

Safe educational partnership with parents: a new integrative model of parent-teacher relationships in a diverse, polarized and changing society

Abstract

During recent decades, there have been far-reaching social changes in Western countries, that have affected parent-teacher relationships dramatically. The worldwide Covid19 crisis has exacerbated educational gaps, especially among disadvantaged populations. Therefore, restoring parent-teacher relationships is a key factor in reducing inequality. However, many models of parent-teacher communication have not yet been updated to include multicultural approach or socio-systemic work. Accordingly, we propose a new integrative applicable model: safe educational partnership with parents. This model is based on cultivating psychological safety, including identity safety, as a necessary condition for building close relations. For this purpose, the teacher has to work in three levels: 1) intra-personal level 2) inter-personal level and 3) institutional-organizational level. Educators and counselors can use this model to lead protected empathetic interactions with parents and promote an environment with a perspective of “value in diversity”, for the benefit of restoring trusting relationships with parents and reducing gaps.

Keywords: parents teachers’ relations, psychological safety, identity safety, cultural competence, multicultural counseling

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Introduction

Communication with parents constitutes a central aspect of the teaching profession. Significant changes in social reality affect the family-school relationship, requiring of the educational staff a deep understanding of the complexity in relationships with parents, as well as efficient skills and strategies for communicating with them. In fact, many teachers consider interaction with parents as one of the most challenging parts of their job.¹ The transition to distance learning, during the worldwide Covid19 crisis, has exacerbated educational gaps, especially among students from low socio-economic status, minority identity communities, and families with high parental distress.² Yet, many models of parent-teacher communication tend to ignore cultural diversity and do not relate to socio-systemic work. Hence, we wish to propose a new integrative applicable model for working with parents in a culturally diverse, polarized and changing society.

Theoretical background

Parental involvement in the educational framework

According to Bronfenbrenner’s ecological-developmental theory,³ the child’s mutual relationship with his environment and the mutual relationships among various “social agents” in the environment have a crucial effect on the child’s development. Bronfenbrenner perceives of the environment as composed of inter-related systems affecting one another. The family and the educational framework are the environmental systems in society that are most significant to the development of the young child.⁴

Many Studies have indicated the contribution of positive parental involvement to children’s cognitive, behavioral and social-emotional development as well as academic achievements.^{5,6} Yet, there is currently a sense of mutual suspicion, even hostility at times, between parents and teachers.^{4,7} This tension is usually a consequence of gaps between the teacher’s perception of her role as opposed to parents’ perceptions,

conflicts between educational worldviews and Intervention of parents in issues that are not in their area of responsibility.^{1,8,9}

Parent teacher relationships in a diverse, polarized and changing society

The General Assembly of the United Nations has recently declared that the world is at a critical moment in the history of the United Nations due to complex and interconnected crises, including the COVID-19 pandemic, the war in Ukraine, a tipping point in climate change as well as threats to the global economy. They have formulated a document of 17 sustainable development goals, among them quality education.¹⁰

In the last decades, there have been far-reaching changes in the social reality of the Western world, Israel included: immigration from many countries and cultures, the development of new family structures and reforms in the field of special education. Power play and cultural gaps have created institutional discrimination and exclusion of minority groups in Israel, struggling for equality and inclusion, among them: Arabs, Jews of Ethiopian origin, Jews of Oriental origin, LGBTQ, special-needs populations and more. The social reality of Israel is particularly polarized and fragile, characterized by ongoing security tensions which create a rift between the Jewish and Arab citizens. Thus, for example, in May 2021, Israel was at battle with Hamas, while violent events were concurrently going on between Arab and Jewish citizens within Israel, as a portion of the Arab citizens identified with Hamas and supported it.

The following headings detail some of the changes in the 21st century social reality, as well as their effect on the educational system and parent-teacher relationships.

Immigration and cultural heterogeneity

In many countries in the Western world, there are groups living together which differ in terms of religion, nationality, ethnicity, politics and culture. Israel too is heterogenous and polarized.¹¹ All of the

social groups recognize the importance of parent-school connections, yet there are differences in the parental involvement patterns of various ethnic groups and social classes. For example, families from ethnic minority groups and low social class tend to be involved in their children's education in the home sphere to the same extent as the dominant group,¹² yet less involved at school in comparison to the dominant group.^{13,14}

These groups' lower involvement at school may stem from the following reasons: lack of economic resources; difficulties with language and communication; gaps between the school culture, which represents the values and beliefs of the dominant groups in society, and the unique culture characterizing the home.⁷ Feelings of discrimination and the lack of appreciation and trust make it difficult for them to be present and involved in the school.^{13,14}

Accordingly, many policy-shapers and researchers emphasize the need to cultivate cultural competence in the institutions' work with minority groups. Cross and her colleagues¹⁶ defined the concept of 'cultural competence' as a suitable system of policy, attitudes and behaviors in an institution, social system or professionals, which enable these to work efficiently in inter-cultural situations. From the 1990s on, the concept was expanded to cultural competence vis-a-vis communities that share other characterizations such as gender, religion, age, sexual identity and special needs.

The development of new family structures

The disintegration of the traditional family unit, the social struggles of women, and gender and sexual minorities for equal rights, as well as advanced fertility technology have led to the development of alternative family structures, such as single-parent families, individual parents by choice, LGBTQ families and others. Negative emotions and prejudice can affect the interaction of the educational staff with alternative families.^{17,18}

Anonymous Author¹⁹ emphasizes the need for teachers to refrain from judgement when meeting 'new families', especially same-sex families. These families sometimes function under the "burden of proof": namely, the pressure to prove to themselves and to the majority heterosexual society that they are capable and worthy families. Therefore, they need warmth and security in order to increase their involvement in the school framework and in the community.⁹

Integrating and containing special needs children within regular education

From the 1990s onwards, progressive legislation and educational reforms in the Western world and in Israel have led to a revolution in the educational perception and methods of working with special needs children. These reforms emphasize society's responsibility toward the other, viewing difference as an advantage rather than a limitation, promoting inclusion rather than separation. Hence, more and more special needs children receive special services when they study in special education classes or in regular classes, within the regular educational framework.^{20,21}

Integration of special needs children into regular education requires of the entire system to undergo training in order to absorb the integrated children.²² The child's parents expect their child to receive the treatment he deserves to get, and often feel the need to advocate his causes. The gap created between parents' expectations and teachers' difficulties creates great tension and conflicts.⁷

The influence of family background and parental function on educational gaps during the Covid19 crisis

Israel is characterized by many wide socio-economic gaps in comparison to the rest of the OECD countries. Israel is one of the leading countries in poverty rates, and one of the two leading countries in children poverty rates.²³ The Gini index, which examines the measure of inequality in income, indicates that Israel has an index higher by 10% than the average in developed countries.²⁴ Israel is also characterized by wider gaps in educational achievements in comparison to other developed countries.²⁵ The trend of inequality has been maintained in Israel over the last decade, favoring students from the Jewish sector with parents of higher education and from a high socio-economic level.²⁶

The worldwide Covid19 crisis has been accompanied by an economic and social crisis, including in Israel. The closing of kindergartens and schools in Israel from mid-March 2020, and the transition to online studies have exacerbated the gaps in education in Israel, especially among the weakened populations: the social and geographical peripheries, the low socio-economic class, Arabic speakers, ultra-religious communities and populations lacking formal status.²⁷ It was found that family background (socio-economic status, minority identity, lack of technological resources and knowledge) and parental functioning (parental distress, adjustment problems) were particularly connected to gaps and inequality processes in education.² In sum, Socio-economic gaps, ongoing social tension and continuous disruption of routine under the Covid19 pandemic have affected the relationships between teachers and parents, making them particularly complex and challenging. However, many models of parent-teacher partnership are still based on universal psychological principles and refer to personal conversations; They have not yet been updated to include multicultural approach and socio-systemic work, as will be shown in the following review.

Review of current models of parents- teachers communication, multicultural education and counseling

Universal psychological models of parent-teacher relationships

In theoretical and research literature, several psychological models are offered for optimal communication. One of the central models is that of Nonviolent Communication, proposed by Marshall B. Rosenberg,³⁰ which was later adjusted to schools.³¹ The model includes four principles for Nonviolent Communication, and posits reflexive, intrapersonal discourse as the basis for optimal interpersonal communication. The first principle relates to observation and attentiveness to the daily reality we see and hear at kindergarten. The second principle relates to the emotions we or others feel (such as anger, fear, insult, excitement, satisfaction, etc.) in that daily reality. The third principle relates to identification of our needs: What is the personal need/value/desire which leads to the emotion? These needs may be security, belonging, love, appreciation, success, self-fulfillment, etc. The last principle relates to requests: What do we wish to request, and from whom, in order to fulfill said need? Expressing the request is important since it increases the chance of our need receiving the appropriate response; it reminds us that there are many ways to fulfill the need; and it promotes ties as well as creative solutions.

Another model relating specifically to parent-teacher communication is the PTC model.³² The PTC model includes three central stages in establishing optimal interaction with parents. The first stage is: Plan prior to discussions with parents. This stage includes planning the boundaries of the discussion and its goals; clarification; and becoming prepared. The second stage is: Talk during the discussion with the parents. This stage includes the dialogue itself in relation to the goals set. It is important to define the problem and search for its answers and to relate with practical empathy to barriers in the conversation. The third stage is Continuing after talking with the parents. This stage refers to follow-up and counseling after the conversation itself.

These existing models of close communication, including the context of parent-teacher relationships, do not usually relate to the cultural diversity of children and their families, although the relationships between individuals or groups take place in a diverse and changing society. The existing models focus particularly on psychological aspects. Moreover, these models relate mainly to work at the personal and individual levels, ignoring systemic aspects.

Socio-Pedagogical models of multicultural education

In addition to the psychological models, there are socio-psychological ones relating to the cultural diversity of children and their families. One of the most quoted models is the Multicultural Education model by Banks,³³ which encourages inclusion, decency and education towards multiculturalism in kindergartens and schools. The model is based on five principles:

- 1) **Building up knowledge:** the teachers should contribute to the children's understanding, examination and reaching of conclusions regarding the way in which latent assumptions, perspectives and biases implanted in every field affect the process of knowledge-building.
- 2) **Decreasing prejudices:** the educational staff should be aware of their own prejudices towards otherness of various sorts (including ethnic minorities) and examine how teaching methods and materials may contribute to a decrease of prejudice.
- 3) **Integrating a variety of cultural content:** introducing examples and content into the teaching methods which relate to a variety of cultures and populations.
- 4) **Pedagogy based on decency:** this is expressed by teachers implementing changes in their original contents in order to enable significant learning and positive achievements of children coming from various ethnic, cultural, religious, socio-economic and functional backgrounds.
- 5) **Empowering organizational culture:** reorganizing of the educational institution's organizational culture so that children from various backgrounds may experience the learning environment as equitable. This reorganization touches upon the method of streaming groups; relationships among school attendees, and decreasing of gaps.

Models of multicultural education such as Banks and Banks' are socio-pedagogical models, which do not take into account psychological and individual aspects. They mainly relate to work at the organizational level, not always including the individual and intra-personal ones.

Models of multicultural counseling

The universal approach emphasizes that which is common among people and does not relate to the diverse collective history of various

cultural groups. When a teacher acts according to this approach, the assumption is that the teacher's professional skills will serve him/her in their work with parents, and that the different cultural background is irrelevant to their interaction.³⁴ The disadvantage of this model is that it disregards the effect of the social environment on individuals and their hardships.

As opposed to the universal approach, the multicultural approach favors the perception of culture as the context in which the individual operates and functions. It relates both to the parents and their culture and to the mutual relationship between the dominant culture and the parents' specific one. According to this approach, the teacher or counselor combines the universal models of communication with a profound and sensitive knowledge of the parents' culture.^{35,36}

The American Psychological Association formulated specific guidelines for providers of psychological services to ethnic, linguistic, and culturally diverse populations, in the spirit of the multicultural approach.³⁷ Yet, the work on cultural competence still tend to focus on the micro level, the individual. In the education and training of psychologists, for example, the goals have been to increase the level of self-awareness of trainees; to acquire knowledge of the history, culture, and life experiences of various minority groups; and/or to aid in developing culturally appropriate and adaptive interpersonal skills (clinical work, management, conflict resolution.). Less emphasis is placed on the macro level: the profession of psychology, structural-organizational aspects of institutions, and the society in general.³⁸

In this article, we wish to present an integrative model promoting safe partnership with parents in educational institutions. Safe partnership with parents from diverse groups is a key factor in reducing educational gaps and inequality process, following the Covid19 crisis. The uniqueness and innovation of this model are expressed in the combination of two complementary perspectives: psycho-educational and socio-organizational. For this purpose, the teacher has to work in three levels, simultaneously:

- 1) intra- personal level,
- 2) inter- personal level and
- 3) institutional-organizational level.

These ideas are inspired by MDCC (Multidimensional Cultural Competence) Model³⁸ which suggested a general conceptual blueprint for developing cultural competence on two levels: micro (individual and professional) and macro (organizational and societal). They are also supported by a meta-analysis of 39 family- engagement teacher training programs which examined their effect on teachers' family-engagement practices, attitudes and knowledge. This comprehensive study found that teachers' positive family engagement attitudes, trust relationships with parents, effective communication strategies, collaborative planning and problem solving and cultural awareness/practices are key ingredients within family school partnership programs and have the greatest impact on teachers outcomes.³⁹

The proposed model – safe educational partnership with parents

Teachers' working relationships with parents of diverse social groups are embedded in the broad context of the kindergarten/school system (Figure 1); the policy of the Ministry of Education and the supporting system; teacher training institutions; society and culture. This broad view is based on Bronfenbrenner's ecological-developmental model.³ His theory emphasizes the child's mutual relationship with his/her environment, and the mutual relationship between the various 'social agents' themselves, as well as their crucial

effect on the child's development. Bronfenbrenner perceives of the environment as comprising inter-related systems which affect one another. The most significant environments for the development of children is their family and their school framework.

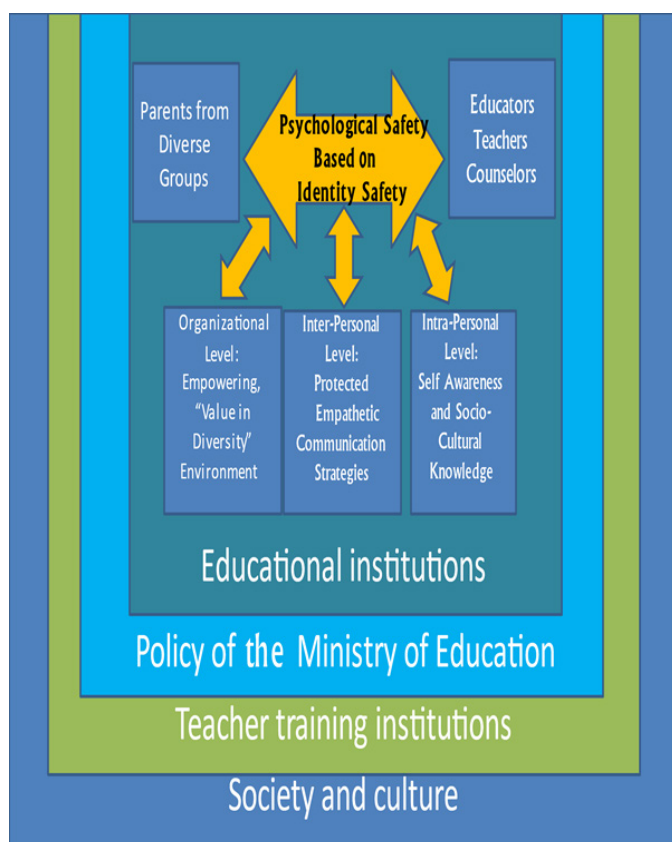


Figure 1 SEP Model - model of safe educational partnership with parents.

The model we propose regards the concept of psychological safety as a mediating and necessary condition for the establishing of safe communication between teachers and parents in a diverse and changing society. We would like to claim that Psychological Safety should be based on social- cultural identity safety. In order to establish an experience of safety in the interaction with parents, the teacher has to work in three levels, simultaneously:

- 1) intra- personal level;
- 2) inter- personal level; and
- 3) institutional-organizational level. In the following heading we shall explain the concept of psychological safety based on identity safety, detailing each of the three levels.

Psychological safety based on identity safety

Psychological Safety relates to a climate in which the individuals feel comfortable to express themselves, with the shared belief that mutual trust and respect exist within the a specific group or setting.³⁹ Examples of Psychological Safety include: “I feel safe taking a risk in this group”, as well as “I can maintain my identity and/or integrity, while I’m learning something new here.” In other words, Psychological Safety is vital in order for people to feel comfortable sharing personal aspects and receiving feedback from others for the purpose of communication, learning and development.

Since open communication and learning can take place only under conditions whereby the identity or integrity of the individual is not

threatened, Psychological Safety should be based on Identity Safety.⁴⁰ Identity Safety is the belief of the individual that his/her social identity - in terms of race, religion, ethnic group, gender, sex or any other - is recognized, welcomed and will not expose the child to risks in class.^{41,42}

An environment with Identity Safety recognizes the differences in social identity and treats these differences as a valuable source of ideas and perspective. It can, therefore, encourage the individual to share his/her emotions and experiences, to take risks and to raise ideas that would be kept to oneself in other environments.⁴³ In other words, an environment with Identity Safety adopts the perspective of value in diversity, instead of the perspective of color-blindness.

This notion is supported by social-psychology researchers who have found that people at risk of decreased value, in a group suffering from discrimination and exclusion, are attentive to hints regarding one's social identity as expressed by the organizational environment in a given institutional framework. Hints indicating ‘color-blindness’ (as opposed to the philosophy of ‘value in diversity’), together with a low representation of minorities in the institution, led Afro-Americans to perceive of threatening identity scenarios and to show a lack of trust towards the given framework. Institutions that ignored group diversity were perceived as threatening, since that hinted towards the framework's preference for typical similarity and behaviors usually connected to the dominant majority groups in society.^{44,45}

Due to the need for developing cultural Identity Safety, it is important for teachers to implement cultural competence in their interactions with parents and children of diverse groups. These ideas are supported by studies pointing to the positive contribution of cultural awareness and working with diverse populations to teacher family- engagement attitudes, knowledge and practices.³⁸

The characteristics of a teacher with are expressed in three areas: 1) cultural awareness - the teacher's awareness of her own ethnic origin and social class, her sensitivity to her personal values, prejudices and biases, and to the way in which these might affect her perception of the parents and their problems and her interaction with the parents; 2) cultural knowledge - the knowledge that the teacher has regarding the culture of the child and his/her family, the parents' worldview and their expectations from communication with the school 3) cultural skills - refers to the teacher's ability to lead educational interventions or therapy that relate to the social and cultural background of the child and his/her family.³⁵

Cross et al.,⁴⁶ claimed that cultural competence is a developmental process. Every institution or professional can place themselves on the continuum from the most negative extreme to the most positive. For example, in a situation of cultural incapacity, the system or institution do not have the desire and ability to help minority groups. They believe in the race and class supremacy of the dominant group and take a paternal stance towards the minority groups. In the middle of the continuum, cultural blindness indicates that the system and its agents provide services, believing themselves to be devoid of bias and prejudice, while they actually preserve an ethnocentric approach. They ignore cultural diversity and cultural strengths, while encouraging assimilation into the dominant culture, blaming the victims for their problems. At the high end of the continuum there are the institutions and professionals with cultural competence, characterized by acceptance and respect for the other; awareness of the dynamics of cultural differences and power play; ongoing dissemination of cultural knowledge; and implementing a variety of adjustments to clients of diverse social and cultural groups.

Cultivating safe educational partnership with parents in a diverse, polarized and changing society: A simultaneous work in three levels

An intra-personal level- Self-awareness, knowledge acquisition and constant intra-personal inquiry

In order for the teacher to cultivate safe communication with parents from diverse populations, he or she has to maintain positive attitudes and beliefs with regards to parental involvement, acquire cultural knowledge and be committed to ongoing intra-personal inquiry.³⁷ High self-awareness may help the teacher neutralize judgmental reactions and strengthen practical and professional behavior.

This learning and self-inquiry should be based on the following components

- 1. Acknowledging the importance of positive family-school communication and its contribution to children's achievements and inequality reduction** - the teacher should be aware to the importance of positive family-school communication and its contribution to children development and achievements and educational gaps reduction.
- 2. A transition from 'cultural blindness' to high self-awareness** – it is important that the teacher be aware of his/her own social position, prejudices and biases and constantly check their effect on his/her working processes and interactions with the children and their families.
- 3. Cultural knowledge acquisition** – It is essential that teachers should acquire knowledge about diverse social and cultural groups, including ethnic and religious minority groups, new families, and special needs families. They should be familiar with their history, customs, resources, attitude to authority and expectations from the communication with schools. Home visits are an efficient tool for this purpose.
- 4. Acknowledging social power relations, inequality and discrimination** – teachers should be aware of power relations between different groups in society and acknowledge the fact that there are groups suffering from inequality and discrimination in rights, opportunities and resource distribution. It is important for teachers to read updates articles and academic literature about racism, sexism, fobia against the LGBTQ community, stigma against people with disabilities, and understand how race, culture, religion, age, gender, sexual identity and special needs influence and shape family- school relationships.
- 5. Writing a reflective diary** - writing a reflective diary, based on documentation of practices, processes and products may be very helpful for the purpose of learning and constant self- inquiry.
- 6. An inter-personal level with the parents**

A careful preparation before personal meetings with parents from diverse groups

One of the significant keys for successful personal meetings with parents from diverse groups is suitable planning and preparation. It is important for the teacher to consider several significant aspects:

- 1. How is the encounter with the parent's part of the vision of the kindergarten/school, its policy and procedures, regarding communication with parents** - some schools encourage parental involvement more than others. The teachers should know what the educational institution's policy is regarding communication with parents in situations of routine, conflict and crises.

- 2. What are the settings, boundaries and nature of the discussion** - it is important to take into account its place, time, timing and duration. What is the nature of the discussion? Is it intended for feedback? It may be directed at solving a problem; disciplinary, directed towards updating the parents about the rules at the kindergarten/school; a more emotional discussion to understand at greater depth what the difficulties are of the child and the family; or their integration.

- 3. What are the goals of the discussion with the parents, what means are needed to achieve these goals** - the teacher has to determine the goal of the discussion in advance, for example - to report to the parents what the child's strengths or difficulties are; to request more ongoing communication via email; to know if something is happening at home; to hear if the parents have something they want to share.

- 4. What is the information that the teacher wishes to convey to the parents** - it is important to establish the information conveyed to the parents on data and behavioral descriptions. Hence, it is recommended that teachers conduct home visits, observations of the children at the kindergarten/school, use evaluation questionnaires and methodically document behaviors in advance.

- 5. Who is the parent, in a multi-cultural view** - what do I know about the parent, his/her social and cultural status? The structure of the family unit? Values? Specific difficulties? What knowledge do I lack? How should I obtain it? The teacher should become updated through articles and research literature on racism, sexism, LGBTQ-phobia, and understand how race, ethnic origin, culture, religion, gender, sexual preferences, age, physical limitations, etc. affect the parent-teacher interaction.

- 6. What emotions and attitudes, assumptions and prejudices does the encounter with the parents evoke in the teacher** - it is important that the teacher is aware of the emotions evoked by encountering a specific parent, as well as the biases, stereotypes and prejudices that might affect the his/her reactions when interacting with parents of diverse social and cultural groups.

- 7. Planning the strategy for coping with possible linguistic and cultural barriers and/or with conflicts in the discussion** - an efficient preparation should include the planning of strategies and tools for coping with situations that might raise conflicts or objections in the discussion. In cases of linguistic or cultural barriers, the teacher should consider assistance of an interpreter or cultural mediator from the community.

- 8. Consulting in advance with professionals if necessary** - in addition, prior to the discussion, it is important to consult with the relevant professionals from the Ministry of Education (educational counselor, educational psychologist, instructor, inspector) or the local authority and the community (social worker, truancy officer, etc.) or to invite them to the discussion, if necessary.

Use of communication strategies promoting a protected empathetic conversation and encouraging consent and cooperation

A protected conversation is a conversation where all sides feel comfortable to discuss complex and conflicting issues. A protected space is created by following agreed guidelines and using strategies enabling all participants to create dialogue in conditions of trust, protection and care.

Ideally, guidelines are produced collaboratively and are not imposed. The joint creation of practical guidelines leads to a greater understanding and commitment to adhering to the guidelines.⁴⁷ Therefore, it is recommended for the teacher to open a complex conversation with parents with the question: “what conditions should exist in this meeting in order for us to feel safe and comfortable to talk? “ These ideas are based on principles and practices of family therapy in general, and narrative therapy, in particular.⁴⁸ They were efficiently implemented in the “care-ful listening and protected conversations” program, between members of conflicting groups at schools in Israel.⁴⁷ They are also supported by recent studies which found efforts aimed at improving parent- teacher relationship through trust building and creating joint perspectives as well as communication strategies and collaborative planning and problem solving are key intervention components of the most effective teacher training programs focusing on parents- teachers relations.³⁸

Following are specific strategies for creating a protected conversation and encouraging agreement and cooperation

1. Listen from a knot-knowing stance. Avoid remarks or questions that are rhetorical, that make assumptions or that are based on interpretations.
2. Ask curious and appreciative questions in order to develop new understandings. For example: “What do you mean when you say....?” ; Can you give me an example...?”
3. Use experience close language. Talk in the first person and don't make generalizations.
4. Use externalized conversation, when talking about problematic situations – for example, “What is the situation for each of you?” or “What meaning does the situation have for you?” or “what name or names do you have for the situation? “
5. Develop alternative and preferred stories – search for exceptions to the rule of the “problem” or the “conflict”, point out emerging alternative preferred narratives.
6. Use communication strategies that encourage cooperation: asking the parents' opinion, emphasizing agreements, looking for joint solutions to controversy. Don't force upon the parents any solution for which they are not yet ready or with which they do not agree.

A proposal for a protocol of a conversation with parents, according to Safe Educational Partnership (SEP) model

The teachers should manage the conversation itself, according to the goals set, yet should also show flexibility and attentiveness to the parents at the encounter. They should define the problem together with the parents and look for joint solutions. The teachers should also relate to barriers in the discussion, with matter-of-fact empathy.

The teachers should take into account the self-awareness and cultural knowledge which they acquired in the planning stage, neutralizing judgmental attitudes, making adjustments where necessary and implementing culturally sensitive skills during the discussion. If required, a cultural mediator or interpreter should join the discussion. It is important to pay attention to body language and cultural differences regarding authority.⁴⁹

The following is a proposal for a protocol of a conversation with parents, according to Safe Educational Partnership (SEP) model. The protocol is based on the principles of the PTC parent – teacher

communication model³² combined with the principles of the “care-ful listening and protected conversations” program, aiming at creating dialogue between members of conflicting multi-cultural groups at schools.⁴⁷

1. A brief and pleasant social conversation opening, in order to “break the ice”: “How are you?”, “Very pleased to meet you”, expressing interest in the parents' workplace, other children in the family, etc.
2. Defining the discussion's goals and boundaries (duration of the discussion).
3. Joint formulation of guidelines for safe conversation, as part of coordination of expectations - It is recommended for the teacher to open a complex conversation with parents with the question: “what conditions should exist in this meeting in order for us to feel safe and comfortable to talk ? He/she should create together with the parents agreed practical guidelines for safe conversation and the ways to follow them.

The teacher should also consider that there are parents of ethnic minority groups who expect an authoritarian educational encounter where the hierarchy between the teacher and the parents is clearly maintained, and the definition of the problem and solutions are solely provided by the teacher.⁴⁶ Hence, the teacher - as part of the coordination of expectations - should mediate for the parents what the encounter structure is, ways of communication and work.

4. Listening to the parents' experience and position from a knot-knowing stance and gathering information by asking curious and appreciative questions – For example, “Please tell me how you experience the child at home”, “What do you think of your child's social/scholastic situation?”
5. Giving the parents data-based information, while relating to the points raised by the parents - The teacher gives the parents information, based on observations, data, facts and behavioral descriptions. While conveying the information, the teacher relates to the points raised by the parents in stage (4). It is important to start with positive points, to relate to the child's functioning and to show knowledge of the child's abilities, strengths and difficulties. Finally, the teacher sums up the information.
6. Relating to the parents' feelings - When the teacher identifies that a parent is emotionally flooded, the teacher should stop the discussion and relate empathically to the emotion itself: “I can see that this isn't easy for you, would you like to tell me about it?” By relating to their emotions, the parents can then relax and continue the discussion.
7. Showing a matter-of-fact empathy while coping with objections – it is important for the teacher to remain calm and to the point, without entering into power play. He/she should try to understand the parents' perspective and not take matters personally.
8. Joint definition of the problem and speculating about its reasons - it is important that each party tries to define the problem and raise possible reasons for it.
9. Joint search for solutions - the teacher should think together with the parents about possible ways of coping, culturally adapted to the home framework and to the kindergarten/school, in order to reach a solution acceptable by both sides. The more the parents are committed to the solution, the greater the possibility that they will make an effort to apply it. In addition, it is important to

divide the responsibility for implementation among all involved, the teacher, the parents and the child.

10. Summing up the discussion, confirming understanding and agreement - at the end of the discussion, the teacher sums up its goal, the main points raised and the division of responsibility among all sides. The teacher should confirm understanding and agreement over these points, especially where there may exist linguistic and cultural gaps.
11. Determining follow up - Deciding when the parties will meet again, what the pattern of communication will be (phone, email), what the education professional will report, what the parents will report, the frequency of communication, etc.^{50,51}

An organizational and institutional level - Cultivating Empowering organizational culture and designing educational environment promoting perspective of “value in diversity”, instead of “color-blindness”

Parents-teachers relationships are anchored within an ecological system of organizational, institutional and social- cultural contexts.⁴⁰ Specifically, family- school communication is influenced by the broad social context (division of power, money, resources and prestige between different groups in society) and by organizational and institutional contexts: the ministry of education, teacher education institutions and the educational institution itself (school/ kindergarten).

Accordingly, the establishment of safe educational partnership with parents from diverse groups is dependent on the answers to the following questions: is the Ministry of Education promoting a perspective of “value in diversity” or “color-blindness”? do Teacher Education Institutions train teacher students to work with parents in a diverse environment? To what extent do multicultural contents are integrated into the social and academic curricula? Are the educational staff and administration represented by people of diverse groups.? And so on.⁵²

Recent studies show that people at risk of decreased value, due to stigmatized social identity, are attentive to hints regarding one’s social identity as expressed by the organizational environment in a given institutional framework. Institutions that ignored group diversity and showed a low representation of minorities were perceived as threatening.^{44,45} Therefore, it is vital that the educational staff adopt a proactive and systemic approach to cultivate empowering and equal organizational culture and design educational environment promoting a perspective of “value in diversity”, instead of “color-blindness”. Here are some recommendations for the educational staff:

Cultivating empowering and equal organizational culture

1. The educational staff should be aware of the school policy and the processes blocking the success of minority groups pupils and create new mechanisms to identify pupils at- risk and improve their mobility.
2. The educational staff should pay special attention to practices of classification and application at the cultural organizational level, which discriminate against various groups. This includes, for instance, over-representation of the upper-middle socio-economic class in prestigious study tracks (sciences, gifted, etc.), or directing only boys to sports activities and technological subjects while girls are directed to arts, humanities and social sciences.

3. The educational staff and administration are represented by people of diverse groups.
4. Ensuring equal representation of parents from minority groups in the management and decision-making team.
5. Using inclusive language addressed to girls and boys, fathers and mothers, diverse families.
6. Forms - using un-gendered forms with the “name of the parent” instead of the “name of the father/mother”; verbal accessibility and translation of forms to different languages
7. Coping with intolerant behavior towards the other by parents, staff members and the peer group.
8. Cultivating social activism, contributing and helping others.
9. Creating support groups at the system level (kindergarten, municipal, regional) for diverse parent populations with shared needs.
10. Creating cooperation with community organizations. For example, associations of parents with special needs, the LGBTQ community, the Ethiopia-originating community, etc.
11. Training a case manager to mediate between the kindergarten/ school staff, the diverse families and various community bodies and organizations. The case manager will retain the information regarding the diverse family, making it accessible to the educational staff and the parents and will also counsel them

Designing educational environment promoting a perspective of “value in diversity”, instead of “color-blindness”

1. Designing a culturally sensitive educational environment, representing various populations (children from different cultures, diverse families, gender, special needs, etc.) through pictures, signs, music, objects, toys, games, etc.
2. Building a multicultural and gender- sensitive library Recognizing different learning styles of students and adjusting the teaching methods and curriculum accordingly.
3. Understanding that both parents are equal partners in communication with the educational staff. Hence, corrective preference should be cultivated to ensure that the father is considered equal to the mother in school-home relationships.
4. Organizing lectures to the educational staff and parents regarding issues such as gender and multiculturalism
5. Creating joint meetings with the parents, empowering the diverse cultures of the families, for example, by becoming acquainted with customs, dishes, rituals, etc.⁵³

Summary and discussion

The innovation and relevance of the model

The innovation and relevance of the model proposed, of educational safety partnership with parents, is expressed in its simultaneous observation of teacher-parent relationships through two lenses: the psycho-educational one and the socio-organizational. The goal of the model is to cultivate among teachers new integrative worldview, knowledge and practices regarding family- school relationships in a diverse and changing society: 1) awareness of power relations and inequality in society, self-management of personal

biases and prejudices and constant intra-personal inquiry ; 2) Usage of communication strategies promoting a protected conversation and encouraging consent and cooperation 3) practical guidelines for promoting empowering institutional culture and educational environment that evaluates diversity.

The model calls for a shift from ‘the child at the center’ approach to that of ‘the child and his/her family at the center’. Accordingly, the relational contract between parents and teachers must be reformulated so that the educational system is committed both to the child and to the family, recognizing that families of minority groups are families with diverse needs.¹³

At the same time, it demands from the educational system to move from a state of “cultural blindness” to “cultural competence”.⁴⁶

The model grants teachers an applicable relevant tool for conducting empathetic protected conversations with families from diverse groups, along with leading profound changes in school policy and culture and removing structural barriers. Implementing the model will provide students and their families an experience of safety and inclusion adapted to their unique needs, raise parents’ involvement and their sense of belonging, and improve the welfare, development and achievements of all students, including students from weakened populations.

The role of the ministry of education and teacher training institutions

Many countries, including Israel, have recently pledged in front of the United Nations¹⁰ that they would promote 17 sustainable development goals, among them: quality education, gender equality, and reducing inequalities. It is vital that the Ministry of Education will meet this obligation and translate it, in practice. The Ministry of Education must determine a clear policy regarding all aspects of parent-teacher relationships in a diverse and changing society, including protocols that detail working methods with families of diverse social groups. A clear policy of the Ministry of Education, together with protocols, will obligate teachers to work according to clear guidelines and professional standards, rather than leaving every case to the deliberations of the educational staff. Moreover, the policy and protocols will serve as anchors, a compass, for the educational staff in their dilemmas and queries.

Moreover, education for multiculturalism and gender equality must be a vital part of the teacher training process. Teacher training institutions should provide teacher students with the relevant knowledge, awareness and skills for working with parents in a diverse and changing society. An empowering and equal school climate combined with protected empathetic communication with parents from diverse groups are key factors to rehabilitating parents – teachers trust relations and reducing educational gaps and inequality processes, especially after the Covid19 crisis.

Limitations and recommendations

The model has not yet been evaluated empirically. We recommend building an intervention program, according to SEPP Model, including all 3 levels: intra-personal, inter-personal and institutional, and examine it empirically at schools and kindergartens. The suggested conversation protocol can be used to lead interactions with parents, at the inter-personal level. In addition, it is important to accompany the intervention program by research, in order to evaluate its contribution to teachers-parents partnership.

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Conflicts of interest

The author declares that they have no direct or indirect conflicts.

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