Parental expectations of their adolescents' teachers

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In spite of increasing parental participation in their children's education, and the growing research interest in this trend, the study of one of the central components of parental involvement, namely, parental expectations of teachers, has been scarce. The present research focuses on this important, albeit neglected, topic. We examined the effects of the sex of the parent and the sex and grade level of the specific child on parental expectations of teachers. Seven hundred and sixty-five Israeli parents of students attending 31 educational institutions participated in the study. They completed the Expectations of Teachers questionnaire, consisting of 12 items describing behavioural characteristics of teachers subsumed under three broad categories: Help and Assistance, Teaching Competence, and Fairness. Greater expectations for Help and Assistance were reported by the parents, followed by Teaching Competence and Fairness on the part of the teacher. Mothers hold higher Fairness and Help and Assistance expectations as compared with fathers. Help and competence expectations were higher for parents of female students as compared with parents of boys. Conclusions from our study call for increasing efforts geared toward the building of a sustainable and beneficial partnership between teachers and parents for the best interest of the students and for the further elucidation of teachers' expectations of parents.

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Introduction

During recent years, numerous studies have documented the increasing parental involvement and participation in the schools and educational activities of their children (e.g. Aronson, 1996; Bauch and Goldring, 1995; Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler, 1995). One of the pillars maintaining and regulating this home–school relationship consists of the expectations that the parent holds regarding the various factors involved in the education of his or her child. Global educational views of parents are likely to be reflected in their expectations regarding school goals. Findings based on a representative sample of parents of Israeli school-aged children showed that approximately half of them consider teaching and imparting knowledge as the major goal of schools, followed by transmitting values, preparing for further study and work, developing personality, and education for life in society (Benyamini and Tatar, 1994).

  Many studies conceptualized parental expectations in terms of the views that parents hold regarding the highest level of education that their children will complete (see, for example, Reynolds, 1991). Seginer (1986) proposed a more complex conceptualization of parental educational expectations and defined them as consisting of three dimensions: (1) realistic expectations—parental predictions of the level of academic performance of their children; (2) idealistic expectations—including the wishes and hopeful anticipations held by the parents related to their children in academic realms; and (3) standards of achievement—

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namely, the implicit measures by which the parents evaluate their children's academic attainments.

Moreover, based on her understanding that "expectations function as cognitive guidelines to one's behaviours...[that]... in turn, affect the level of performance or quality of action of the focal person" (Seginer, 1986, p. 154), Seginer later suggested (Seginer, 1995) differentiating between two perceptions of parental expectations. The first relates to the family learning environment, including family expectations and behaviours related to the relevant field of studies and educational attainments of the children as reported by parents, whereas the second approach focuses on the same parameters but as perceived by the children themselves. In Seginer's opinion, while the advantage of the first approach (based on parental reports) is especially relevant for potential interventions, because it suggests the kind of parental behaviours that help or hinder children's academic achievements, its main disadvantage lies in the difficulty to reach parents for research purposes. The second approach—based on students' perceptions of parental expectations—focuses on the subjective reality as experienced by the children themselves and may allow us to understand the meanings that children give to their parents' expectations regarding their own school-based academic achievements.

Parental expectations of teachers

Tatar and Horenczyk (1996) conceptualized and operationalized expectations of teachers held by elementary and senior high school students in terms of three main categories: teaching competence, help and assistance, and fairness. Various studies have shown the first two characteristics to be central to students' perceptions related to their image of the good teacher (Kutnick and Jules, 1993). Teaching competence relates to teachers' behaviours such as explaining well, having strong control over the lesson content, being firm and keeping order in the classroom, and being well organized. Taylor (1962) suggested that the importance attributed by children to aspects of the teaching process is due to their perception of them "as a means to the satisfaction of a need they have in our society: to be taught and to learn" (p. 264). Helpfulness on the part of the teacher is a major component of the relational aspect of the 'good teacher' image (Pianta and Walsh, 1996) along with support and trust.

Various studies point to the centrality of these two factors among students of all ages. Paradise and Wall (1986) showed that elementary-school children perceive the job of teacher as helping children, teaching them, and assigning work. Cullingford (1987) reported that young adolescents judge teachers on their ability to explain and on their awareness of their students' individual needs. With regard to college students' perceptions, Basow and Howe (1987) found that both affective and instrumental qualities are important in evaluating professors.

Based on their conception of expectations of teachers as reflecting the ideal student–teacher relationship, Tatar and Horenczyk (1996) chose to include fairness as a third category in their conceptual framework. Elkind (1971) assumed that every human interaction presupposes some form of contractual relationship, involving the mutual expectations of the contracting parties. One of the primary components of this tacit contract between students and teachers involves fairness on the part of the teacher responded to by the students' co-operation. The other two ingredients resembled the factors of expectations of teachers described above: teachers' competence being echoed by students' respect and teachers' warmth followed by students' affection. It has been argued (Nisan, 1989) that

teachers' failure in honouring their contractual commitments will lead to negative attitudes toward teachers and learning on the part of students. Since these days parents are generally considered as a legitimate and influential party in the educational partnership, we would like to suggest that an unwritten contract also regulate the relationships between teachers and parents. Therefore, the three factors that were proposed as characterizing the students' expectations of teachers are well suited for the examination of parental perceptions regarding the appropriate functioning of teachers in the education of their children.

    This research focuses on parental expectations of teachers since we consider this to be a central component of parental involvement. In this study, fathers and mothers were asked to complete a written questionnaire dealing with their expectations of their adolescent child's teachers. We were interested in examining the effects of the sex of the parent and the sex and grade level of the specific child on these parental expectations.

Method

Participants
The research sample consisted of 831 parents of students attending 31 secular schools in the broad central Israel area. Seven hundred and sixty-five parents (92% of the original sample) agreed to participate in the study: 219 parents of 4th to 6th graders attending 11 elementary schools, 328 parents of 7th to 9th graders studying in 12 junior-high schools, and 218 parents of 10th to 12th graders attending eight senior-high schools. The sample of parents was selected randomly from the student lists of all participating classes. Seventy-one per cent of the respondents ($n=543$) were mothers and 29 per cent were fathers ($n=222$); mean age was 42 years (S.D.$=5\cdot67$ years). The respondents were heterogeneous in terms of education: 28 per cent of them had secondary education or under, 39 per cent had post-secondary education, and 33 per cent held academic degrees.

Questionnaire and procedure
A questionnaire dealing with expectations of teachers was included as part of an investigation of parental attitudes toward schools. The parent (mother or father) who chose to complete the questionnaire was requested to do so according to her or his own views. The first questions asked for background information of the respondent (age, sex and education) and for the grade and sex of the son or daughter sampled, to which the parent was requested to refer in the following sections of the questionnaire. The parents were then administered the Expectations of Teachers questionnaire developed by Tatar and Horenczyk (1996), which consisted of 12 items describing behavioural characteristics of teachers. The respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which they expected their children's teachers to meet these criteria, on a scale ranging from 1 ("not at all") to 5 ("definitely yes"). The 12 characteristics came from three broad categories: (1) Help and Assistance (four items, e.g. "I would like the teacher to be interested in his or her problems"); (2) Teaching Competence (four items, e.g. "I would like his or her teacher to give interesting lessons"); (3) Fairness (four items, e.g. "I would like his or her teacher not to discriminate between pupils"). Although the recent literature on expectations has discerned between two different meanings of the term; namely, anticipation and preference (e.g. Galassi *et al.,* 1992), the use of "expectation" in Hebrew (*tzipiyah*) unambiguously refers to a desired, or preferred, state of affairs.

Parents were initially contacted by research assistants, who asked for their participation and prompted them to decide which of them is willing to respond to the questionnaire. The questionnaire was then administered to the consenting parents individually and at their homes. No identifying information was requested, except for the background information listed above. Confidentiality with regard to identity of both respondents and schools was strictly assured. The whole procedure lasted about 30 minutes.

Results

Preliminary analyses examined the internal reliability of the scales used in this study in our parent sample. For the Expectations of Teachers scales, the values of Cronbach's alpha among parents were found acceptable: 0·86 (Help and Assistance), 0·70 (Teaching Competence), and 0·60 (Fairness).

Since the parental expectations of teachers were assessed with reference to a specific child whose grade level and gender was specified in advance, the gender and grade level of the pupil were included as independent variables in this study. The frequencies of sex of parent, sex of child, and grade level of the child are presented in Table 1. It should be noted that the "elementary" category includes pupils from the 4th to the 6th grades; "junior-high" pupils are those who attend 7th to 9th grades; and the "senior-high" category comprises pupils from the 10th to the 12th grades.

A $2 \times 2 \times 3$ multivariate analysis of variance was first performed on the three Expectations of Teachers scales. The linear combination of the expectation scales was found to be significantly affected by the sex of the parent ($F(1,750)=7\cdot11$, $p<0\cdot01$) and the sex of the child ($F(1,750)=8\cdot84$, $p<0\cdot01$), but not by the interaction between these two independent variables ($F(1,750)=1\cdot11$, n.s.). There was no effect of grade level of the child ($F(2,750)=0.46$, n.s.), or any of the interactions between the three independent variables.

The within-subjects effect of scale was also found significant ($F(2,749)=62\cdot10$, $p<0\cdot001$). Paired t-tests between the three expectations scales show that parental Help expectations were higher than both Competence ($t(764)=10\cdot80$, $p<0\cdot01$) and Fairness

Table 1 *Frequencies of sex of parent, sex of child, and grade level of the child*

Sex of parent	Sex of child	Grade level of child			Total
		Elementary	Junior-High	Senior-High	
Mothers	Girls	76	127	88	291
	Boys	71	109	66	246
	Total	147	236	154	537
Fathers	Girls	36	41	30	107
	Boys	33	48	33	114
	Total	69	89	63	221
Total	Girls	112	168	118	398
	Boys	104	157	99	360
	Total	216	325	217	758*

*Seven parents did not specify the gender of their child.

expectations ($t(764)=10\cdot83$, $p<0\cdot01$). There were no differences between parental expectations of teachers with regard to Competence and Fairness ($t(764)=0\cdot84$, n.s.). A significant Scale × Sex of parent interaction ($F(2,749)=5\cdot20$, $p<0\cdot01$) suggests that the patterns of importance assigned to each of the expectation scales are different for mothers and fathers: While among both mothers and fathers the highest expectations of teachers are in terms of Help, mothers assign a similar degree of importance to Fairness and Competence, whereas fathers attribute greater importance to Competence than to Fairness ($t(221)=2\cdot56$, $p<0\cdot05$). The interaction between Scale and Sex of student was not significant ($F(2,749)=0\cdot19$, n.s.).

Table 2 presents the means and standard deviations of parental expectations of teachers on the three scales, for mothers and fathers and for sons and daughters. Separate ANOVAs performed on each of the three expectations of teachers scales show that mothers hold higher expectations of their child's teachers in terms of Fairness and Help as compared to fathers (Fairness: $F(1,754)=9\cdot35$, $p<0\cdot01$; Help: $F(1,754)=9\cdot52$, $p<0\cdot01$); no differences between fathers and mothers were found with regards to Competence expectations ($F(1,754)=0\cdot14$, n.s.). As to the effect of the sex of the student on his or her parents' expectations of teachers, findings show that in all three scales expectations are higher for female than for male students; these differences were significant with regards to Help ($F(1,754)=6\cdot26$, $p<0\cdot05$) and Competence ($F(1,754)=7\cdot78$, $p<0\cdot01$), but not for the Fairness scale ($F(1,754)=3\cdot74$, n.s.). It should be noted that the Sex of parent × Sex of student interaction was significant for the Help scale ($F(1,754)=6\cdot16$, $p<0\cdot05$). While mothers do not show differential expectations for their sons or daughters, fathers tend to expect that their daughters will receive greater help than their sons.

Discussion

Three main findings emerged from our study: (1) Help appears to be the most important expectation parents hold regarding their children's teachers; (2) mothers, in two out of the

Table 2 *Means and standard deviations (in parentheses) of parental expectations* by sex of parent and sex of child*

Sex of parent	Sex of child	Expectations of teachers scale		
		Help	Competence	Fairness
Mothers	Girls ($n=291$)	4·62 (0·48)	4·43 (0·48)	4·47 (0·45)
	Boys ($n=246$)	4·62 (0·49)	4·36 (0·52)	4·35 (0·60)
	Total ($n=537$)	4·62 (0·48)	4·40 (0·50)	4·41 (0·53)
Fathers	Girls ($n=107$)	4·60 (0·47)	4·46 (0·39)	4·30 (0·57)
	Boys ($n=114$)	4·40 (0·57)	4·31 (0·57)	4·25 (0·63)
	Total ($n=221$)	4·49 (0·53)	4·38 (0·50)	4·27 (0·60)
Total	Girls ($n=398$)	4·61 (0·48)	4·44 (0·46)	4·42 (0·49)
	Boys ($n=360$)	4·55 (0·52)	4·34 (0·54)	4·32 (0·61)
	Total ($n=758$)	4·58 (0·50)	4·39 (0·50)	4·37 (0·55)

*Higher values indicate greater expectations.

three scales, hold higher expectations of teachers than fathers; and (3) gender of the child was found to be related to her or his parent's expectations of teachers: Parents hold higher expectations of teachers in terms of Help and Competence for girls as compared with boys.

In a previous study (Tatar and Horenczyk, 1996) in which Israeli students were asked about their own expectations of teachers, a slightly different pattern of results emerged: the highest expectations were those of Fairness, followed by Help expectations with Competence receiving the lowest levels of endorsement. The parents in our study did not express high expectations of teachers in the area of Fairness, while emphasizing Help as their highest category of expectation. It would seem that children's expectations are more affected by interpersonal processes taking place in the classroom, and the teacher is seen to a greater extent as an unbiased adult moderator. Parents do not assign such a high priority to this socially-contextual factor; rather they seem to have a more individualized focus in which the specific needs of their own child are expected to be met by the teacher. Thus, expectations of teachers in terms of help, followed by competence, are receiving their highest preference. It is worth noting that in studies where no such distinctions were made between different areas of teacher expectations, the helping role of the teacher was also stressed by the students themselves. Dubow *et al.* (1990), for example, reported that two-thirds of student adolescents see their teachers as helping agents and potential sources of assistance and support.

Mothers' higher expectations of their adolescents' teachers, as compared with those of fathers, can be understood in terms of the amount of information and kind of involvement *vis-à-vis* the educational institutions. A recent research reported that mothers are better informed than fathers about the details of daily school life, apparently because they used more than fathers the internal sources of information about school (including visiting school, attending parent-teacher meetings, and meetings with the school principal) (Tatar, 1998*a*). These findings are consistent with the results obtained by Epstein (1986) who reported that over 90 per cent of the most "knowledgeable" parents of age-school children were mothers. One way for understanding the difference between attitudes of mothers and fathers towards their children's schools may be related to the different roles they take on within the family (see Tatar, 1998*b*). While mothers are expected to be the "emotional core" of the family, being supportive and receptive, fathers tend to be "crisis managers", providing more instrumental help (Frey and Rothlisberger, 1996). Furthermore, mothers of adolescents are viewed as the "major providers of reliable and consistent social verification, becoming a prism for sorting out what others have to say about the adolescent, and functioning as gate-keepers in the process of self-formation" (Hoffman *et al.*, 1988, p. 313). Fathers, on the other hand, are perceived by adolescents as more judgmental and less willing to negotiate with them (Noller and Callan, 1990). These general attributes of mothers and fathers may be reflected in and extended to school issues. Mothers, more than fathers, may assume a closer supportive role toward their children as pupils, making regular school visits and meeting more frequently with teachers. This high familiarity with the school setting may lead mothers to raise their expectations regarding their adolescents' teachers.

The children's gender difference in their parents' expectations of teachers can be understood in terms of divergent attributions and expectations of success and failure between boys and girls as reported in the literature. Although most studies dealt specifically with mathematics, it was generally found that parents expect their sons to perform better as compared with their daughters. They tend to believe that girls are less talented than boys and that girls have to work harder than boys to do well in that subject (for a review see

Golombok and Fivush, 1994). Moreover, when girls succeed in an academic task, their success is attributed more to external factors, whereas boys' success tends to be attributed to internal ones such as ability (Deaux and Emswiller, 1974). For the parents, teachers may serve as external agents who can assist, through help and teaching competence, to meet their daughters' higher academic needs as compared to their sons' needs.

In addition to these interesting differences revealed in our study, the results indicated that, on the whole, parents hold high expectations of their children's teachers (see Table 2). This finding provides additional support to the growing evidence showing the increasing involvement of parents in the academic development of their children in general, and in aspects of school activities and functioning in particular. In a recent study, Israeli parents singled out academic performance as a major factor affecting both stress and popularity among their adolescent children (Tatar, 1995). This choice may reflect parents' perceived areas of influence over their adolescent children. In fact, parents often apply pressure through expectations of high grades, which their children attempt to meet (Pang, 1991). Meeus (1989) indicates that parental influence is particularly high with regard to school-based issues. Moreover, adolescents report that they perceive their parents as having more influence than their friends on adjustment to school (Berndt et al., 1989).

The main objective of parental involvement in their children's schools seems to be the parents' desire of making a difference to their children's educational outcomes. In fact, extensive research literature suggests that parental involvement in academic activities is an important contributor to children's school achievement (e.g. Griffith, 1996; Shumow et al., 1996).

We would like to argue that teachers' expectations not only reflect the extent of parental involvement, but they also affect the nature and intensity of the participation of teachers in school-related activities. As suggested by Grolnick and Slowiaczek (1994) (see also Bauch and Goldring, 1995; Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler, 1997), parental involvement can be manifest in three major areas: the active behaviour of parents expressed in their attendance of school activities; cognitive-intellectual involvement, like exposing the child to cognitively stimulating activities and materials; and the parents' affective involvement reflected in her or his positive attitudes, values, and expectations toward school and learning. Our study examined in depth this last facet of parental involvement. Thus, it would be worthy to explore the relationship between parental expectations of teachers and their actual involvement in the education of their children, both in the school and in the home settings. Such an investigation should also be aimed at elucidating the conditions that would encourage parental attitudes to be reflected in actual behaviours. It is important to note that behaviours tend to affect attitudes and expectations, not just the reverse (Olson and Zanna, 1993). Parental involvement could thus be promoted by providing parents with opportunities and incentives for engagement in school activities, assuming that this will lead to further involvement through the strengthening of their positive attitudes and expectations.

Additional research could broaden the scope of cultural groups out of which schools and parents are sampled. An investigation which will include immigrant and minority parents is likely to provide us with important insights as to the ways and extent to which contextual factors affect parental involvement in general, and parental expectations of teachers in particular. Our understanding of parental involvement and expectations could also benefit from the inclusion of additional methodologies, such as open-ended questions or semi-structured interviews. Qualitative reporting can contribute valuable information related to new categories of expectations and to factors which possibly affect the strength and types of expectations held by the parents.

Finally, further research could focus on the effects of different types of parental expectations on the teachers. Parental involvement in children's academic achievements and in schooling in general, and their expectations of teachers in particular, seem to affect the teachers themselves, as reflected in their reports on work-stress. Research evidence show that teachers find community and parental expectations from them as one of the more serious stressors they confront in their daily work (e.g. Gaziel, 1993; Punch and Tuetteman, 1996). A recent study of Australian teachers (McCormick, 1997) revealed differences between teachers working in primary and secondary schools; the former reported greater stress in their interactions with parents as compared with secondary-school teachers, this discrepancy being attributed to the greater involvement of parents in lower grades.

It is our contention that present-day schools cannot ignore the powerful role of parents in their children's education. However, on the other hand, parents are more willing to transfer their educational duties to the schools. This calls for increasing efforts geared toward the building of a sustainable and beneficial partnership between teachers and parents for the best interest of the students. Such collaboration cannot be fully accomplished without a mutual knowledge and understanding of the attitudes and expectations that each of the parties holds of one another. While teachers should recognize the importance of parents' expectations of teachers, and should be attuned and responsive to these parental attitudes, it would be worthwhile if teachers' expectations of parents could also be clarified and shared.

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