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Parental school involvement in elementary schools on St. Maarten

Parents' perceptions on parental involvement, positive parenting, social capital and social control

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ABSTRACT: The government of St. Maarten implemented the Active Parenting program (AP) to make parents more involved at school. Parental involvement plays an important role in student success. Not only the actual involvement but also three other factors are important: a. positive parenting, b. social capital (parents' knowledge and skills to become involved) and c. social control (consensus about appropriate behavior between several settings in which a child grows up). In this study parents' perceptions on parental involvement and these three factors has been explored by using questionnaires (N=71) and semi-structured interviews (N=6), to create a clearer view of to what extent the AP program addresses to the need to increase parental involvement. The results indicate that parents did not feel much social support for parental school involvement and positive parenting. Present barriers limited parents to become involved and old habits prevented new parenting behavior. Parents felt that they had learned more skills in AP to become involved. It was not sure whether parents and teachers had the same idea about appropriate behavior of children (social control). A recommendation for better school related outcomes of children is to increase the social support in the direct environment of parents by making others aware of the importance and benefits of involvement and positive parenting. A general idea about what is important in education and parenting may be desirable to enhance social support and social consensus.

Key Words: parental school involvement, positive parenting, social capital, social control, St. Maarten.

Introduction

There has been an emerging consensus that the quality of relations between schools and families plays an important role in student success. Research shows that parental school involvement has a positive influence on school-related outcomes for children. Parental involvement is correlated with higher academic achievement, better student attendance and more positive student and parent attitudes toward education. (Griffith, 1998; Grolnick & Slowiaznek, 1994; Sui-Chu & Willms, 1996). The definition of parental school involvement consists most often the following activities: volunteering at school, communicating with teachers and other school personnel, assisting in academic school activities at home and attending school events, meetings of parent-teacher associations and parent-teacher conferences (Hill & Taylor, 2004). This positive influence of parental school involvement depends on three factors: parenting style, social capital (parents' skills and knowledge to get involved), and social control (consensus about appropriate behavior between several settings in which a child grows up) (Griffith, 1998; Grolnick & Slowiaznek, 1994; Steinberg, Lamborn, Dornbusch, & Darling, 1992).

In 2002 a new educational system, the *Foundation Based Education* (FBE) has been introduced on the island of St. Maarten. This introduction was on account of several factors, including inefficiency of the educational system then and the high youth unemployment rate which led to youth seeking for alternative, less positive ways of organising income. The original educational system, based on the educational system of the Netherlands, needed also to be replaced by a system more adapted to the Antillean/St. Maarten context (Ministerie van Onderwijs en Cultuur, 2002).

In the society on St. Maarten are several risk factors present that children can encounter in their education. The three risk factors most relevant for this study will be discussed. First of all, the Antillean culture is based on order and respect. This is reflected in the way parents educate their children. Education is often associated with a lot of discipline and respect for older and authority. Sometimes parents use corporal punishment and verbal violence in their way of educating (Vedder, 1995). This could lead to unfavourable outcomes in children. Parental corporal punishment is associated with children's higher level of aggression and lower levels of moral internationalization and mental health (Gershoff-Thompson, 2002). Another adverse factor is that only 35 percent of the youth lives with both parents. Many children grow up in a single parent family or are raised by other family members, such as aunts and grandmothers. This could be partially explained by the high rate of teenage pregnancies (Directie Jeugd en Jongeren Ontwikkeling, 2003). Most teenage mothers are not capable to take care of their child and the father is often not present. Early childbearing and growing up in a single parent family could also

lead to less positive developmental outcomes in children, such as less positive school outcomes, problems in activity levels and controlling of behavior (Bank, Forgatch, Patterson, & Fetrow 1995; Blum, Beuhring, Shew, Bearinger, Sieving, & Resnick, 2000; Geronimus, Korenman, & Hillemeiren, 1994). Finally, many different ethnic minority groups are living together on St. Maarten. People from neighboring islands come to St. Maarten to find work and try to create a better future. These people are often less educated, which is associated with a lower socioeconomic status (SES). Parents with low SES are less involved in their children's schooling, because of lack of time or knowledge (Eccles & Harold, 1996; Griffith, 1998).

The aim of the recent introduction of the FBE was to ensure optimal functioning in the Antillean society for every child, despite of the existing risk factors. An important conclusion of an evaluation of the FBE was that good functioning in the FBE can be established only when parents are involved in their children's schooling. Unfortunately, the level of parental involvement in schooling was low (Poyck & Van 't Rood, 2006). The Department for Educational Research, Policy and Innovations (DERPI) introduced in 2004 an Active Parenting variant, *Active Parenting Now (AP)*, with the purpose of increasing the parental involvement rate on the island and to get optimal outcomes as result of the introduction of FBE (Benschop, 2009). Active Parenting can be described as a video-based parental involvement program that aims at creating a positive parenting style. The goal of the program is to create active involvement of parents in their children's life and to prepare children to survive and thrive in the kind of society in which they live. Active Parenting responds to the need of creating a change in attitude, self-efficacy and the intention of actual change in parenting style (Popkin, 2005).

DERPI requested an analysis of the state of affairs with regard to parental involvement in elementary schools on St. Maarten. To contribute this request, the research goal was to explore whether AP can help to increase parental involvement. This has been done by creating a clearer view of parents' perception on parental involvement, positive parenting, social capital and social control. Observation of actual behavior was not possible therefore parents' perception has been explored. If parents do not have a positive view about these factors after AP, the program does not meet the original reason for implementation and another way to increase parental involvement need to be sought. Parents' perception on parental involvement and positive parenting is discussed by means of the ASE-model, which is a model of behavioral change which can be used to explain behavior. By using this model, an analysis of determinants among the parents will be conducted. The ASE-model is described first, then parents' perception on parental involvement, positive parenting and last social capital and social control.

The ASE-model

According to the theory of planned behavior (TPB) behavior can be predicted through behavioral intention (Fishbein & Yzer, 2003). Behavior is determined by the intention to act in a certain way and the perception whether it is beneficial and under control of the people (Dumas, Nissley-Tsiopinis & Moreland, 2007). The ASE-model, a widely used model for determinants analysis in the Netherlands, uses the TPB but also takes external factors into account and will therefore be used in this study. The ASE-model shows that behavioral determinants; attitude, social influence and personal effectiveness, determine behavioral intention. The model also includes barriers and skills, which may have an influence on actual behavior after behavioral intention is present (see figure 1).

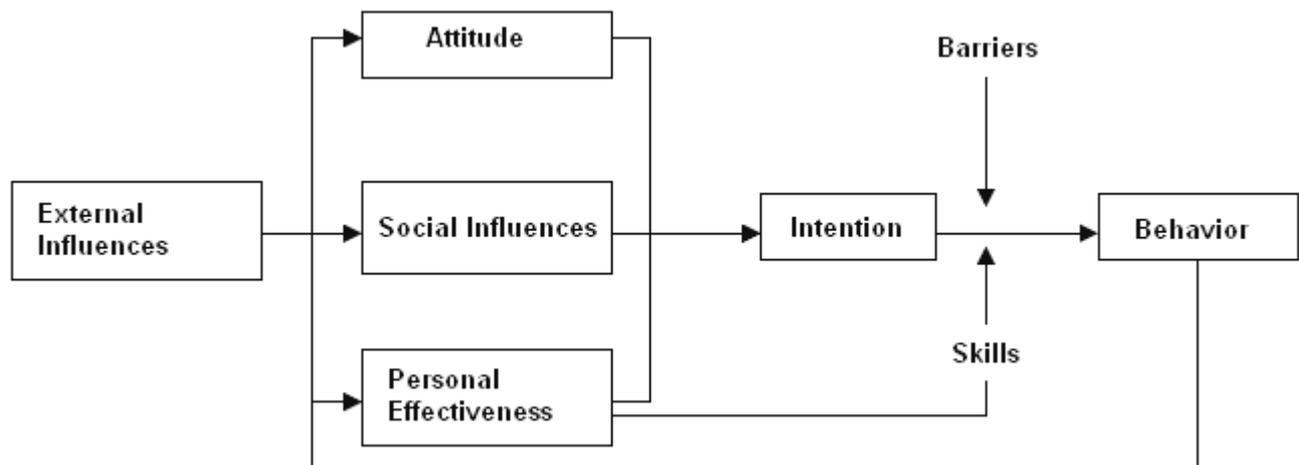


Fig. 1 ASE-model (de Vries, Dijkstra, & Kuhlman, 1988; Kok, De Vries, Mudde, & Stretcher, 1991).

The first behavioral determinant is the person's attitude toward performing the behavior, which is based upon one's belief about the positive and negative consequences of performing that behavior. When people acknowledge that there are more benefits than disadvantages attached to the behavior they will create a positive attitude toward it. Awareness of the importance of the behavior and positive (long term) outcomes are positively related to a positive perception on the behavior. Previous experiences, prejudices and habits can also influence the attitude (Ajzen, 2001; Eccles, J. S., & Harold, 1993).

The next determinant is social influence. This includes the normative beliefs, social support, social pressure and modelling. The perceived expectation implies one's expectation of others' reaction in his or her environment about that certain behavior, in relation to the prevailing belief in the community. For example, less social support affects the openness of gay men about their sexuality (Vincke, 1994). The social influence is negatively related to the degree of motivation to comply. Social support and social pressure include the perception on the behavior

of those with whom the individual interacts most closely. When people feel direct support of close ones, for example explicit request to perform behavior, they will be more likely to perform it (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). Social pressure implies a negative influence on performing the behavior. Research showed that role models and modelling are important ways in which neighborhoods influence behavior (Brooks-Gunn, Duncan, Klebanov, & Sealander, 1993).

The last behavioral determinant is personal effectiveness which involves the person's expectation that she or he can perform the behavior; has the opportunity and ability to do it. This expectation has three dimensions (Bandura, 1977). The first is magnitude, which is a person's estimating of the difficulty of the behavior. Research showed that individuals with a high personal effectiveness magnitude perceive themselves able to accomplish more difficult tasks on the computer than those with lower personal effectiveness. Individuals with lower personal effectiveness magnitude judge themselves to need more assistance (Compeau & Higgins, 1995). Second is generalizability, the extent to which one's judgement of personal effectiveness is limited to a particular domain. For example, high estimating personal effectiveness of resistance of drug use can differ for different kind of drugs (Hays & Ellickson, 1990). The last one is strength. This refers to parents' confidence in their selves to perform the behavior, do they think that they have the possibility and do they think they are able to do it (Brug, Schaalma, Kok, Meertens, & Van der Molen, 2003).

As the model shows, there are external factors that influence the intention indirectly through attitude, social influence and personal effectiveness. External factors are personal characteristics, sociodemographic and structural factors, such as SES, ethnicity and cultural background (Eccles & Harold, 1996). Eventually the three determinants determine the intention of the behavior, which may develop to actual behavior. However the behavioral intention can be limited by barriers, environmental constraints. On the other hand skills can progress the development from the behavioral intention to actual behavior.

The ASE-model has been used to explore whether parents had positive perceptions on performing parental involvement and positive parenting after participating in AP. By means of the ASE-model has been explored whether the behavioral intention was present. When the intention has not been formed, the model suggest that there are three primary determinants of intention which need to be changed to ensure parents' positive perception on performing parental school involvement or positive parenting. If there was behavioral intention but no actual behavior, barriers which limit the positive perception on performing behavior should be found. This information could be used to create recommendations for DERPI to increase the parental school involvement or to adapt AP to certain needs in the society.

Behavioral intention, barriers and actual parental school involvement

The first aim of this study was to create an image of parents' perception on parental school involvement. The need of parental school involvement, which includes volunteering at school, communication with school, assisting in academic school activities at home, attending school events, PTA's and parent-teacher conferences, was an important conclusion of an evaluation of the FBE (Hill & Taylor, 2004; Ministerie van Onderwijs en Cultuur, 2002). To increase this, the program of AP has been introduced. After participation in AP parents should be more involved in their children's schooling. Although there was no data available of parental involvement after implementation of AP, it was not expected that all parents would have a positive perception on actual parental involvement. The ASE-model has been used to create an image about parents' perception on actual involvement. When parents do not have a positive perception it can be explored whether it is a lack of intentional behavior, lack of skills or presence of barriers. (Fishbein & Yzer, 2003).

The behavioral intention is determined by attitude, social influence en personal effectiveness. On St. Maarten it was expected that not all parents had a positive attitude about parental school involvement because of several factors. First of all, because of bad experiences with school. Especially parents with a low educational level often have less positive school experiences and do not see education as a key to future opportunity. They do not see the positive long term outcomes of school involvement. They often feel uncomfortable, if not resentful, interacting with their children's teacher (Colbert, 1991; Hill & Taylor, 2004). It was expected that some parents do not see the importance of parental school involvement because of difference in parental role construction. Especially on St. Maarten, where people with many different cultural backgrounds live together, it could be expected that some parents have a different role construction where parental school involvement, as described in this study, does not fit in. (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). When parents do not see the importance of parental involvement, they will feel that there are more disadvantages (less spare time) than benefits which is negatively related with a positive attitude (Georgiou & Tourva, 2007).

The next behavioral determinant is social influence. It was expected that most parents feel positive social influence for parental school involvement. Since the implementation of the FBE parental school involvement has been encouraged by the government. It would be a positive social influence when schools encourage and invite parents to become involved. Research showed that when parents experience support like an invitation they feel more appreciated and meaningful and are more likely to become involved (Hoover-Dempsey, Battiato, Walker, Reed, DeJong & Jones, 2001). When schools are really encouraging parents it will be plausible that

more parents are getting involved. This means that the other, uninvolved parents would have more and more participating parents in their direct environment so it would be more likely that they model the behavior and get involved.

The last determinant is personal effectiveness. It was expected that not all parents would have high personal effectiveness. A possible explanation for this is the lack of 'mondigheid' in the culture on St. Maarten (log field orientation). Parents do not feel confident to participate at school or help their child in school related activities and therefore they do not become involved (Hoover-Dempsey, Battiato, Walker, Reed, DeJong, & Jones, 2001). Another reason could be lack of knowledge and skills to help children with homework. Parents' estimated difficulty would be high. Especially parents with lower educational level could experience this (Bogenschneider, 1997). When behavioral intention is present there could be barriers that limit the development to actual parental involvement. Barriers which parents may experience are non-flexible work schedules, language and written literacy difficulties, transportation problems or other children to take care of at home (Finders & Lewis, 1994; Sui-Chu & Willms, 1996). Good communication skills can progress the development from behavioral intention to actual parental involvement (Eccles & Harold, 1996).

Positive parenting

The second aim of this study was to create an image about parents' perception on positive parenting after their participation in AP. AP has been introduced to obtain the intentional results of the introduction of FBE; to ensure optimal functioning in the Antillean society for every child. The rationale was that the relation between parent and child has a more important influence on school outcomes, rather than actual participation itself. A positive parenting style increases the chance of improving school outcomes as a result of parental involvement (Mattingly, Prislin, McKenzie, Rodriguez, & Kayzar, 2002; Steinberg, Lamborn, Dornbusch, & Darling, 1992).

The main goal of AP is teaching parents this positive parenting strategy, which includes emotional support, high standards, appropriate granting and clear bidirectional communication (Popkin, 2005). A positive parenting style differs from an authoritarian style (in which parents use a high degree of power assertion to control their children and strongly value obedience for its own sake) and a permissive parenting style. Permissive parents are most tolerant of their children's disruptive and least likely to discipline them at all (Baumrind, 1967; 1971, as cited in Gray, 2006). Through aiming at parents' attitude and personal effectiveness AP tries to change parents' way of parenting. For example, through providing information about the benefits of positive parenting and by teaching practical skills. The ASE-model was used to create an image

about parents' perception on positive parenting. When parents do not have a positive perception on positive parenting it can be made clear by means of the ASE-model on which of the primary three determinant of intention the AP program needs to be addressed more (Fishbein & Yzer, 2003).

It was not expected that all parents would have a positive attitude. Many parents have a traditional view about parenting their children. They feel that they have to raise their children in the same way their parents raised them. Although AP aimed at a change in attitude toward positive parenting, the traditional view seemed too strong. Parents do not see the positive outcomes or benefits because they think their parents raised them well (log field orientation). Parents' experiences could also be an influence on the attitude. Parents know that they have control when they use their old, authoritarian, parenting style. They are not sure whether they have the same control when they use a positive parenting style, so it is very tempting not to change it (Prochaska, DiClemente & Norcross, 1993). It was also expected that not all parents would experience positive social influence. Because of the prevailing culture of order and respect it would be difficult to let parents educate their children in a positive way (log field orientation). Parents would not feel support in their environment. It was also expected that within families social support is not always present. Parental courses, like AP, are mostly attended by mothers. Fathers and other family members (especially in single parent families) do not attend the course and so are not aware of the importance of positive parenting and stick to their own traditional view (Leung, Sanders, Leung, Mak, & Lau, 2003). On the other hand, through the widespread range of AP on the island the general knowledge about positive parenting will grow which is positively related with social support (Finger, 1994). Last, it was expected that parents find it difficult to raise their children in the new, positive way. This new way of parenting will require a lot of energy and the results will not be visible immediately. It was expected that it will be tempting for the parents to behave like they were used to (Prochaska, DiClemente, & Norcross, 1993).

Social capital and social control

The third aim of this study was to explore the possibility of improvement of children's school related outcomes experienced by parents after they participated in the Active Parenting program. Aside from a positive parenting style, there are two factors of great importance in the relation between children's school related outcomes and the extent to which parents are involved in school (Grolnick & Slowiaznek, 1994; Griffith, 1998). The first factor is social capital which includes parents' skills and information that makes them better to assist their children in their school-related activities, such as helping with homework. This can be increased through parental

involvement and frequent contact with school. For example, when parents have a good relationship with the teacher of their child it is more likely that they are aware of the school's expectations for behavior and homework. Another way of increasing social capital is by meeting other parents. In this way they can share thoughts, experiences and information about school and learn from each other (Lareau 1996 as cited in Hill & Taylor, 2004).

The second factor is social control which can be defined as building a consensus about appropriate behavior that can be effectively to children at both school and home. Messages become clear and salient and confusion about expectations will be reduced when children and their peers receive similar messages about appropriate behavior across settings and from different sources (McNeal, 1999). Moreover, when families do not agree with each other or with school about appropriate behavior, the authority and effectiveness of teachers, parents or other adults may be undermined (Grolnick & Slowiaznek, 1994).

Despite of the fact that AP does not directly aims on change in social capital and social control it could be expected that these factors may change after parents participated in the course. The first factor, social capital, could be changed after parents participated in AP. The AP sessions were given in groups of parents. During the sessions were little breaks wherein parents had the possibility to share thoughts and experiences. Because of the fact that most of the sessions were given on schools it is likely that parents talked about school related things. It was also expected that through AP social control would grow. Parents learned how to raise their children in a positive way. This way of educating is also used in the FBE, so the possible gap between education at home and at school would decrease (Lee & Bowen, 2006; Keyes, 2002). All together, it was expected that parents because of their participation in AP would have a higher perceived social capital and social control.

Method

Participants

Questionnaires were filled in by 71 parents, who participated in the program of AP at different schools from different signatures. The parents had children aged from 4 to 12 years old. The average age of the parents was 38.1 years with an average of 2 children of which the youngest was not even a year old and the oldest child was 27. The educational level of 24 parents was high school graduate, of 19 parents college graduate, 19 parents had a graduate degree. One parent filled out to have completed no education and eight values were missing. 19 parents were single parents, 14 parents were living together with a partner and 39 parents were married (2 missing values). Judging from the educational level it can be stated that mostly middle class

parents filled out the questionnaires. Semi-structured interviews were held by six mothers who had participated in AP. These parents were selected by AP leaders at four different schools. It may be that the leaders selected more involved parents to talk about the program because these parents were more accessible and willing to participate in the interviews.

Assesment

Field orientation

Informal interviews were held with several leaders, teachers and parents involved with AP in the first phase of the research. The coordinator of the AP program introduced the researchers to the participants at schools, churches and other institutions. There questions were asked to the people involved about the development of the program and the experiences with the program AP and the implementation of it. This information was used to focus the research question and the other instruments at the relevant issues. The observations were done during the AP meetings at eight different schools. These sessions were selected because they took place in the period during the study. The researchers attended nine AP sessions and held informal interviews with parents and leaders about the successes and shortcomings of the program. The researchers expected that the observations would give a clear view of the actual situation concerning daily practice of the program. Also a focus group interview was held among AP leaders and trainers. The questions asked were how parents can be reached with the program, what obstacles do the leaders encounter in reaching parents for the program, what are success factors of the program and what can DERPI do to improve the accessibility of the program? The answers were expected to give extended information about possible shortcomings in the implementation of the program. All the data from the field orientation was not used to give answer to any research goal but used to get better insight in the context wherein the answers should be interpreted and as a foundation for later research questions and topic lists. Finally all additional information was noted in research logs for the purpose of methodical justification (Boeie, Hart, & Hox, 2008).

Questionnaires

Questionnaires were used to get answers to the goals about parental school involvement, positive parenting, social capital and social control. The questionnaires contained a general part, wherein was asked about general characteristics of parents including family situation, parents' education, age their children's age, and part with specific questions. In this part was asked about parents' opinion about specific subjects, including actual parental school involvement, social

capital, social control and parents' perception on positive parenting. Parents could indicate in what extent they agreed using a Likert scale that ranged from 1 (= totally disagree) to 5 (= totally agree). The answers were processed anonymously. For example, to get more information about actual parental school involvement parents theorems like: "I attend parent-teacher meetings at school" were asked. Parents' perception on positive parenting was measured by theorems such as: "I know other people who raise their children with the principle *freedom within limits*". Social capital was measured by using theorems such as: "I have the knowledge and skills to help my child in school activities". To measure social capital theorems such as: "I talk about our children's school with other parents", were used. The items on the questionnaire would be analyzed separately and not as summative scales. This has been done because of the more explorative character of the research. The questions were based on the literature used in the introduction and on the field orientation data. Besides the theorems there were also multiple choice questions included in the questionnaire, such as "Are there any practical obstacles why you are not able to participate in school activities sometimes?" Parents had five different answer options to choose from. There has been chosen for multiple choice questions so it was easy for the parents to fill out the questionnaires in a short time.

The researchers chose to split up the questionnaire because there were too many questions to include in one questionnaire. A conducted pilot study showed that parents needed much time to read and fill out the questions and that they lost their concentration by too many questions. The first part of the questionnaire was given to the parents at the first AP meeting and the second questionnaire at the third and last meeting. For some questions it was necessary that these were included in the first or second part, because parents' participation in AP could influence their answer or participation in AP was needed to answer the question. An example is: "People in my environment are interested in what I have learned in Active Parenting".

The researchers expected that these questionnaires would give a clear view by all the three aims of the study. Semi structured interviews were held later for more extensive and profound information on the subjects. The researchers expected that these questionnaires would give a first indication and a clear view of the specific subjects of the questions. There has been chosen for questionnaires to reach a large group of parents in a short amount of time.

Semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews were used to get answers to the goals about parental school involvement, positive parenting, social capital and social control. The questions were open ended and the parents were asked to elaborate and answer extensively. This instrument was used

because it is in line with the explorative nature of the study and it gives parents the opportunity to give their personal impression about the questioned subjects. First, parents were asked about some parental characteristics such as their family situation, their own age, the number of children they have and the ages of their children. After that, a topic list was used to learn more about parents' experience with the program, their perception on positive parenting and their actual school involvement. The interviews were conducted by two researchers to increase the intra-observer reliability (Robson, 2002).

The aim of the researchers was to get parents to share their experience parental involvement and the influence of participation in AP on their perception on positive parenting. The interviews were expected to give additional information about all the three subjects. This information could be used as an illustration on the data obtained from the questionnaire and as a control measure to verify the data from the questionnaires to enhance reliability and to gain a more balanced view on mutual relationships amongst the different topics. By using multiple instruments that overlap the research questions, the principle of triangulation was used to increase the internal validity of the study (Baarda et al., 2001; Robson, 2002)

Procedure

Questionnaires were distributed among participating parents at the Active Parenting sessions at eight different schools. Parents were selected because they were participating in AP sessions in the period during the study. Because of their participation in AP, the parents were accessible and could be asked to cooperate in the research. The questionnaires were analyzed using SPSS 17.0 for windows to calculate the percentages, mean and standard deviation to get a general image of the answers to the questions. This general image of the parents' concepts about the program was further explored by the semi structured interviews held later.

For the interviews leaders who guided the AP at eight different schools selected two parents for the interview at each school. The leaders passed the researchers the information to approach the parents for the interviews. These parents did not participated yet in the observations or did not filled out the questionnaires to cover a wide range of parents. The selected parents were chosen because they understand and speak English, their ability to understand the purpose of the interview and their skills to verbally express themselves. Not all parents responded, one recording got lost and finally a total six interviews were conducted and useful for the research. The interviews were done by two researchers to enhance reliability. One to ask the questions and who had the conversation with the respondent and the other made notes and secured recordings. The data from the semi structured interviews was analyzed using inductive coding techniques,

based on constant comparison of interview statements. Categories were generated with regard to the goals of the study. A qualitative analyzing method was used to keep the possibility open for new insight in the parents' feelings about parental involvement and positive parenting. This qualitative way of analyzing contributes to the explorative character of the research. To reduce the chance on bias in the analysis, the inductive coding and the categories created were kept as close to the original quotations of the participants as possible (Baar, 2002; Baarda et al, 2001).

Results

In this section the most relevant and important results for each research goal will be reviewed. Results of two different instruments will be reviewed together because the results overlap, complete and support each other. Parents' characteristics such as age, number of children, education and marital status are also reviewed in relation to the results of the questionnaire and interviews.

Lack of social support and barriers prevent parental involvement

The first aim of this study was to create an image of parents' perception on parental school involvement. Parental school involvement was operationalized in the following activities: volunteering at school, communicating with teachers and other school personnel, assisting in academic school activities at home and attending school events, meetings of parent-teacher associations and parent-teacher conferences. Parents' perception has been made clear by means of the ASE-model and the results will be discussed by using the behavioral determinants; attitude, social influence and personal effectiveness and eventually possible barriers will be discussed. Most of the parents had a positive attitude about parental involvement in general (See Table 1).

Table 1: Percentages and Self-Reported scores of parents' attitude about parental involvement (Mean and Standard Deviations in Parentheses).

N=36	Totally agree		Agree		Neutral		Disagree		Totally disagree	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Theorem A	18	54.5%	6	18.2%	8	24.2%	1	3.0%	0	0.0%
Theorem B	1	2.9%	3	8.8%	0	0.0%	2	5.9%	28	82.4%
Theorem C	18	52.9%	6	17.6%	9	26.5%	0	0.0%	1	2.9%
Theorem D	29	85.3%	3	8.8%	1	2.9%	1	2.9%	0	0.0%
Theorem E	5	15.6%	2	6.3%	11	34.4%	1	3.1%	13	40.6%
Theorem F	30	85.7%	4	11.4%	0	0.0%	1	2.9%	0	0.0%
Theorem G	22	64.7%	6	17.6%	2	5.9%	3	8.8%	1	2.9%
Theorem H	11	33.3%	2	6.1%	12	36.4%	4	12.1%	4	12.1%

Theorem A: My experiences with school activities are positive. (M 1.76; SD .94)

Theorem B: Only non working parents participate in school activities. (M 4.65; SD .88)

Theorem C: Every parent should participate in activities organized by school. (M 1.82; SD 1.03)

Theorem D: I think it is important to attend parent-teacher meetings at school. (M 1.24; SD .65)

Theorem E: Some parents interfere too much in school affairs (M 3.47; SD 1.48)

Theorem F: I think it is important to have good contact between me and the teacher of my child. (M 1.20; SD .58)

Theorem G: I regularly receive newsletters or school papers to stay informed about school activities (M 1.68; SD 1.12)

Theorem H: A lot of parents in my environment are participating in school activities (M 2.64; SD 1.39)

Parents did recognize the benefits and importance of involvement (theorems D, F). Parents had no negative experiences with school or parental involvement (theorem A). The participating parents did not have a different parental role construction because most recognised the most important elements of parental involvement. Parents' definition about parental involvement included mostly volunteering at school, helping with homework, being interested in a child's school career, to have good communication with the teacher and to stay informed about the child's developments at school. An interviewed mother did mentioned difference in role construction by other parents with the same cultural background as hers: *'But we are from Dominican Republican Nation, we are more the low in education. And not that I mean that we have no education, college, university or that, there is but it is our culture. And the people that are coming here is more the low people from the Dominican Republica (..)Because they so busy making the money. Yes, they will have to work hard to make the money, so eh... they won't... 'Ehhh I don't have no time'. (Resp. 4).* Based on the perception on role construction of this mother, it is plausible that some parents experience this but that those parents did not participated in this study.

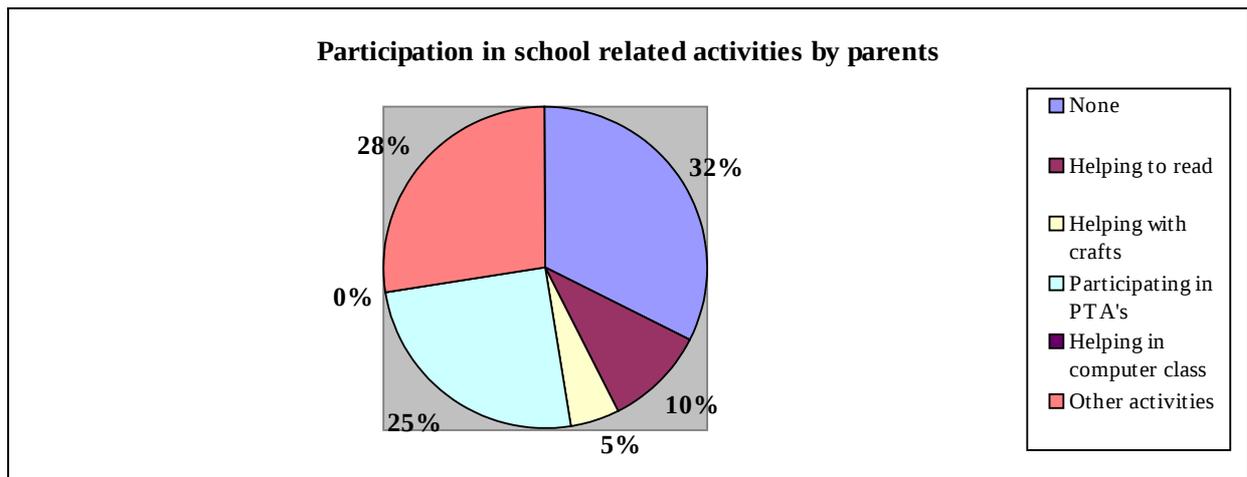
Parents felt that schools were very supportive in parental school involvement. They said that schools organize meetings, activities for example at Eastern and invite parents to assist in class. Most parents filled out by that they regularly receive newsletters or school papers to stay

informed about school activities (theorem G, 78.5%). Unexpectedly, not all parents felt much social support in their direct environment, despite of the encouraging of involvement by schools. Parents did have different opinions about theorem H: “A lot of parents in my environment are participating in school activities” (M 2.64; SD 1.39). According to some interviewed parents are some parents very involved and most others are not involved at all: *‘The teacher tried four or three times to set up parents meetings at night for parents to talk to them zo van hey jij moet ook meehelpen of jou kind is druk met dit of je moet helpen met dit of jouw kind is niet goed in dat. Maar er komen steeds maar weer dezelfde 5 of 8 mensen.’ (Resp.2).*

Parents were positive about their own ability and opportunity to get involved. Most filled out that they thought that they were able to help their child with homework when their children experienced difficulties (80.0 %) However, parents had a difference in opinion about theorem E: “Some parents interfere too much in school affairs’ (M 3.47; SD 1.48). This can be interpreted as not all parents found that they should participate as much as some parents do. It is not sure whether this can be attributed to the lack of ‘mondigheid’ in the society.

Not all parents had the behavioral intention or experienced barriers in parental school involvement because not all of the participating parents said to perform actual participation. All of the interviewed parents, but only 68.0% of the parents who filled out the questionnaire said they do (See Figure 1). When parents did not had the behavioral intention it was most likely that the reason would be lack of direct social support or lack of self-confidence. When the behavioral intention was established there could be barriers present that limited the development to actual parental involvement. A minority of parents said that they had not the skills to assist their child because of language differences or lack of education: *‘It depends on the education of the parents too. I don’t have the level of ten years sometimes. With Mathematics I can but I cannot help them so much on the Dutch because the class is very advanced.’ (Resp. 4).* Some parents experienced practical obstacles trough what they were not able to participate, such as mostly non-flexible hours at home (53.1%) and a child to take care of at home (9.4%). Some single mothers said in the interviews that they wanted to participate but could not because of a lack of time. When these parents received help from other family members they were more able to take part in activities.

Figure. 1: Participation in school related activities by parents



Old habits and little social support

The second aim of this study was to create an image of parents' perception on positive parenting after participation in AP. Parents' perception has been made clear by means of the ASE-model and the results will be discussed by using the behavioral determinants: attitude, social influence and personal effectiveness. Parents had a positive attitude toward positive parenting (See Table 2). They recognised the importance of changing their parenting behavior and the benefits of a positive parenting style: *'It's just to create a better environment altogether because when the kids feel they are more part of everything, the decision making everything, everything is more peaceful.'* (Resp. 3). Sometimes, parents acknowledged the importance of positive parenting but the good experiences with their old parenting behavior and old habits influenced this. This resulted in decrease of behavioral intention: *'According to the program I try to use as much as I can and in some cases it doesn't work and then you go back to the old way'*. (Resp. 3). On the other hand parents said that they thought that it is important to learn new ways of parenting because of the ever changing society in which they live. Contrary to expectations, none of the parents said that they preferred their traditional way of parenting instead of a positive parenting style.

Unfortunately, parents experienced not much social support from other parents in their direct environment or in the normative belief in the society (See Table 2; theorem L, N, O): *'And of course my mom and sister were not able to go so they weren't able to do it in a different way.'* (Resp. 6) and *'It did not seem realistic, because of how the society is and how the children are.'* (Resp. 3). Mostly single parents experienced less social support because they raised their children together with other family members. Divorced parents experienced less social support when their child was partly raised by the other parent who used a different parenting style. There were also different opinions about the fit of the way of communicating of AP in their culture (theorem L).

It is possible that the parents do not feel social support for positive parenting in a kind of society based on order and respect. Although schools are trying to reach parents to let them participate in the AP program, to learn them the strategies of positive parenting, not all parents were familiar with the program: *'I heard about it yes, but I really didn't know what exactly was gonna be.. what were they gonna talk about, but I know it had to do with kids and you know, I guess discipline and stuff like that'*. (Resp. 1). Some parents did hear about the program but most of them did not know what it exactly was about. This might influenced the general acceptance and social support on positive parenting.

Nevertheless, most parents felt that they were able to put AP in practice (79.3%). However some parents had a high estimated difficulty of changing their parenting style. They thought that it would take time to educate their child with a positive parenting style consistently. Many parents thought that they would feel more confident about their own abilities when they could participate in refresher courses or had more practice.

Table 2: Percentages of Self-Reported scores of behavioral determinants of positive parenting by parents. (Mean and Standard Deviations in Parentheses).

	Totally agree		Agree		Neutral		Disagree		Totally disagree	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
N=36										
Theorem I	18	54.5%	13	39.4%	1	3.0%	1	3.0%	0	0.0%
Theorem J	15	45.5%	9	23.3%	7	21.2%	1	3.0%	1	3.0%
Theorem K	21	60.0%	9	25.7%	2	5.7%	3	8.6%	0	0.0%
Theorem L	12	35.3%	9	26.5%	10	29.4%	1	2.9%	2	5.9%
Theorem M	19	54.3%	9	25.7%	4	11.4%	2	5.7%	1	2.9%
Theorem N	7	21.9%	5	15.6%	14	34.8%	2	6.3%	4	12.5%
Theorem O	15	41.7%	6	16.7%	9	25.0%	2	5.6%	4	11.1%
Theorem P	8	24.2%	11	33.3%	9	27.3%	4	12.1%	1	3.0%
Theorem Q	19	55.9%	9	26.5%	4	11.8%	2	5.9%	0	0.0%

Theorem I: I have learned useful things during AP (M 1.55; SD .71)

Theorem J: I think AP makes me more able to handle conflicts at home (M 1.91; SD 1.04)

Theorem K: If parents raise their children like AP their child will be prepared to function well in this society (M 1.63; SD .94)

Theorem L: The way we learn to communicate in AP does fit in our culture (M 2.18; SD 1.14)

Theorem M: I have decided to raise my child in a different way (M 1.77; SD 1.06)

Theorem N: People in my environment are interested in what I have learned in AP (M 2.72; SD 1.25)

Theorem O: I know other people in my environment who raise their children with the principle 'freedom within limits' (M 2.72; SD 1.37)

Theorem P: I think it is difficult to carry out what we learn in AP (M 3.64; SD 1.08)

Theorem Q: I think I am able to put AP in practice (M 1.77; SD 1.06)

More skills and absence of a general image about children's appropriate behavior

The third aim of this study was to explore the possibility of improvement of children's school related outcomes experienced by parents after they participated in the AP program. This has been done by using the factors social capital and social control. Parents' social control was high. Parents thought they are able to help their children with school-related activities, because they have the knowledge and skills to assist them (See Table 3; theorems R,S). Some parents were insecure about their ability to help because of their lack in education or language difficulties: *'I have a bit of a language problem, I can not speak Dutch.'* (Resp. 5). They did not feel that AP provided them more information but they did feel that they had more skills to help them. Parents thought that they were better in communicating with their child and had better patience. They also said to have contact with the teacher of their child and with other parents: *'I call an other parent and ask my questions or I go to the school and ask them, you know.'* (Resp. 1). They had different opinions about to what extent AP had an influence on their contact with other parents and the opportunity they had to communicate with others about school related issues (Theorems T, U).

Table 3: Percentages of Self-Reported scores of social capital. (Mean and Standard Deviations in Parentheses)

	Totally agree		Agree		Neutral		Disagree		Totally disagree	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
N=36										
Theorem R	22	64.7%	5	14.7%	7	20.6%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Theorem S	20	60.6%	7	21.2%	5	15.2%	0	0.0%	1	3.0%
Theorem T	14	42.4%	8	24.2%	8	24.2%	2	6.1%	1	3.0%
Theorem U	9	28.1%	8	25.0%	8	25.0%	6	18.8%	1	3.1%
Theorem V	17	48.6%	8	22.9%	8	22.9%	1	2.9%	1	2.9%
Theorem W	21	61.8%	3	8.8%	6	17.6%	3	8.8%	1	2.9%

Theorem R: I have the knowledge and skills to help my child in school activities (M 1.59; SD .82)

Theorem S: I understand the teaching material of the school and I am able to explain this to my child (M 1.63; .96)

Theorem T: During the sessions of AP we, as parents, were able to talk about the school of our children. (M 2.03; 1.10)

Theorem U: Now I have participated in AP I talk more to other parents about school-related issues (M 2.44; 1.89)

Theorem V: Children should be able to express their own opinion, also towards the teacher (M 1.89; SD 1.05)

Theorem W: It is the teachers' job to create an atmosphere of order and respect in class (M 1.79; SD 1.17)

Social control did not emerge from the answers of the parents strongly. Most parents agreed with the way the teacher handles their child in class. But it is not sure whether parents knew how the teacher handles their child because a part of the parents find that children should be able to express their own opinion (theorem V; 48.6%), also towards the teacher and also that the teacher's job is to create an atmosphere of order and respect in class (theorem W; 61.8%). It also appeared that teachers do not always handle their students in a positive way according to AP

because they found it difficult or they thought that they had more control by using their old strategies.

Sometimes adults had in the direct home-situation of the child a difference in opinion. Some children who are (partly) raised by grandparents receive different (old-fashioned or less strict) messages about appropriate behavior at several settings. Children in single parent families can received different messages about appropriate behavior, when they lived with their mother or father partly. A single mother explains: *'Especially if his father says yes to one thing and I say no. And then is difficult to explain why it is okay there and not okay by me. That is difficult, you know. The thing now is that he would react different with me, then in certain things, instances with his father.'* (Resp. 3). So, there was no clear picture about children's appropriate behavior at several settings.

Discussion

The general research goal was to explore whether AP can help to increase parental involvement parental involvement. This has been done by creating a clearer view of parents' perception on parental involvement, positive parenting, social capital and social control.

Contrary to the expectations parents had a positive attitude about parental school involvement. Parents did not have bad experiences with school or a different parental role construction (Colbert, 1991; Hill & Taylor, 2004; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). An explanation could be that mostly higher educated, middle class parents participated in this study. It is unlikely that these parents had negative experiences with school (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). Parents' parental role construction could have been influenced by immigration and acculturation (psychosocial process of adapting to a new culture) through what parents' traditional parental role constructions have changed and now include parental school involvement (Chiu, Feldman, & Rosenthal, 1992).

Parents experienced social support from schools which made them feel appreciated and meaningful and more likely to become involved (Hoover-Dempsey, Battiato, Walker, Reed, DeJong, & Jones, 2001). Unfortunately, they did not feel more social support from other parents in their direct environment which could mean that the number of involved parents did not increased much. Perhaps the range of AP is not large enough to reach all parents on the island and therefore other parents who are not aware of AP do not form social support. On the other had it may be that these parents participated in AP but that they did not had the behavioral intention to get involved or that they encountered barriers that limit the development from behavioral intention to actual behavior (as described later in this section).

Contrary to the expectations formulated in the introduction, most parents had high personal effectiveness. This may be because of the parents' high educational level (Bogenschneider, 1997). Some parents did not feel confident enough to get involved. However, research showed that mostly working class parents are often not confident enough to get involved and do not feel that they should get involved (Reay, 1999). Contrary to these research outcomes, in this study mostly middle class parents did not feel confident. This may be attributed to the 'mondigheid' of the parents. Further research is necessary for firm conclusions.

As expected, some parents experienced barriers that limited actual parental school involvement (Chu & Willms, 1996). The most experienced barrier was having non-flexible working hours. Parental school involvement consist of involvement at home and at school so it is likely that working parents can not participate in activities at school, but they should be able to help their children with activities at home (Finders & Lewis, 1994).

The expectations formulated in the introduction about positive parenting were that not all parents would experience positive social influence and the estimated difficulty would be high. Contrary to the expectations parents had a positive attitude towards positive parenting. Parents' opinion was asked after their participation in AP so it is possible that AP successfully changes parents' attitude towards positive parenting (Mullis, 1999;Popkin, 2005). On the other hand, effects of social desirability bias should be taken into account because parents' opinion after AP was measured in this study. Parents possibly gave more positive answers which could give a biased image about parents' attitude (Robson, 2002).

As expected, parents experienced not much support in their direct environment and society, especially not from individuals who did not participated in AP. The traditional view on parenting or the prevailing culture (based on order and respect) could be an influence on the perception on positive parenting of individuals who did not participate in AP. It could therefore be that AP influences attitude towards positive parenting positively (as described in the paragraph above about parents' attitude about positive parenting). Another explanation could be that there is no general knowledge and awareness of positive parenting in the society so that others who did not participated in AP are not supportive (Roe, 1990).

As formulated in the introduction parents found it difficult to raise their children in the new, positive way consistently (Prochaska, DiClemente, & Norcross, 1993). It could be useful to introduce refresher courses to make parents more confident and to encourage them to educate their children like an Active Parent (Hawley & Joley, 2004).

About social capital and control was expected that this would be enhanced through participation in AP. After participation in AP parents did not feel they had more knowledge to

become involved but did not think that they had more skills. AP is not explicitly aimed at increasing knowledge but more at giving parents skills to make them able to get involved (Popkin, 2005). Parents also did not have the opportunity in all sessions to communicate with other parents about school-related things so they were not able to share information, knowledge and thoughts about their children's schooling (Lareau 1996 as cited in Hill & Taylor, 2004).

This study did not give a more clearer view about social control because it was unclear to what extent there is social consensus present on appropriate behavior between home and school. It was not sure whether parents knew how teachers handle their children in class and they did not mention a general image of how this should be.

Overall it can be stated that a lack of social support limits the parents' behavioral intention for school involvement and positive parenting. To create more acceptance, knowledge and awareness it is necessary to ensure that AP is better known in society (e.g. through marketing) (Finger, 1994). Not only parents but all individuals who are involved in education should participate in AP to create more support. It is very important to let teachers participate in AP so they educate their students in class in the same way parents do at home. When parents change their educating behavior, like AP, this change needs also to be made in the classroom and vice versa to create a better consensus (higher social control) (McNeal, 1999). When there is a general consensus about appropriate parenting behavior it will be more likely that there will be positive outcomes as a result of the implementation of the FBE. Besides creating better social support and general knowledge, the program needs to address more at making parents more confident about themselves and their own abilities. When the social support and confidence by parents is established most parents will have the behavioural intention to get involved and educate their children in a positive way. Schools should get informed about the possible barriers parents experience in parental involvement should take the non-flexible work hours of parents into account and organise school activities when parents are available to participate. For example at weekends or at a time agreed with parents.

Several limitations to this study have to be taken into account when interpreting these results. It was based self-reported perceptions of mostly middle class mothers who participated in AP. There may have no representative image of the actual population been formed, but of the parents who participated in AP. It would be desirable to involve all kind of parents from different cultural backgrounds, educational and SES levels. Children's and teachers' perceptions would also be useful for further study. Because of the short amount of time given for this study it was not possible to conduct an effect-study to investigate the actual effects of AP on parents' perception on parental involvement, positive parenting, social capital and social control.

To increase the internal validity two different research instruments were used, questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. A large group of parents filled out the questionnaires and six parents were interviewed. The small number of interviews was because most data was obtained from questionnaires and the interviews were used only as a control measure and to gain additional, more detailed and illustrative image of the topics. All interviewed parents were mothers. This may be not representative for parents in general but it may be representative for the more involved parents. The interviewed mothers were selected by AP leaders. It must be taken into account that the leaders may have chosen the more involved and motivated parents. In addition, the interviews were conducted in English so only English speaking parents could participate. The less educated, Spanish speaking parents, could not participate so probably only higher-educated parents were interviewed. The principle of triangulation was used and elaborate field orientation was done to ensure maximum reliability and internal validity (Baarda et al., 2001; Robson, 2002).

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