

Teachers' representations of the 'typical' parent

Loizos Symeou

European University Cyprus
Nicosia, Cyprus

Elena Stylianou

European University Cyprus
Nicosia, Cyprus

In this paper we present the findings of a study that investigates Greek-Cypriot teachers' visual representations of parents typically encountered in the course of teachers' daily professional practice. The study aims to identify which parents typically communicate with the school, to explore teachers-parents relationship as well as the ways in which parents' representations relate to the various demographic sub-groups of families encountered in Greek-Cypriot schools. After we briefly describe the social and educational context in which the study was implemented, we present the methodology that we followed, and discuss how drawings by 72 Greek-Cypriot pre- and in-service teachers of different school levels and of different teaching experiences represent the 'typical' parent. This methodological approach was used to gather visual data, alternatively to traditional interviews or observations. We then describe how the drawings and their accompanied text were analysed. The analysis of the data indicates that teachers typically encounter mothers rather than fathers; parents of the local ethnic-cultural dominant group (Greek-Cypriots), and rarely parents from other ethnic-cultural groups; middle class parents rather than working class parents; and higher educated rather than lower educated parents. The analysis of the data also points out that teachers are highly concerned with parents' image of them. We conclude by discussing how teachers' images seem to reflect the broader local parent and family profile and how these data could potentially enhance understanding of school-family relationships, thus allowing for suggestions about the ways in which teachers could be supported for collaborating with *all* families of the children they teach.

Keywords: teachers, parents, representations, visual methods, Cyprus

Introduction

School-family communication appears to be the most prevalent practice initiated by the schools aiming at linking them with their pupils' parents (Lightfoot 2003; Epstein and Sanders 2006; Symeou 2010). During their encounters, teachers and parents usually exchange information and ideas about the development and the progress of the children in school and at home (Pang and Watkins 2000; Symeou, Roussounidou, and Michaelides 2012; Wandersman, et al. 2002).

Various family and school factors appear to determine the nature and extent of school-family relationships. Women, whites, higher-income and better-educated persons tend to be more in contact with schools than their counterparts (Crozier 2000; Epstein 2001; Lareau 2000; Reay 1998; Symeou 2010; Vincent 1996). Families also may face different barriers and obstacles towards

their school involvement due to practical reasons relating to family and work conditions, as well as psychological reasons relating to parental low self-esteem, mistrust, anxiety, but also ignorance, misunderstanding, and confusion about the family's role (Epstein and Sanders 2006; Symeou 2010). Especially when referring to socially excluded parents, schools and teachers have both been criticised of treating families as a homogeneous group, remaining unaware of the demographic, practical and psychological variants in the body of families concerned, thus preventing specific families from getting involved into their children's school in the same active and efficient way (Crozier 2007; Lareau 2000; Symeou, Luciak, and Gobbo 2009; Tett 2004;). Even more, schools and teachers appear being unappreciative of the fact that many parents provide various home-based forms of school related support and consider non-coming parents as apathetic or indifferent (Bakker, Denessen, and Brus-Laeven 2007; Crozier 2000; Reay 1998; Symeou 2010).

This paper presents the findings of a study that investigated Greek-Cypriot teachers' image of the

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Loizos Symeou, e-mail: L.Symeou@euc.ac.cy

'typical' parent. By identifying the profile of the parent who teachers encounter in the course of their daily professional practice, the study aimed to explore the degree to which teachers communicate with parents in general, and, in particular, to identify the different and diverse demographic sub-groups of families represented in Greek-Cypriot schools they communicate with. After we briefly describe the distinct social and educational context in which the study was implemented, we present and discuss the analysed visual data collected from Greek-Cypriot teachers who were asked to draw their image of the 'typical' parent who they encounter in their daily professional practice. We then discuss how these representations reflect the broader profile of the local parent and other relevant family characteristics and how teachers seem to perceive their relationships with their pupils' parents, as well as how these findings could potentially enhance our understanding of school-family relationships and particularly how teachers could be supported to collaborate with *all* families.

The educational context

Education in the Greek-Cypriot educational school system, wherein this study was conducted, is provided through pre-primary and primary schools, secondary general, and secondary technical/vocational schools, special schools, institutions of tertiary education and non-formal institutions and centres. Education is mostly public, but there is also a number of private, self-funded institutions, the latter also being liable for supervision by the Ministry of Education and Culture. Education is free for all students through the age of 18 and compulsory until completion of lower secondary school (Gymnasium) at the age of 15. The educational system is highly centralised (Educational Reform Committee 2004; Karagiorgi and Symeou 2006). Centralised structures of educational administration, curriculum planning and development and policy-making derive from political and economical concerns (Persianis, 1998).

Largely due to the centralised educational context, school-family relationships in the Greek-Cypriot educational system appear marginalised in the agendas of policy and practice. The lack of any recent legislative action in relation to the issue is indicative of the lack of substantial relations between families and schools. Research in the field, which is conducted mainly within elementary

education, is limited. Current school-family links are largely determined by the activity of schools' Parents Association (PA), formally named the 'Parents and Guardians Association'. These are voluntary associations elected by an annual general meeting of each school's parents and guardians. The PA's responsibility is to fund some school events and occasionally poor students, using money they collect from events they organize during non-school time or during Christmas celebrations. The PAs do not participate in any educational decisions or policy-making, but parents' representatives at a national level constitute a significant power-group that manages to influence the official educational policy.

A distinctive institution of the state Greek-Cypriot educational system is the Parents' Weekly Visiting Period. Regulations that go back to the foundation of the first schools in 1960 specify schools to have one weekly period on each class's timetable when parents and guardians can visit their child's teacher/s to be informed about their child's school attainment and discuss with the teacher any relevant issues. Teachers would typically expect parents to come to the school for these short briefings on a one-to-one basis. The aim of these contacts is to provide families with information about their children's academic progress and behavior, about the schools' function, and how families can support the school's work (Symeou, 2010).

Schools also establish informal teacher-parent contacts, the extent and nature of which depend on the culture of the school itself and the initiatives of the families. Such relationships are the informal communication between parents and the school or the teachers and parents' visits to the school to attend school events and social activities. There are moreover, opportunities for parents to volunteer in non-educational activities, for example, in offering breakfast to students, repairing and preserving school equipment, and so on.

The study's methodology

The sample and the data collection method

The data set presented in this paper includes the visual representations of the 'typical' Cypriot parent gathered from 72 Greek-Cypriot teachers of different school levels and different teaching experience during a series of courses on school-family relations in 2010-2014. The courses were attended by teachers of all levels -pre-primary, primary, secondary, vocational schools. The

teachers' sample, even though opportunistic (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison 2000), could be considered reflective of the key teacher variables/parameters, determinant of teacher population composition in Cyprus (level of teaching, gender, teaching experience, district of school, private and public educational sector).

Teachers who participated in the courses were called to individually draw the 'typical' parent. They were also encouraged to use additional written brief comments, signs, and clues depicting some of the parent's characteristics (such as outwards appearance, gestures, age, gender, socioeconomic status, style, values, etc). More specifically, during the first session of the courses, teachers were provided a piece of paper with the following written guidelines: "On this paper draw the image of the typical case of parent you have in mind. Try to depict his/her characteristics, like outwards appearance, stance, gestures, age, gender, socio-economic status, style, values, etc. If you want, you may complement your drawing with written comments, notes, symbols etc, in order to depict the image you have in mind as accurately as possible". Teachers were then provided approximately half-an-hour to prepare their sketches.

Drawing was adopted as a visual method of collecting data and important in providing information about the teachers' perceptions as much as about the social landscape within which these perceptions are formed, enacted and often transformed. Images have abundantly impacted on the ways in which we live, experience life, understand experience, and construct meaning. Especially, since W.J.T Mitchell's (1994) establishment of a *pictorial turn*, we are more than ever before aware of the fact that images, as language previously did, have been established as central to the interpretation of culture and social life. While arguments still remain relevant to the ways one could start studying images, to their relationship to language, and how they can be a useful tool in social science research (Rose, 2007), more recently various technologies (digital, virtual and augmented reality technologies, etc.) allowed for an ever-greater production of images that led to a flood of the visual in all facets of everyday experience. More so, social medial has led to an abundance of images in ways previously unimaginable. This has ultimately forced a shift of our priorities to the visual over other senses (Knowles and Sweetman, 2004) and has put urgency upon the use, study and adoption of

images. A recorded renewed interest in the visual has similarly been witnessed in research. Even though using visual data for research has been an integral part of the methodologies of various fields, especially geography, sociology and anthropology since the nineteenth century, this has only recently gained significance in younger fields such as cultural studies, visual and material culture, while finding its lost appeal to the social sciences, especially social anthropology (Knowles and Sweetman, 2004; Rose, 2007).

Among the most popular of all visual material in visual research are photographs, video and film. Especially photographs are considered to be a means to "help 'place' or 'ground' sociological discourse and add another dimension to the arguments they pursue" (Payne 1996, as cited in Knowles and Sweetman 2004: 3). In our paper, we similarly consider that drawings of people, as a highly subjective form of representation of events, people, characters, situations, and places can provide insights to ways of understanding, to biases, conceptions and misconceptions of real social situations. As such, they are thus important in gaining insight into people's ideas of the social landscape, ideologies, and personal prejudices and misconceptions. Following a post-structuralist perspective, visual material in our study was adopted as an important element of social research since "images help to *construct* reality: they operate as part of a regime of truth, while performing a central role in the surveillance and management of individuals and populations" (Knowles and Sweetman 2004: p. 5). Thus, in this study, drawings of pre- and in-service teachers about the 'typical' parent are used as a way of gaining access, beyond individual conceptions and beliefs, to the wider local social landscape of parent-teacher and family-school relations.

Although mainly based on visual material and its analysis, participating teachers were encouraged to include small phrases, words or any type of brief text to assist and support their drawing/illustration of the typical parent. The text in these cases becomes an integral element of the analysis of the image and possibly important in demonstrating a broader validity of the drawn images. The question of how misleading or inadequate these drawings would be to stand alone in providing insight to the teachers' beliefs, appeared to be an issue as indicated from the analysis of the drawings. Without the textual information accompanying the drawings, albeit small, the analysis would often be missing

important aspects of the profile of the typical parent, and which teachers appeared unable to indicate through drawing, such as age, social status, and education background of parent or emotional condition. This observation further supports the limitation of drawing as a visual research method but also the importance of the relationship between the visual and the textual in this research process.

The appreciation, production and interpretation of images in Euro-American contexts have been hugely interconnected to language even though 'reading' a visual image sometimes requires more effort than reading the written word. Although in the practice of visual arts it is often believed that produced images have an intrinsic quality (or internal truth), in the adoption of produced images in research these are viewed as highly influenced by the context of their production. As Banks maintains, images are inseparable from their external narrative, the social context in which they are produced, their materiality, and the social relations within which the image is embedded at the time of viewing (Banks 1998; 2011). In this project, images are viewed as a way of communicating between the teachers and the researchers.

What was also of interest in our study is the ways in which people are reading or interpreting these images after production -including the researchers themselves. Audiences 'read' an image (its internal narrative) based on social conventions: in those ways in which they were taught to 'read' an image (Banks, 2011; Barthes 1977; Berger 1972). So, beyond looking at the images, investigating the process of reading them can also often provide significant information about these exact social conventions. Even though this is not particularly emphasized in our analysis of the data, it could be a point of departure for future research. Instead, for the purposes of this research project, the emphasis is directed toward the 'reading' of the images produced by the teachers in relation to the text that accompanies most of them.

Data analysis

In order to analyse the collected drawings we adopted visual methods as defined by Knowles and Sweetman, namely "to include ways of *doing* research that generate and employ visual material as an integral part of the research process, whether as a form of data, a means of generating further data, or a means of representing 'results'"

(2004: 5). Contrary to them, and beyond producing visual data as part of the process, which in this case is by adopting *drawing* as a method, our project went further as to adopt additional forms of analysis such as qualitative content analysis, which put the visual data in the focus of attention.

Initially, all drawings were analyzed based on keywords defined through a preliminary close reading of all produced drawings and in direct relation to the instructors given to teachers prior the activity. Teachers were asked to draw the image of the "typical" parent by emphasizing his/her appearance, stance, gestures, age, gender, socio-economic status, style, values, etc. and to use small text and/or phrases to make their depiction as accurate as possible. The generated categories for the final visual analysis (see Appendix: Table 1) were produced based on the above keywords and they reflect similarities and common themes and trends that emerged from the abovementioned preliminary analysis. These categories include: parents' gender; overall drawing of the parent; body language; facial expressions; overall context of the drawing of the parent; dress code which was further analyzed based on elements showing wealth and religion; thoughts; the relation of the parent to the child; and the relation of the parent to the teacher.

Even though the drawings were about individual ideas, they are more importantly means of accessing the socio-cultural and political framework within which this research project took place and are considered to be very specific to this exact framework. Thus, the above categories and observations from the analysis of the drawings were later considered in relation to the social landscape in which they emerged and in relation to already-established literature in the field. This was important for identifying issues that could be confirmed or more importantly contradict current literature and draw some preliminary conclusions about parent-teacher and parent-school relations as these emerge in the framework of Cyprus.

As Knowles and Sweetman (2004) argue, when adopting visual methods, it is important to ask about the things that images are able to tell us about the things that we do not already know. The challenge faced is to draw connections between the individual and the social, or the local and the international, while maintaining as neutral as possible in our analysis. It is often the case that our readings of images are pre-scribed (Banks 2011), based on our own personal understandings

of both the subject of study and the socio-cultural landscape in which the investigation takes place (in this case as natives of this landscape) and it is important to maintain a distance throughout the analysis. As Saussure argued, the study of human behavior needs to “focus on the functions events have within a general social framework. It must treat social facts as part of a system of conventions and values” (in Culler 1987: 16).

Semiology in our analysis is adopted loosely, as a way of emphasizing the importance of the relationship between various elements in single drawings and how these relationships might provide insights to teachers’ individual perceptions, ideas and biases regarding the ‘typical’ parent. Semiology as a research paradigm in which existing images are regarded as texts, proves to be useful here for it allows for an investigation of those messages that might have a wider cultural significance and shed light to parent-teacher and parent-school relations. So, single drawings from the samples were selected, based on the degree of their detail, and were further analysed using a combination of content analysis and semiology, albeit avoiding the strict breakdown of each image into particular signs and signifiers or an analysis of the iconic, indexical and symbolic meaning of each sign. Instead, following Saussure’s conviction regarding the social and cultural specificity of signs, we focused on emerging relationships between parents and teachers, based on the selection of a single sign: the image of the parent, and how it functioned through its relative position with the rest of the drawing (Saussure 1915/2011). For instance, in some of the drawings as shown in the examples below (Figure 1 and Figure 2), despite the specific guidelines provided to teachers for the drawing activity, teachers also represented themselves, either in an indirect way (parents talking to teachers even though teachers are not in the immediate picture frame, parents thinking of conversations with teachers) or in a more direct representation (the teacher is also drawn).

The analysis of this reveals a rather complex relationship between teachers and parent as further discussed in the findings.

Findings of the study

The findings from the analysis of the collected data indicated that teacher participants represented in very similar ways the parent they

Στον πιο κάτω χώρο ζωγραφίστε την εικόνα ενός τυπικού γονιού. Προσπαθήστε να αποτυπώσετε χαρακτηριστικά του/της, όπως εμφάνιση, στάση, χειρονομίες, ηλικία, φύλο, κοινωνικο-οικονομικό επίπεδο, στυλ, αξίες, κ.ά. Αν θέλετε, πλαισιώστε το σκίτσο σας με λεκτικά σχόλια, σημειώσεις, σημάδια για να ενδυναμώσετε την εικόνα που έχετε στο μυαλό σας.



Figure 1.

Στον πιο κάτω χώρο ζωγραφίστε την εικόνα ενός τυπικού γονιού. Προσπαθήστε να αποτυπώσετε χαρακτηριστικά του/της, όπως εμφάνιση, στάση, χειρονομίες, ηλικία, φύλο, κοινωνικο-οικονομικό επίπεδο, στυλ, αξίες, κ.ά. Αν θέλετε, πλαισιώστε το σκίτσο σας με λεκτικά σχόλια, σημειώσεις, σημάδια για να ενδυναμώσετε την εικόνα που έχετε στο μυαλό σας.



Figure 2.

typically encounter during their day-to-day professional practice. A compelling finding, although expected, was that participant teachers represented mothers rather than fathers as the parent they would typically encounter. Out of the 72 drawings, only 6 were drawings showing the father. Teacher participants from all school levels were found to encounter mothers more than fathers, thus confirming previous findings in Cyprus (Phtiaka 1998; Symeou 2002) and internationally (Crozier 2000; Epstein 2001; Lareau 2000; Reay 1998) that connection with

school is largely perceived as a female role and men are maintaining a greater distance from schools. Despite recent changes in family characteristics, such as the rise of a “fatherhood movement” that leads to an increased male involvement in schools, as well as the increased full-time employment of mothers that has already led to a substantial decline in the total number of families able to be involved in schools, as well as the expectation that these changes may eventually alter the abovementioned pattern, mothers in Cyprus still appear to be the typical case of parent that teachers encounter, according to this study’s findings.

Middle class parents were represented in the teacher participant drawings to be communicating and contacting teachers more often than working class parents. By paying attention to detail, especially relating to what the parents in the drawings were wearing (Figure 3), the typical parent represented appeared belonging to middle to upper class rather than from the lower economic strata. This was particularly shown by their expensive accessories (brands such as Gucci, Fendi, etc.), and by being represented showing attuned to fashion (thus revealing their wide interest toward consumerism and commodities).

Moreover, the parents represented in this way were described as wealthy parents in the urban centres, compared to the less represented parents from the less affluent social strata who were indicated more to be in schools in rural areas. For instance, in one of the drawings, the mother looks completely indifferent about the teacher and the school; instead she appears only caring about shopping and she is presented amidst numbers of shopping bags and brands.

This finding again confirms local and international findings stating that higher-income families are more in contact with schools than those of a lower socioeconomic status, and who are consistently found to be less commonly involved in schools (Lareau, 2000; Reay, 1998; Symeou, 2010; Vincent, 1996).

A less expected finding of the study was that of the representation of the parent cultural group. Despite the increasing number of immigrant families in Cyprus¹ and the growing number of students from other ethnic-culture groups in

schools,² teachers seem to only represent the typical parent as a Greek-Cypriot parent. Interestingly enough, parents were rarely drawn in relation to their ethnic-cultural background, indicating that teachers might lack any

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Figure 3.

information about this particular aspect of the family situation. This might also indicate a lack of interest from the teachers about where these parents come from, a sense of indifference – even a stereotypical misconception of homogeneity among families – and thus justifying why there are no signs of diverse ethnic-cultural groups among the representations. In more specific, the representation of the dominant ethnic-cultural group and of a dismissal of any other minority was illustrated through: a) the lack of any indicative elements relating to a different religion or culture (dress code, headscarf, other objects); b) the lack of facial characteristics that might illustrate a different ethnic group (even as a simplified,

¹ Cyprus has a population of 840,407 of which 170,383, i.e. 20.3% are non-nationals, namely EU citizens and third country nationals (Cyprus Statistical Service, 2012).

² In primary education 2011-12 the 13.2% of the student population constituted non-national students and approximately 0.5% indigenous minority students (MoEC, 2013), whereas in 2010-11, 8.7% of the secondary education student body were non-national students and approximately 0.6% were indigenous minorities (Cyprus Statistical Service, 2012).

stereotypical representation); and c) the lack of any text other than Greek-Cypriot in those cases that parents were drawn with a bubble text over their head as if talking to the teacher. This finding confirms the distance kept from school by parents and families from other than the majority ethnic-cultural group both in Cyprus (Symeou, Karagiorgi, Roussounidou, and Kaloyirou 2009; Theodorou and Symeou 2013) and internationally (Crozier 2007; Lareau 2000; Symeou, Luciak, and Gobbo 2009; Tett 2004).

Instead, the only reference to a different minority ethnic group is in one drawing (Figure 4) in which a woman is identified as a "maid" in the house, trying to prepare for school what appears to be a "difficult" child in the morning, as his parents cannot wait to go off to work, with a remarkable "X" sign covering both of their mouths, while tears running off her cheeks show her despair as she is asking – in broken Greek – to return to her home country (as shown in the text in the bubble). This image, the only one – speaks of a new condition, of a new type of uprising middle-class family in Cyprus, that always employs women, usually from Asia, as help at home, since both parents work long hours. At the same time, it indicates that many times, unfortunately, the working conditions of these women are not ideal (they are paid very low

wages, they are treated with disrespect from the families and children they take care of, they tend to take care of all household tasks along with the care of the children and so on). It also, of course, reveals a common understanding, which might or might not be accurate, that these women are not happy in the houses where they work, missing their home country.

Figure 4.

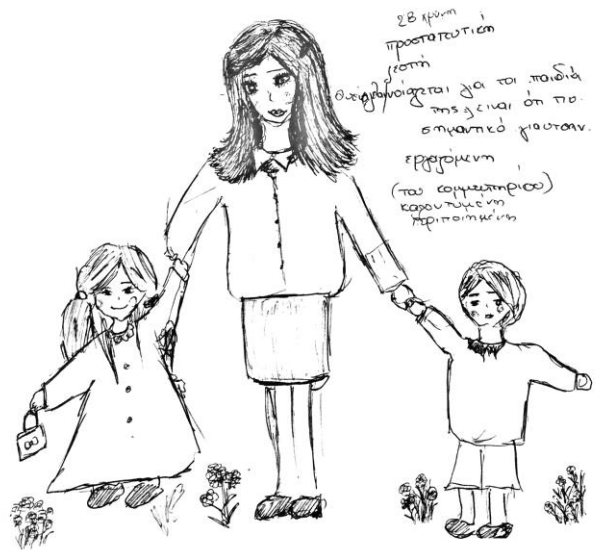
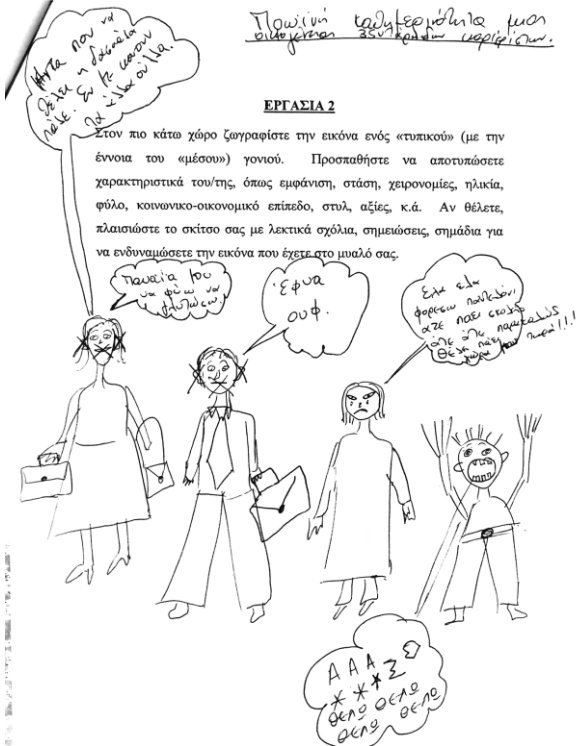


Figure 5.

Στον πιο κάτω χώρο ζωγραφίστε την εικόνα ενός τυπικού γονιού. Προσπαθήστε να αποτυπώσετε χαρακτηριστικά του/της, όπως εμφάνιση, στάση, χειρονομίες, ηλικία, φύλο, κοινωνικο-οικονομικό επίπεδο, στυλ, αξίες, κ.ά. Αν θέλετε, πλαισιώστε το σκίτσο σας με λεκτικά σχόλια, σημειώσεις, σημεία για να ενδυναμώσετε την εικόνα που έχετε στο μυαλό σας.



Figure 6.

As shown in Table 1 (see Appendix) in Category: 'Relation to Child', teachers in all groups tended to think that parents are over-protective toward their children. In many drawings the child is drawn in the picture despite the fact that the guidelines of the drawing activity did not ask for this. In all these cases the child is shown in relation to his/her mother: either behind her and always smaller and in some cases holding her hand, an indication of caring, direction or protection (Figure 5); in relation to her regarding homework (Figure 6); or as part of the thoughts of the mother revealing perhaps over-protectiveness and constant worries.

Moreover, as shown in Category: 'Body Language' and 'Facial Expression' (see Appendix, Table 1), most drawings show the parents with arms slightly open to the side (palms facing up) and a smile (Figure 7). These might be signs of a level of acceptance for the teachers/school or happiness, but the accompanying text reveals that this is not really the case. Instead, the text indicates that even though smiling, the parents are ready to criticize the teacher, defend their child, and argue. In most cases these open arms show questioning, worrying, anxiety, and so on.

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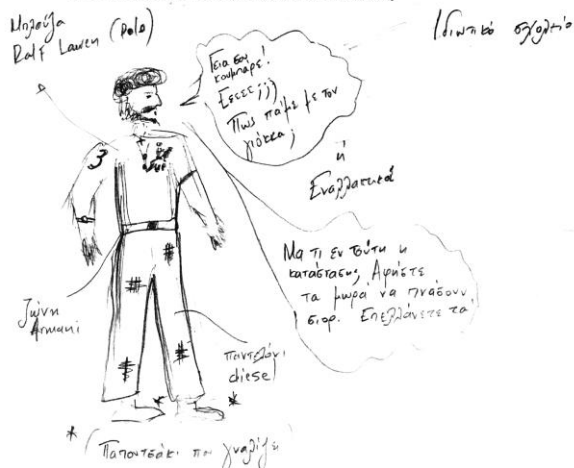


Figure 7.

This is also evident in other drawings in which parents have their arms clenched to their bodies. Thus, parents' illustrated body language indicates

that according to teachers, most parents worry about their child's academic performance and behaviour or about the teacher's opinion. Overall, parents' clenched arms close to the body, animated hands, their palms facing up, raised eyebrows and in some cases open mouth, all seem to be signs of anxiety, worry or stress. Parental anxiety and ignorance, diffusion and confusion about the families' role are some of the psychological signs sent consciously or unconsciously by parents when they talk about their children, their schools and their teachers (Symeou, 2010).

Finally, what is of interest is the representation of the relationship between teacher and parent as this emerges from the analysis of the drawings. Although teachers were only asked to draw the image of the typical parent, their final drawings, in a number of cases, include an illustration of a direct or an indirect relation between parent and teacher. In these cases, parents' attitudes are often presented to be critical towards the teachers despite the parents' seemingly overall positive behaviour (as discussed in the previous point). Many parents appear critical of educators for various reasons and their perceptions have been documented as consisting psychological barriers for many group of parents to contact the school and collaborate with parents (Symeou, 2010). This is a finding that could possibly not have emerged if teachers were asked to use a mere written response. Instead, in these drawings teachers reveal that they are most concerned with the parents' image of them. In some cases, teachers' drawings of parents present parents as aggressive and slightly obnoxious (as in Fig. 7 above) and in a position of possible defense and reservation towards the school and the teachers' comments.

These implicit power relations in teachers' drawings reveal that teachers are well aware of parents' criticisms and are positioned slightly defensively toward them, simultaneously pointing to a level of insecurity and vulnerability. As elsewhere, teachers seem to fear family interaction as questioning their professional expertise, and their traditional authority and status, and thus might establish a distance from families in order to safeguard their own positions (Vincent, 1996).

Discussion

Through teachers' visual representations, this study investigated Greek-Cypriot teachers' image

of the 'typical' parent with whom they encounter in the course of their daily professional practice. Drawing was adopted alternatively to traditional interviews or observations as a visual method of collecting data information about teachers' perceptions but also about the social landscape within which these perceptions were formed, enacted and transformed. The findings of the study largely correspond to findings in other educational systems and contribute in illuminating current realities concerning the issue in Cyprus and to the international exchange of ideas and practices in the area of school-family relationships. Quite importantly, the findings of this study validate similar existing studies which have used other research methods for answering similar research questions.

More specifically, the study's findings indicate what other research has documented, that despite the widely accepted agreement among researchers that a school culture which supports active family engagement in school, accompanied by the actual active engagement of the family, can bring about improvement in children's school performance and attainment, this findings needs to take into consideration that, in practice, it is not all families that have strong relationships with their children's schools. Our study, as others elsewhere and previously in Cyprus, highlights that in comparing demographic characteristics, higher-income and middle class parents are more in contact with schools than their counterparts, and that lower socioeconomic status families and working class parents appear to be less commonly involved in schools (Lareau, 2000; Reay, 1998; Symeou, 2010; Vincent, 1996;). In addition, teacher participants in this study confirm teachers' and school's distance from parents and families other than the majority ethnic-cultural group both in Cyprus (Symeou, Karagiorgi, Roussounidou, and Kaloyirou 2009; Theodorou and Symeou 2013) and internationally (Crozier 2007; Lareau 2000; Symeou, Luciak, and Gobbo 2009; Tett 2004). Despite the increasing number of immigrant families in Cyprus and the growing number of students from other ethnic-culture groups in schools, teachers seemed to only represent the typical parent as the parent belonging to the local ethnic-cultural dominant group, namely as Greek-Cypriot, and never from other ethnic-cultural groups. Moreover, the teacher participants in this study confirm that within families, mothers seem to get involved more than fathers in matters relating to the child's

schooling and that they typically encounter mothers rather than fathers. Connection with school is thus presented in our study as a female role and men were rarely appearing in the scene, indicating a possible trend towards maintaining a greater distance from schools.

Highly interestingly, this study points out that teachers are strongly concerned with parents' image of themselves. The representation of the relationship between teacher and parent as this emerged from the analysis of the drawings revealed parents' position of possible defense and reservation towards the school and the teachers' comments, but also parents' critical attitudes towards the teachers and in some cases parents' aggressive and slightly obnoxious stance towards teachers. This finding again corresponds to previous findings demonstrating that parents appear critical of teachers for various reasons. Parental self-esteem, mistrust, anxiety and ignorance, misunderstanding, diffusion and confusion about the families' role are some of these reasons (Symeou, 2010). Many families also may see schools as a cold and threatening environment and consider school communication as synonymous with 'bad news'; others associate school with their own experiences as pupils, and others feel intimidated by educational jargon, 'sophisticated' educators and the system. Many families refer to indifferent or antagonistic attitudes on the part of school personnel and see themselves as being inhibited and repelled by schools and teachers who adopt a purely business-like approach showing little interest in their views (Epstein, 2001). Families may also consider some school practices as intrusions in their personal life. Such perceptions appear as psychological barriers for parents and limit the impact and influence of effective school-family interventions.

In addition, the implicit power relations in teachers' drawings reveal that teachers are well aware of the parents' criticisms and are positioned slightly defensively toward them, simultaneously pointing to a level of insecurity and vulnerability. Thus, participant teachers appear to relate to their pupils' parents with hesitancy and to maintain ambiguous attitudes towards them. As elsewhere, teacher participants in our study seem to fear family interaction as questioning their professional expertise, and their traditional authority and status, and thus might establish a distance from families in order to safeguard their own positions (Vincent, 1996). Many factors might relate to teachers' hesitancy and ambiguous attitudes.

Teachers might fear family interaction as questioning their professional expertise, and their traditional authority and status. They might feel overwhelmed by parental problems, and fear that family involvement will exert increasing demands, undue pressure, and higher expectations upon them, particularly from articulate parent groups, minority parent groups, or parents from cultural and linguistic backgrounds that are different from their own (McBride & Lin, 1996). Teachers' prior experiences working with parents may also influence their attitudes and practices. Other teachers fear that ultra-conservative community attitudes can inhibit innovations and worsen educational standards, and others may maintain low expectations for families' follow-up efforts, the complexity, formality, impersonality and centralisation of the public school system, lack of time, basic resistance to change, difficulty in relating to some parents, and so on (Symeou, 2010). Conclusively, our study may suggest that among the things that deeply affect teachers is their personal relationship to parents as much as parents' image of them, which might in the end affect the balance and successful relationship between teachers and parents.

The study could underpin broader theoretical considerations on the issue of teacher-family collaboration in Cyprus and could contribute to future investigations of the field to broader local and international discussions. The implications stemming from the study's findings link to concerns about the importance of all families' collaboration with their children's schools and teachers. In more specific, the study revealed existing perspectives of teachers regarding parents and their own representations of parents as these derive from their current contacts, thus providing the necessary knowledge for reflecting and action upon collaborating with all school families. During any such attempt, the lack of homogeneity among parents' and families' profiles, as described in this study, must be taken under serious consideration.

As a final note, the study contributes to existing literature methodologically. Drawings, instead of traditional interviews or observations, may not be an innovative methodology but it served well the research purposes of this study. As it appeared in the study, even though emotional conditions are difficult to be presented in drawings, and drawings could not be read autonomously as the only method of gathering data, the study's findings contradict earlier

assumptions about drawings as a possibly unnecessary method of research, if and when text is involved. Even under specific guidelines, the participants in this study diverted to include elements that are deeply affecting them, emotionally and psychologically. While these emerged in the drawing activity, it is possible that these might have never been so explicit in textual discourse.

At the same time, drawings – as a data collection method – have limitations. Although the act of drawing is similar to taking photographs and filming, in that it is a subjective activity based on selection, abstraction and interpretation, it is also an activity with which few people are familiar or accustomed to. Most people tend to think that drawing requires certain skills or talent and they are overthrown by the difficulties implied by such assumption. Indeed, a lot of the drawings that were part of the data sample in this study lacked detailed information and participants often resort to line drawings of figures that can tell little of what these people actually think or imagine the typical parent to be. Instead, teachers used textual information to indicate all the things that had difficulties drawing, such as age, educational background, social status and emotional condition; an understandable choice since people are more familiar with expressing thoughts and ideas through textual or verbal language rather than a visual one.

Also, drawing emotions, feelings or attitudes, is indeed a very difficult task, even for people who are familiar with drawing or have drawing skills. For instance, facial expressions of the drawings in the samples cannot always be indicative of teachers' beliefs regarding the complex emotions parents have, as indicated by the accompanying text. So, it is difficult to distinguish whether a 'smiley face' means that parents maintain a friendly attitude while being critical of teachers, or whether they are indeed happy with the school system or whether this is the result of lack of drawing skills and because participants find it much easier to draw a 'smiley face'.

Even if people have good drawing skills, or skills that allow them to represent their beliefs, the act of drawing itself as a form of representation is discrete and thus, highly subjective and possibly misleading. As Banks mentions, drawings, paintings, photographs and films are "the products of intentionality" and as all "sensory experience the interpretation of sight is culturally and historically specific" (Banks, 2011:

7). Other theorists have similarly argued over the years that all visual material needs to be located in its particular culture of production and habits of viewing (i.e. Adorno 1997; Barthes 1977; Berger 1972; Debord 1995). It is this exact quality though, that exhibits drawings in this study as a good source of information regarding their social specificity, whilst maintaining at all times that what we can reach is not a singular truth but rather interpretations of social conditions. Some would say that the necessity of text in the analysis, and the limitations posed by drawing as a research method of collecting data, might confirm concerns of many regarding adopting visual methods. Some might ask, why should one even employ drawing if all information about teachers' perceptions of the typical parent could instead be easily provided through a mere short

written description. However, drawing or visual material in general provide information that the text could have ignored, as much as the other way around. Often drawings include elements that lay in the subconscious and are not readily available through language. For instance, investigating adornment, details on clothes or hair, but more importantly the positioning of the child or of the parent in relation to the teacher in these drawings are just a few of the things that could provide information that mere written description fails to do. As Foucault argues: "It is not that words are imperfect, or that, when confronted by the visible, they prove insuperably inadequate. Neither can be reduced to the other's terms: it is in vain that we say what we see; what we see never resides in what we say" (1994: 9).

Appendix

Table 1.
Analysis of Drawings as Groups

	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	Group 4
IMAGE	13 drawings	17 drawings	24 drawings	18 drawings
Gender	Only one of the drawings represents a father	Only two of the drawings represent a father	Only one is a drawing of a father	Two drawings of a father and two drawings showing the whole family (one of them has a child with brain damage)
Overall drawing of the parent	Three drawings are incomplete (show only the face and torso of parent). One is a line figure drawing but most of them have details (except from one) and two are drawn in profile.	One drawing shows complete absence of drawing (only arrows around an imaginary figure and text). Two drawings are incomplete, showing only the face of the parent and two others are line drawings. Another drawing has no facial characteristics. No drawings shows the parent in profile.	These drawings are much more detailed – especially in relation to the dress codes, accessories and hair of the parent – and are all complete in their representations. All drawings are enface.	These drawings are detailed – even though not as much as the Group 3. Two images are incomplete (show only the face of the parent) and three show a figure in profile.
Body language	In six drawings the parent has arms close to the body. In one the folded arms in front of her body show she is conservative and reserved (indicated by the text as well). In two of the drawings the open arms seem to be like a happy waving whereas in two others the open arms, palms up might show a sign of concern. In the drawing of the father, this is affirmed by the text (ζητώ τη βοήθεια σας)	Most drawings represent the parent with clenched arms close to the body. Only few are a bit more animated with open arms – possibly showing some type of openness in their attitudes toward the school or towards the child, even though the text indicates that in four out of six the open arms are expressions of anxiety towards the child's academic performance or about what the teacher might tell them. In one the text indicates that open arms are possibly because of the mother's nice character and the last is an indication of arrogance (text: “κυκλοφορώ και σπλοφορώ”)	Most drawings show the parents with arms slightly open to the side (palms facing up) and a smile showing a level of acceptance for the teachers/school (9 out 24). Four drawings show the parent (including the one of the father) a bit stiff with a more strict face, indicating perhaps criticism or discontentment or worry. Three drawings show more directly the parent's worries or anxiety by presenting them with crossed arms in front of their bodies and worried face. Five drawings show the parent with arms either in their back, in their pockets and in a position of possible defense and reservations towards the schools and the teachers' comments. The other three drawings show the parent in action (talking on her cellphone, taking her kids to/from school and studying with him at home).	Most drawings show the parents with arms slightly open to the side (palms facing up) and a smile showing a level of acceptance for the teachers/school (8 out 18) or happiness. Again this is misleading since the accompanying text reveals that only in one case the parent is happy. In all other cases these open arms show questioning, worrying, anxiety etc. Which is also evident in two other drawings in which the parents have arms clenched to their bodies. All other six drawings represent the parent as more animated but again the text reflects their anxieties (movement as part of anxiety, fear, worries etc)

TEACHERS' REPRESENTATIONS OF THE 'TYPICAL' PARENT

Facial Expressions	Most of the drawings (10/13) show the parent (the father among them) smiling. Two show concern (straight line for lips and round circle showing surprise (the text indicates that she is surprised of the amount of take home assignments)	Most drawings represent the parent as worried with a straight mouth or even wide-open eyes or raised eyebrows (8/17), showing concern. Four drawings show the parents smiling but the accompanying text suggests that this is a sign of politeness rather than happiness. Only two drawings show the parent being happy while the text in these cases shows that happiness derives from their children's excellence in school	In 16 out of 27 the mother is presented with a smile, albeit a reserved and polite one. The text also indicates that even though smiling the parents are ready to criticize the teacher, defend their child, and argue. Only in a few cases (four or five) the smile seems to be genuine as a sign of good will for cooperation with the teacher. In seven of the drawings the straight line for the smile and arched eyebrows show worries and anxiety about their children. In one case the parents looks completely indifferent (only cares about shopping since she is presented amidst numbers of shopping bags and brands)	Only eight drawings show the parent smiling and this as indicated by the accompanied text is not reflective of their happiness. Instead most parents seem to worry about several things (child's behavior, what the best school is, teachers' attitudes, their own work and responsibilities) Eight drawings show the lips as straight and the eyebrows are raised, indicating some type of concern. The accompanied text reaffirms this assumption. Parents worry about what their child will learn, wear or befriend with during their time in school. In one of these drawings the student has crossed the lips of the parents.
Overall context of the drawing of the parent	Most drawings show nothing of the environment in which the parent is located. Only two draw elements of an environment (a TV and a shelf with pots)	No indications of the environment in which they imagine the parent to be. One is only placed in the frame of what might be a door (it s interesting that he/she 'frames' the parent)	No indications of the environment in which they imagine the parent to be apart from the drawing in which the mother is sitting with her son to help him with his homework	No special indications of the environment in which they imagine the parent to live, work or exist – only two drawings the sing of the kindergarten is included when the parent brings the child to school

Dress code	Most of the drawings show the mother wearing trousers (6/13) and only three of them are showing her wearing a dress or skirt. One is wearing a necklace and two others are holding handbags. The dress code doesn't tell us much about the parents' status or ideologies. Only one wearing a skirt seems conservative but this is mostly because of the folded arms in front of her skirt (holding a clutch)	Six drawings show the mother wearing skirt (in four of them the skirt is long which might indicate a form of conservativeness based on cultural codes. In one the text affirms this assumption since it says that the mother's dress code is "classical rather than modern" but this is contradicted in a different drawing in which the text suggests that the mother is following fashion (ντύνεται στην τελευταία λέξη της μόδας) In three drawings the woman is represented wearing trousers but again there is no indication whether they are modern or fashionable	Most of the drawings show the parents well dressed with details on their accessories, hair etc. Half the drawings show the mother wearing a skirt but there is no indication of conservative style – on the contrary mothers look quite fashionable. The text also in most of these drawings indicates that mothers pay special attention to the way they look (του κομμωτηρίου, εξεζητημένο γούστο, έχει από όλες τις μάρκες, ακριβό ντύσιμο κτλ). Only four drawings lack this type of attention to fashion details but this might be <u>due to the students' lack of drawing skills or personal character or gender</u> rather than a reflection of the parents' status since only in one of these drawings the text indicates that the mother's style is simple and casual	Six drawings show the mother wearing trousers and eight of them wearing skirt or dress but these do not seem to reflect a general attitude, behavior or status. Some drawings pay attention to the mother's accessories or hair but again this does not seem to reflect anything important (private or public school, wealthy, poor or middle class) other than the parent's desire to look good. It might though reflect the group's interest in the dress code, which seems less than in Groups 3.
a. Elements of wealth	No specific indications of wealth. One shows the mother holding a cellphone and car keys and another shows her wearing a hat which I am assuming is some sort of indication that she is different than most parents as this is not a usual type of wear in Cyprus	No indications at all. Only two mothers are holding handbags but they are not indicative of expensive wear.	It is interesting that most drawings show parents wearing expensive clothing, jewelry, and hold very expensive handbags (known brands like Fendi, Levis, Louis Vuitton) appear in 8 of the drawings.	There are some indications of wealth similar to Group 3 (expensive handbags and clothing) but not as many (only four)
b. Elements of religion	No indication	A mother is wearing a cross on a necklace and a father has a cross on his shirt's right up pocket (it might be a type of brand??)	Three drawings show the mother wearing the cross on her necklace – quite common in Cyprus	One of the drawings of a father includes a cross on a necklace, even though from the rest of his appearance this might have to do with fashion more than religion.

Thoughts/Speech – Relation to Text	Four drawings show the parent's thoughts directly (similar to comic book stripes). Only two do not include text and the rest have text indicators of what they have just drawn (see below for details).	Five drawings show the parents' thoughts directly, which include concerns about their child (behavior, performance, what the teacher might have to say). Four of them include text in the form of conversation with the child (<i>How was your day, Study!, If you try harder I will buy you..., Bravo!</i>). Eight of them only include text as additional information to the image	In seven of the drawings the parent seems to direct the teacher (text in bubble) asking for the child's performance in school or saying that she is busy/rushing from work and needs to see the teacher now. All the other drawings have text as indicator (see below)	Nine of the drawings address the teachers with questions and concerns, four address the child mostly with commands (study, don't get dirty etc), three show the parents' thoughts in bubbles and only two include text as indicator.
Relation to child	Three drawings only show the child in relation to his mother (I think a boy in all cases?). One shows the child behind the mother indicating her as protector (or being over protective) and the other two facing the mother in conversation (about homework)	Five drawings show the mother with the child. One includes the teacher too. The child is represented on the side of the mother in 3/5; in one is represented as part of the thoughts of the mother revealing perhaps over-protectiveness and constant worries; and in the last one, the mother is in conversation with the child. In this latter case, the question of how the school day went is answered with a request for a mobile (possibly indicating parents' reward of academic achievements with commodities, but also the type of children's demands/games/ interests)	Four drawings show the mothers with their child (children) – again most are boys. In three of them, the mother holds their hand (indication of caring for them, directing them, protecting them). In one of the four the mother helps the child with his homework.	Nine of the drawings include the child as smaller, standing next to the parent but only in three drawings the parent directly speaks to the child. There is another drawing that assumes the present of the child even though not visually present (the parent talks to the child). The parent is not holding the child as in previous group, even though the text shows that the parent's main concern is the child.
Relation to the teacher	Two drawings show the parent with the teacher. In both cases the teacher is considering whether to tell the "truth" to the parent. In one case (when the father is represented) the teacher is shown smaller and in a lower position to the father. In two more drawings the teacher is referred to in the text (the teacher told me ...; let's see what the teacher has to say)	No visual appearance of the teacher in these drawings even though in seven of the drawings the mother appears to speak to the teacher (present but outside of the frame)	Only one drawing shows the teacher even though in nine of them the parent is directly addressing the teacher (present but outside the frame). Text indicates that parents are either asking teachers to take care of their child (help her put on her shoes) or are dismissive of the work done by the teacher (too many assignments, disagreement about child's performance)	

TEACHERS' REPRESENTATIONS OF THE 'TYPICAL' PARENT

TEXT	<p>Most text is an indicator of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the age of the parent (30-35) - the emotions (happy, worried, angry) - financial/social status (high or low) - profile (judgmental towards the teacher – or not enough [accepting the teacher’s opinion too easily], reserved, cool, respectful toward the teacher, over-protective toward the child) - descriptive of appearance (nice clothes, tidy, modern, young) 	<p>Most text is an indicator of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the age of the parent (30-40) - the emotions (happy, anxious, calm, sad) - status (educated, wealthy living in a village, high social status) - profile (moral values, no suggestions to propose to the teacher, over-protective towards the child and high demands from the teachers, polite, inquisitive (asks too many questions), awkward behavior, loving) -descriptive of appearance (very fashionable, stylish, classic, tidy) -descriptive of family situation (divorced with problems at home, very busy with work) 	<p>Most text is an indicator of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the age of parents (29-45) - emotions of parent (anxiety, awkward, tired, reserved, desperate) - status (middle class, financial independent mother, wealthy, educated, housewife) - profile (basic values, open to new methods of teaching, loving, genuine relation with teacher, accepting teachers comments, without knowing what to do to improve her child’s performance, removed from school, over-protective) - descriptive of appearance (smiles often, tries to maintain a slim figure but cannot due to giving birth, high heels give style, tight trousers, tidy, cares of appearance, wears make-up) 	<p>Most text is an indicator of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the age of parents (24 -35) - emotions of parent (smiling) - status (middle class, educated, νεόπλουτοι) - profile (over-protective, career oriented, impolite and distant, active in school activities) - descriptive of appearance (simple dress code, modern wear, fake brands)
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