	1 = totally disagree 2 = very much disagree 3 = rather disagree 4 = neutral 5 = rather agree 6 = very much agree 7 = totally agree	4.80	1.45	1	7
Influence in school decisions and vision (average of two questions)	1 = totally disagree 2 = very much disagree 3 = rather disagree 4 = neutral 5 = rather agree 6 = very much agree 7 = totally agree	4.00	1.33	1	7
Child complains about bullying in school	1 = often every day, 2 = almost every day, 3 = 2–4 times a week, 4 = once a week, 5 = 2–3 times a month, 6 = seldom, 7 = never	6.43	1.04	1	7
Getting support because of special needs or not needing it	1 = not getting support	0.15	0.35	0	1

such as grade level in school (age), complaints of bullying, and inadequate support because of special needs. As shown in Table 3, multiple regression models were used to examine how these variables influenced the three outcome variables of *satisfaction, teaching* and *communication*.

The results in Table 3 show that the same variables predicted parents' general satisfaction with school and their opinions of the quality of teaching and assessment, while the variables that predicted ease of communication were somewhat different.

Three background variables were significant predictors in Model 1 when looking at parents' satisfaction and quality of teaching. When their children became older, parents grew less satisfied with the school, with parents of boys less content than parents of girls, and single mothers less satisfied than other parents. These variables explained a small but significant part of the variability in general satisfaction (1.7%) and quality of teaching (2.3%).

When two variables concerning parents' experience were added to create Model 2, the three previous variables still made a significant contribution to the regression model. Frequent participation in social events and activities at school had no significant effect on parents' general satisfaction, or on how they evaluated the quality of teaching. On the other hand, the feeling of having an influence on the school's decisions and future vision predicted parents' general satisfaction. Model 2 explained 11% of the variability in parents' answers about general satisfaction. The variables in Model 2 had a similar but stronger explanatory power on parents' opinions of the quality of teaching (R^2_{adj} 12.6%).

Two additional variables concerning the child's well-being and support were added for Model 3, increasing the R^2 and adding 10.3% to the explanatory power of the regression model of parents' satisfaction with school. The two new variables also influenced the contribution of the variables in previous models. In Model 3, it remained significant that parents were less satisfied with school when their child became older, but the child's gender and living in a single-mother household were no longer significant. Parents' education levels

Table 3. Regression analysis on scores of outcome variables.

	Parents' satisfaction with their child's school in general				Parents' opinion of the quality of teaching and assessment				Parents' opinion on how easy it is to communicate with school personnel			
	b	SE	β	Sig.	b	SE	β	Sig.	b	SE	β	Sig.
Model 1												
Constant	5.561	0.072		<.001	0.218	0.066		.001	−0.031	0.066		.638
Grade level (age)	−0.121	0.032	−0.090	<.001	−0.151	0.029	−0.122	<.001	−0.004	0.029	−0.003	.903
Child's gender	0.164	0.052	0.076	.001	0.162	0.047	0.081	.001	0.102	0.048	0.051	.033
Single mother	−0.220	0.078	−0.067	.005	−0.157	0.071	−0.052	.027	−0.247	0.071	−0.083	.001
Basic education	0.130	0.099	0.031	.192	0.164	0.091	0.042	.073	0.095	0.092	0.025	.303
Percentage of variance explained (adj. R^2)		0.017				0.023				0.007		
Model 2												
Constant	4.583	0.131		<.001	−0.823	0.119		<.001	−1.237	0.120		<.001
Grade level (age)	−0.107	0.030	−0.079	<.001	−0.132	0.028	−0.107	<.001	0.021	0.028	0.017	.449
Child's gender	0.125	0.049	0.057	.011	0.123	0.045	0.061	.006	0.061	0.045	0.030	.178
Single mother	−0.211	0.074	−0.065	.004	−0.141	0.067	−0.047	.036	−0.223	0.068	−0.075	.001
Basic education	0.110	0.095	0.026	.246	0.155	0.087	0.040	.075	0.107	0.087	0.028	.221
Participation in social activities	−0.007	0.018	−0.009	.694	0.014	0.016	0.020	.377	0.054	0.016	0.077	.001
Influence in school decisions and vision	0.252	0.019	0.308	<.001	0.240	0.017	0.319	<.001	0.230	0.017	0.306	<.001
Percentage of variance explained (adj. R^2)		0.110				0.126				0.111		
R^2 change		0.094				0.103				0.104		
Sig. F change		<.001				<.001				<.001		
Model 3												
Constant	2.191	0.200		<.001	−3.167	0.180		<.001	−2.718	0.190		<.001
Grade level (age)	−0.114	0.029	−0.085	<.001	−0.128	0.026	−0.103	<.001	0.023	0.027	0.018	.406
Child's gender	0.063	0.047	0.029	.178	0.050	0.042	0.025	.227	0.016	0.044	0.008	.713
Single mother	−0.069	0.070	−0.021	.326	−0.004	0.063	−0.001	.953	−0.137	0.066	−0.046	.039
Basic education	0.180	0.090	0.043	.045	0.221	0.081	0.057	.006	0.149	0.085	0.039	.080
Participation in social activities	−0.017	0.016	−0.022	.308	0.007	0.015	0.009	.651	0.049	0.016	0.070	.002
Influence in school decisions and vision	0.216	0.018	0.264	<.001	0.205	0.016	0.272	<.001	0.208	0.017	0.276	<.001
Getting support because of special needs if needed	−0.637	0.069	−0.205	<.001	−0.838	0.062	−0.293	<.001	−0.510	0.065	−0.179	<.001
Child complains about bullying in school	0.222	0.022	0.217	<.001	0.151	0.020	0.160	<.001	0.101	0.021	0.108	<.001
Percentage of variance explained (adj. R^2)		0.213				0.251				0.159		
R^2 change		0.103				0.126				0.050		
Sig. F change		<.001				<.001				<.001		

contributed significantly: parents with more than compulsory education were less content compared to those with less education. The feeling of having an influence was still significant. The two new variables in Model 3 were important: if children complained of bullying, then parents became less satisfied; if parents felt that their child was getting inadequate support because of special needs, their satisfaction with school was substantially lowered. After adding these variables to Model 3, the regression explained 21.3% of the variability in parents' answers to the question of general satisfaction.

The exact same variables that were significant in the regression model on teaching and in parents' estimations of the quality of teaching and assessment were significant in the regression on general satisfaction. The explanatory factor, however, was even stronger for all three models in the regression on teaching, and Model 3 explained 25.1% of the variability of parents' opinions.

The analysis of how easy or difficult it was for parents to communicate with school personnel highlighted influences of the background variables that differed from their influences in the previous regressions. In Model 1, grade level (child age) was not significant; parents of boys had more difficulties with communication than did parents of girls; and single mothers were more likely to experience problems with communication compared to other parents. The explanatory power was significant but small.

Only one of the variables from Model 1 was still significant in Model 2: being a single mother made communication more difficult. Parents that frequently participated in social events and activities at school reported more positive communication. The feeling of having an influence on school decisions and the school's future vision had an effect on parents' opinions about communication. Model 2 explained 11.1% of the variability of parents' ease in communicating with school personnel.

In Model 3, the two variables that were added concerning the child's well-being and support changed the significance of the variables in previous models. In Model 3, it was still significant that single mothers experienced more difficulties in communicating with school compared to other parents, but the other background variables were not significant. The feeling of having an influence at school and actively participating in social events was still significant for communication. The two new variables in Model 3 were important. If a child complained of bullying, or if parents felt that the child was getting inadequate support because of special needs, their communication with school personnel became more difficult. Adding these two variables in Model 3 increased the explanatory power to 15.9%.

To sum up these findings, the regression analysis revealed different aspects of parent satisfaction with

their child's school. Model 1 draws attention to important background variables: child's grade level, gender, single-mother household and parent education. The variability explained by the model was small, and though the variables are outside of the school's control, it can control how the school personnel react toward parents and children belonging to different groups.

Model 2 revealed that the feeling of being able to influence school decisions and future vision gave parents confidence in the school and enhanced their general satisfaction, satisfaction with teaching, and communication with school personnel. On the other hand, the traditional means of parent participation by attending social events did not have the expected positive influence on parents' opinions. It was not significant in regard to parents' general satisfaction and their evaluation of the quality of teaching. It was, however, significant in regard to communication: participating in social activities at the school made communication with school personnel easier.

In Model 3, it became clear that the most influential variables for parents' opinions concerned the child's well-being and school's responsiveness if the child needed special support. If children frequently complained about bullying, the consequence was parental dissatisfaction in general, and with communication and teaching. Furthermore, the analysis revealed the urgency to react when parents state that their child needs special support at school, since that variable was very influential for parents' satisfaction in general, and with teaching and communication.

The analysis draws special attention to how disadvantaged single mothers are when approaching school compared to others in the parent group. The findings showed differences in educational level: 12.8% of single mothers only had compulsory education, whereas only 7% of other parents were in that situation. The likelihood of a child receiving inadequate support in school was double for single mothers compared to other parents: 25.8% reported that their children were not getting the necessary support, while only 12.8% of other parents experienced the same problem. Single mothers' general satisfaction with school was lower than that of other parents, and they experienced difficulties in communication more frequently than did other parents. These findings clearly indicate that social factors influence the support services children get at school; home–school relations and communication; and parents' satisfaction with school in general.

Discussion

Parental satisfaction with their children's school varied, even though it was in most cases very high. More than half of the parent group was totally or very satisfied, and an additional 35% were rather satisfied, as shown in Figure 1. When results are so positive at first glance, it is easy to overlook that 7% of the parents were dissatisfied and another 7% said that they were neutral, and thereby not willing to say that they were satisfied. Even though an acceptable rate of dissatisfaction is debatable, it is important to be aware of the groups of parents that are more prone to be dissatisfied than others, especially since these parents share some common traits.

Responsiveness to children's needs

The results show that the most important aspects influencing parents' satisfaction or dissatisfaction with school relate to their children's well-being and development. When children complain about being bullied, or when parents are disappointed because the school is not responsive to their children's need for special support, they experience a loss of needed and

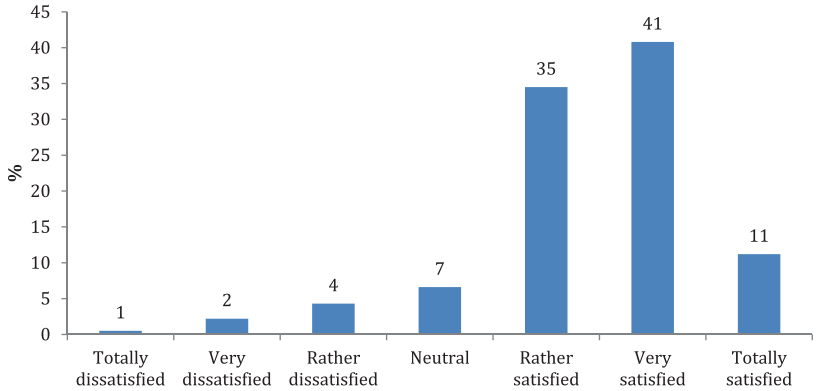

Figure 1. Percentage of parents' answers to a question about their general satisfaction or dissatisfaction with their child´s school (n = 2113).

desired cooperation that manifests in disappointment and dissatisfaction. The importance of cooperation and coherent effort focusing on children's learning and maturation is accentuated by the findings, which show that parents' dissatisfaction increases as children get older, and especially between 4th and 5th grade (Jónsdóttir & Björnsdóttir, 2012). An explanation for this can be related to a systemic change at that point in many of the compulsory schools in Iceland: students often get new teachers, a few more subjects, and two to three more lessons per week at this time. These changes may be particularly challenging for students in need of special support, which is manifested in findings showing that parents of children in need of special support are more dissatisfied compared to those of other parents. The need for special support also increases as students get older, and the difference in the percentage of students that parents consider to have learning or behavioural difficulties is quite striking. For the youngest students, 19% of the parents claimed that this was the case, as opposed to 28% of the parents of teenagers (Jónsdóttir & Björnsdóttir, 2012).

The importance of influence

The feeling of being able to influence the school's decisions and future vision is important for parents. Those who feel that they are able to influence the school in this way are generally more satisfied with the school, and especially with the teaching, and this feeling also makes communication with school personnel easier. This is in line with findings from other studies that failing to include parents in important decisions in school settings indicates that parents are not treated as equals (Bæck, 2009). Moreover, teachers' opinions of parents are often ambivalent; they see parents either as a support or a barrier to successful teaching (Rasmussen, 2004). Thus, school professionals need to discuss and clarify the attitudes and values they bring into the relationship with students' families.

On the other hand, the findings of this study show that traditional methods of parental involvement (i.e. attending social events) increase neither general parental satisfaction nor satisfaction with teaching specifically, but does have a positive influence on communication between parents and school personnel. Encouragement and support for parents is more important than tutelage and guidelines, according to Jeynes' (2011b) conclusion on how schools can foster parental involvement, and the findings here certainly point in the same direction. The relationship between parents and school personnel, with supervisory teachers as key figures, can be sensitive and somewhat personal, but must be cultivated with care.

Equity for all but single mothers

International research has shown that parental participation in school-related activities contributes to children's success at school (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003; Hattie, 2009, 2012; Jeynes, 2005, 2011a). Parents experience pressure to participate because it is in their children's best interest (Böök & Perälä-Littunen, 2015). The present study echoes these findings: both parents and school professionals believe that parental support is important to the academic achievement of children (see also Jónsdóttir & Björnsdóttir, 2012). However, findings from the present study also indicate that parents are presented with varying opportunities to become involved, to have influence in school and to get special support if they feel that their child needs it. Research shows that parents with more formal education are more likely to participate in home–school cooperation, and more likely to acknowledge the importance of parental support in education (Bæck, 2009). Furthermore, researchers have claimed that schools are more likely to match middle-class parents' values and involvement styles than those of the working class (Bæck, 2005; Lareau, 2000). Findings from the present study indicate that this may affect the extent to which parents' voices are heard when arguing for their children's needs for special support in school. Even though parental assessment of whether their child needs special support in school is not the basis for schools' decisions to provide such support, parents' confidence in speaking on behalf of their child, in a way that the schools consider to be reliable and persuasive, may play a role in the decision. Therefore, it is worrying that single mothers are overrepresented in the group of parents who view their children as in need of special support, but not getting any. The educational level among single mothers is lower compared to the other parent groups in this study, and the findings indicate that parental background influences aspects such as receiving special support in school. When parents of children with learning or behavioural difficulties feel that their needs are not met in school, their satisfaction is influenced in a negative way. On the other hand, if parents feel that the special needs of their child are being met, they tend to be more satisfied and find communication easier compared to parents who have children with no disabilities (Jónsdóttir & Björnsdóttir, 2012). The same mechanism was demonstrated by Bæck (2007).

The present findings also indicate that it is somewhat harder for schools to please more educated parents. Single mothers feel powerless compared to other parents, but are also more willing than others to participate in social activities at school. Perhaps school personnel tend to listen more carefully when *two* parents speak on behalf of a child, or when those with more education voice concerns. If this is the reality, intended or not, there is urgent need to open a discussion in Icelandic schools about equity,

social status, and the necessity of distributing quality teaching and 'goods', such as special support, in a fair way to students. Keeping in mind that the majority of teachers in Icelandic compulsory schools are women, just like the single mothers, these findings also call for critical discussions about respect, women's status, and power structures within the school system.

It is a common belief that Iceland is a society of educational equity. The present findings concerning different levels of access to special support, the influence of parents' educational level, and the importance of feeling that the school appreciates parents' opinions all contest the idea of equity as a major value in the relationship between schools and student families. One of the major issues to address is probably the illusion of equity, since it is not necessarily a leading value in practice. It is necessary to acknowledge that the social status, gender, educational level and cultural values of parents do, indeed, have an impact on the rationale and practice of parental involvement in Icelandic schools, just as in schools in other countries (Bæck, 2009, 2010; Pepe & Addimando, 2014).

Concluding remarks

Parents value their children's well-being in school as much as their achievements, and even though media discussions often seem to suggest otherwise, parents will sometimes value well-being even more (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003). However, policy documents, such as a white paper released by the Icelandic Ministry of Culture and Education (Mennta- og menningarmálaráðuneytið, 2014), show that school authorities do not necessarily seem to be very aware of parents' priorities, or sufficiently respect parents' opinions. Communal leaders and school personnel are under pressure from international comparisons such as PISA, and the position is often ambivalent on the local level, as can be seen in policy documents (Reykjavíkurborg, 2015).

Emphasis on equity and quality in educational systems has been thoroughly discussed by Sahlberg (2014), who questioned whether this emphasis should be called Nordic, fearing that so-called Nordic values of equality could be changing. The findings from the present study in some respects sustain this fear. In Iceland, the blame cannot be put on free school choice, like in Sweden (Östh et al., 2013), but at the same time many other influences of GERM can be traced within the Icelandic compulsory school system, such as stronger measures of control over schools. The situation is difficult: the Nordic point of view on education, which emphasizes quality and equity, is visible in official policy documents, but the actions of politicians in charge of the Ministry of Education in Iceland point in a somewhat different direction. The experiences of parents also show that treating all children and all parents equally does not seem to be of prime concern in school practice. The lack of school funding or access to professional expertise cannot excuse this. The illusion of the Icelandic educational system as upholding the values of equity and quality may be one of the reasons for the downplaying of equity in schools' practice, which in turn is displayed in parents' dissatisfaction. It is likely that many teachers and school leaders would reconsider how they act in home–school relationships and reform their decisions and daily practices if the discussion about home–school relations were informed by the findings from the present study and from similar studies in other national contexts. Quality and equity are often promoted as values that are generally emphasized in the Nordic countries (Sahlberg, 2014), but findings from the present study signal the importance of bringing these values forth when working with home–school relations and including them in discussions about school development, where school professionals, parents and students should all have a respected voice. The image of equity in Icelandic schools is disputable. If the aim is joint responsibility for student welfare and education, parental involvement must be discussed and encouraged in many different ways.

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Appendix E

Abstract from Óskarsdóttir, G. G. (2014). *Starfshættir í grunnskólum við upphaf 21. aldar*. Reykjavík: Háskólaútgáfan.

ABSTRACT

The principal objective of the research project *Teaching and learning in Icelandic compulsory schools* (students aged 6 to 15) was to provide an overview of school practices at the beginning of the 21st century, focusing on the trend towards individualised learning.

Three main research questions were asked to achieve this objective:

- *What are teaching and learning practices like in Icelandic compulsory schools at the beginning of the 21st century? That is, how do they reflect attitudes, the learning environment, internal structures, teaching methods, students' activities and responsibilities, and parental involvement?*
- *How have school practitioners adapted teaching and learning to social changes? That is, how have the schools that originated in the industrial age changed and adapted to the information, knowledge or creative society?*
- *How are the policies of state and local authorities reflected in school practices, and to what extent have predictions made in recent decades regarding school development materialised?*

The focus on individualised learning has been prominent in national curricula and other official policy documents in recent decades in Iceland, although this concept has been defined in a number of ways using a variety of different terms. The definition used in this book focuses on the following issues: different tasks for students depending on their ability and interests; co-operation of students; student autonomy, choice and responsibility for their learning; and individual learning plans prepared by students in consultation with teachers and parents, based on information on their progress of learning. The use of information technology is also included. The definition implies a primary focus on adapting teaching and learning to different individuals. The term also relies on concepts such as student empowerment and student voices. Learning is viewed as a social process based on student co-operation, as well as personal experience, emphasising democratic working methods. Individualised learning is therefore used in this book as an umbrella term for a variety of ideas rooted in different theoretical perspectives.

The research project was organised around a framework based on an evaluation tool for schools' progress towards individualised learning, published by the Reykjavík Department of Education in 2005. The evaluation tool consists of six strands. It was intended to assess the trend away from the traditional practices in schools throughout most of the 20th century and toward the model visualised by its authors as the school of the 21st century, with the focus on individualised learning and student co-operation. The model consists of the following six strands:

- Attitudes: views of students, teachers, administrators and parents towards teaching and learning
- Physical learning environment: buildings, classrooms and general equipment
- Internal structures: school-based planning and management
- Teachers: their roles and classroom practices
- Students: their tasks, assignments and learning
- Parents and community: parental involvement and school community relations

Method

A team of almost 50 researchers and graduate students participated in the project. The team included 20 faculty members, and doctoral candidates and master's level students from the School of Education at the University of Iceland and the Faculty of Education at the University of Akureyri, and employees from the participating municipalities and two business enterprises. The study was conducted in 20 schools in collaboration with their staff, students and parents. This co-operation broadened the scope of the study.

School staff responded to a questionnaire survey presented in four stages. An on-site survey was conducted for students in grades 7–10, and all parents were surveyed as well. Classroom observations were conducted

in grades 1–10, and students, teachers and school administrators were interviewed. Various relevant documents were analysed, such as school curricula and plans of school buildings. The data collection took place in the period 2009 to 2011. A database of significant size is now available, which can be analysed still further and will be made available to future researchers.

Teaching and learning: main findings

The response to the first research question, regarding teaching and learning practices in Icelandic schools at the start of the 21st century, in brief, was as follows: School practices were shaped by attitudes which were generally consistent with the policies of the education authorities. The physical learning environment most commonly remained in the form of traditional classrooms, although there were open spaces in various forms, particularly in the most recently constructed buildings. Computer equipment was limited, and the same was true of the use of information technology in class, although information technology was widely used by teachers in relation to lesson planning, communication with parents and in administration. Staff were generally satisfied with governance and morale at work; professional leadership was characterised by encouragement to teachers regarding improvements, but employees did call for increased pedagogical leadership. The most common lesson arrangement was direct instruction, followed up by a variety of individual assignments using workbooks, but teachers' interest in an increased variety of methods and individualised learning was apparent. The attitudes of students in grades 7–10 to teaching and learning, as well as relations within the school, were generally positive. However, students' interest in their studies and influence on their learning was limited, and examples of democratic collaboration were scarce. Relations with parents took the form of regular parent interviews and electronic communications, but direct parental involvement in school activities was limited. Relations between schools and their near communities, although extensive, were not fully focussed.

Future trends in teaching and learning: main results

The response to the second research question, regarding the adaptation of teaching and learning to the information and knowledge society was, in brief, as follows: There were widespread signs of development away from the school traditions of the industrial society, although school work appeared to be some distance from achieving the highest rating of the evaluation tool used in the study. A positive attitude to the pedagogical role of schools, diverse teaching methods and individualised learning, together with an emphasis on parental involvement, indicate a certain trend. The learning environment in the most recent school buildings attained the highest rating of the evaluation tool, which is perhaps an indication of things to come. Teaching methods in schools using team teaching set themselves apart in many ways: learning was more individualised than in other schools; student collaboration was more widespread; and developmental work was more extensive. Student influence on teaching and learning appeared to be at the tool's lowest rating level.

Consistency between school practices and policymaking or predictions: main results

The third research question asked how the policies of state and local authorities were reflected in daily school practices, and to what extent predictions from recent decades of the future state of compulsory education had materialised? The response to this question, in brief, was as follows: Various aspects of the external framework of schools were in many respects consistent with statutory law, the policies of the municipalities selected as examples, and predictions. This refers to single-session school days, additional school hours, the provision of school meals, and the implementation of compulsory schooling for six-year-olds. The main exceptions to schools' adherence to statutory law and polices, and their meeting of predictions, involved the use of information technology, parental participation in school work, and teaching methods, including students' individualised learning, autonomy and influence on their learning process. It is difficult to evaluate whether diversity of working practices and organisation in schools have "increased significantly", as predicted, or whether this "increase" has applied more to democratic practices. However, a number of teachers expressed an interest in developing teaching methods in the direction of greater individualisation, meaning that this policy clearly enjoys support.

Application of the results

The turn of a millennium is a natural milestone at which to pause to reflect on the past and look ahead to the future. Students who are attending school at the beginning of the 21st century will live well into the century and it is therefore appropriate for us to ask ourselves what will prove most useful to them in their future lives and what kinds of skills and qualifications should they aspire to?

The contributing authors of this book hope that the

main findings of the study of teaching and learning in Icelandic compulsory schools will prove useful in policy-making for school authorities at both the state and local level. Most important, however, is that schools, whether participants in the study or not, make use of the results, draw conclusions and plan towards improving.

The authors also hope that the results will encourage other researchers to conduct still further studies of school practices at the compulsory level, both on the basis of the data collected in the course of this study and through further collection of data, which would greatly support educational development.

KEYWORDS: individualised learning, classroom practices, learning environment, school management, parental involvement