JEFF THOMPSON RESEARCH AWARD

PARENTAL ENGAGEMENT IN THE IB DIPLOMA PROGRAMME: A CASE STUDY FROM GREECE

FINAL REPORT

Submitted by

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Abstract

Parental engagement is an umbrella term that describes attitudes, approaches, predispositions and relationships that develop between parents and educators. Existing literature recognizes different levels and forms in engagement, determined by parenting practices, priorities of educators, types of schools and cultural context. Yet, scholars unanimously agree that parent-educator engagement plays a vital role in supporting children's learning and securing positive family-school relations.

This case study of three International Baccalaureate World Schools (IBWS) in Athens, Greece, sought to analyse how parents and educators define and practice parental engagement. Qualitative data was collected through thirty-seven interviews with parents and educators in the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme (DP). Participants explained the motives, desired outcomes and elements that influence parent-educator engagement.

This study found that parental engagement is uniquely conceptualised by each individual, expressed on multiple levels and forms. All participants viewed parental engagement as desired, essential and positive, despite obstacles that might hinder parent-educator relationships. Elements that influence engagement include parents' and educators' attitudes, upbringing, aspirations, lived experiences, culture, surrounding environment and school context. Of these, participants identified the Greek culture and mentality of parents as the primary driver of engagement, followed by the DP programme and the individual school context.

This study is novel on two levels: first, conducted in DP schools in Athens, Greece, and second, addressing parental engagement at the High School grade level. Its originality lays in that DP schools in Athens are private and 'elite', catering for families of higher socio-economic status, who seek active participation in the school community. It is hoped that this study will contribute to a deeper understanding of parental engagement and international education in private, IBWS schools, two catalysts of educational change on a national and global scale.

Keywords: parental engagement, International Baccalaureate (IB), International Baccalaureate World Schools (IBWS), family-school relationships, partnerships.

AKNOWLEDGEMENTS

"I would like to say congratulations for the topic you are researching. I feel that it is a topic that is underdiscussed in research and in practice, in schools. There is extensive bibliography on what the IB is, the curriculum and the program, while a few people care about the role and side of parents and how they are related to the school" (Dione, educator).

"I find your topic of parental engagement in IB schools very interesting and important to be studied, both for my work but also for our students" (Chloe, educator).

"This is very interesting; your research is very interesting. (…) Congratulations, I am so happy to participate in your research, well done" (Xenia, educator).

"Of course, I wanted to participate in your research with all good intentions and good will. I believe that research like yours should happen regularly, not every year obviously, but every three, four, five years, because the IB changes, which is normal and important" (Ektoras, parent).

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1. Introduction

'Parental engagement' as a concept has increasingly appeared in literature in the last decades, with scholars debating its definition, practices, determinants, implications and overall standing in Education (e.g. McIntosh & Hayden, 2021; Walters-Sachs, 2020; Goodall & Montgomery, 2014). Indeed, in my initial attempt to understand the term 'parental engagement' -- let alone create a narrative on it--, I realized an absence of uniformity in the definition and practices of 'engagement'. Some examples found in literature include: 'parental participation in children's' education' (Đurišić & Bunijevac, 2017), 'parental engagement in students' learning' (Piotrowska et al., 2017), 'parental engagement in family-school relationships' (Garcia et al., 2016), and 'parental involvement in family-school partnerships' (Epstein et al., 2018; Epstein, 2011; Epstein et al., 2005; Epstein & Sheldon, 2002). I would attribute this variance to scholars' different approaches and context of research, as well as their personal interpretations of 'engagement', a term that encompasses multiple strands and notions.

In this research, 'engagement' is explored in the context of IBWS in Athens, Greece. My personal interpretation of 'engagement' signifies the identities, worldviews, practices and behaviours of parents and educators when involved in their children's education (Barr & Saltmarsh, 2014). I decided to investigate 'engagement' because it denotes shared responsibility of learning among parents, educators and schools (Epstein and Sheldon, 2006 in Goodall & Montgomery, 2014), unlike 'involvement' which is criticised as extensively school-based (de Oliveira Lima & Kuusisto, 2019). In this research, 'educators' include teachers, directors, coordinators, psychologists, and other adults who have daily interaction with parents and students at school.

Similarly, IBWS in Athens were selected as the context of this research as they are 'same but different' and have not been researched before. Their framework presents interesting antitheses that render this study important and noteworthy. On a global scale, IBWS are 'same' in that they are international schools, characterized by multicultural, progressive learning environments. Also, they abide by a universal DP curriculum, mission and pedagogy. Yet, IBWS in Athens --and around the world-- are 'different' in one or more of the following ways: the hosting culture; student, parent and educator populations; type of school, like state-funded or private, size of school; IB programmes offered; other national curricula offered in parallel with the IB; and individual mission statements.

Considering the cultural and contextual profiles of participating IBWS, this research critically examined factors and processes that affect parental engagement in each school,

according to parents and educators. My aspiration was that the findings of such a comparative and comprehensive analysis will yield new and useful knowledge in the field of family-school relationships and international education.

1.1.   Rationale

My interest in IBWS originates from my professional and personal experiences in the last twenty years. I started as an DP student myself in High School in Athens. This was my first contact with an international, progressive curriculum that valued different cultures, perspectives and ways of learning. Then, the DP was the topic of my master thesis: I examined how students, educators and school directors experienced the DP in Thailand, France, Greece and the UK.

Professionally, in the last twelve years, I have worked as educator and administrator in IBWS schools in Greece, France, the UK and the US. My experience has revealed how important it is to understand the relationship dynamics between parents and schools in all grade levels, no matter the context and culture of the hosting country. Moreover, my interest in parental engagement was strengthened when I became a mother, thinking of engagement as a mother and educator.

It is worth mentioning here that my doctorate journey has been marked by the covid-19 pandemic to a great extent. The pandemic started within the first months of my doctorate degree, while I was reviewing literature and refining my topic. This meant that from then onwards, I had to work in isolation, which came with multiple struggles and slowed down my pace of work. On a societal level, the pandemic had a noticeable impact on parenting quality, family dynamics and parental engagement (Feinberg et al., 2021). Therefore, I believe that the impact of covid-19 on engagement and this study must not be overlooked.

1.2.   Aims and Objectives

Aims

This research aims to create a narrative on parental engagement in the DP of three IBWS in Athens, as experienced by parents and educators. Namely, I examine elements and processes that affect parental engagement in each school, to arrive at a definition of parental engagement individually and collectively in these schools.

Objectives

I. To make the voices of educators and parents heard with regards to parental engagement and family-school relationships.

II. To inquire into the "forms and levels of parent involvement, parent attitudes towards their roles and the power relationships between parents and schools" (Clarke and Wildy, 2004, Connell, 2004 in Barr & Saltmarsh, 2014, p. 493).

III. To understand and define the term 'parental engagement' in the context of DP schools in Athens, Greece.

IV. To yield new and useful knowledge in the field of parental engagement in private, IBWS in Greece.

These aims and objectives contributed to the research questions listed below.

1.3. Research questions

The main research question of this study is:

RQ: "What does parental engagement mean for parents and educators in IBWS in Greece?"

The sub-research questions of this study are the following:

SRQ:

1. How do parents and educators perceive their individual and collective roles in supporting parental engagement?

2. What are the diverse family and school elements that influence parental engagement, for parents and educators?

3. Do IBWS in Greece appear to have similar understandings of and approaches to parental engagement, considering their profiles as schools?

2. Literature Review

The Literature Review section of this report is divided into two parts: first, 'parental engagement' and second, IBWS in Greece. The section concludes by bringing these two elements together, identifying where parental engagement stands in IBWS in Greece.

2.1. 'Parental engagement' as a term

As previously mentioned in the Introduction, 'parental engagement' is an umbrella term that encompasses various definitions and approaches, like 'parental involvement', 'parental

participation' and 'parent-school partnerships'. Historically, *parental involvement* was the first term used by Joyce Epstein to describe parental participation in schools, nowadays considered the 'traditional' form of participation (de Oliveira Lima & Kuusisto, 2019). Following Epstein's lead, numerous authors have written on parental involvement as a multidimensional construct in public schools in the US, in the 1990's (e.g. Jezierski, 2019; Hornby & Blackwell, 2018; Boyd, 2015; Lawson, 2003; Reay, 2000; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997; Swap, 1993). As research progressed, 'involvement' was criticised as extensively school-based, limiting the scope of parental participation on behalf of parents (de Oliveira Lima & Kuusisto, 2019; Goodall, 2017).

Focusing more on mutual partnerships and shared responsibility between parents, educators and schools, Garcia et al (2016), Goodall & Montgomery (2014) and Barr & Saltmarsh (2014) brought forward the notion of parental engagement in students' learning. These authors view engagement as founded on involvement and leading to home-school partnerships (Sheridan & Kim, 2015). Goodall & Montgomery (2014) developed a continuum, a spectrum, that ranges from parental involvement to parental engagement (see Figure 1). The desired outcome is that parents and schools work in parallel to benefit children's learning, which leads to effective engagement (Digman & Soan, 2008).

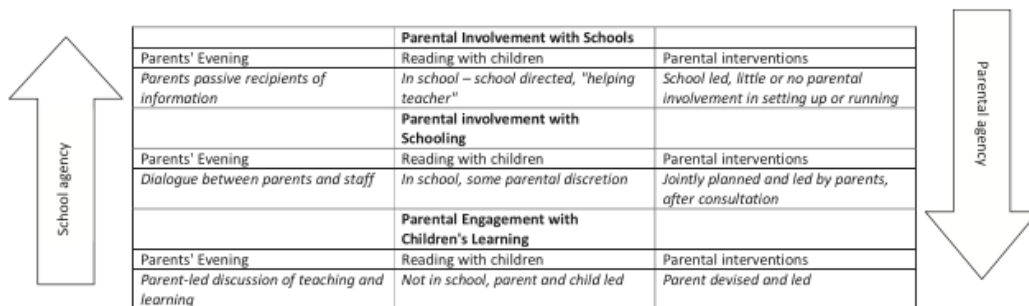|	Parental Involvement with Schools	
Parents' Evening	Reading with children	Parental interventions
Parents passive recipients of information	In school – school directed, "helping teacher"	School led, little or no parental involvement in setting up or running
	Parental involvement with Schooling	
Parents' Evening	Reading with children	Parental interventions
Dialogue between parents and staff	In school, some parental discretion	Jointly planned and led by parents, after consultation
	Parental Engagement with Children's Learning	
Parents' Evening	Reading with children	Parental interventions
Parent-led discussion of teaching and learning	Not in school, parent and child led	Parent devised and led

Figure 1.   Continuum: from involvement to engagement.

Source: Goodall, J. & Montgomery, C. (2014) Parental involvement to parental engagement: a continuum. *Educational review (Birmingham)*, 66(4), p. 403

Thus, literature on parental involvement and engagement surfaces important findings for this study. At the outset, there is indeed no uniform definition of 'parental engagement'. Then, parental engagement is a collective endeavour whose flourishment depends on the cooperation between parents, educators and schools. When successful, parental engagement has a positive impact on the whole school community and is linked with: increased quality of education for

students and higher levels of academic attainment (Garcia et al, 2016; Barr, 2014; Mocanu & Sterian, 2013; Lawson, 2003); a positive school culture, including an orientation toward innovation, continuous learning and improvement (Conolly et al, 2019); and stable and nurturing home environments, with emphasis on parental confidence and skill (Gardner et al, 2006, 2017; Lawson, 2003).

In practice, though, parental engagement is more intricate to unravel due to several reasons. First, diverse family and school factors play into parental engagement as a process (Mandarakas, 2014; Barr, 2014). These include parents' capabilities, cognition, confidence, aspirations and backgrounds (Walsh, 2014), as well as schools' type, mission, profile, policies and leadership practices (Conolly et al, 2019; Hayden & Thompson, 2016; Barr, 2014). Second, the nature of parental engagement is underpinned by human relationships, relational trust, positive interactions and open communication (Conolly et al, 2019; Garcia et al, 2016; Barr, 2014; Walsh, 2014). This means that there is a wide range of ways in which schools "manage their relationships with parents, as well as variation in what parents themselves view as important for engagement with their children's schooling" (Barr, 2014, p. 491-492).

These and other elements that drive parental engagement are bound to culture and context, as seen in existing studies (Brannen, 2020; Faircloth, 2020; Lumby, 2012; Hayden, 2006). With regards to culture, Hayden & Thompson (2013) note that "relationships and how we communicate differ significantly from person to person, school to school and national culture to national culture. Direct, to the point, and honest communication is considered appropriate and in fact required in some cultures but would be nothing less than offensive in others" (Hayden & Thompson, 2013, p. 124). Similarly, Dimmock & Walker (2000) suggest that some cultures encourage and require parental involvement in children's education, whereas others leave teaching and learning exclusively in educators' hands. By context, I mean the sum of the parts of a school as defined by Watson: "the unique composition comprising a history, traditions, socio-economic setting, geography, population, demographic, languages, board, principal, educators, students and parents; in short, everything that sustains the organisation. (…) Contexts need to be read and experienced. Whilst patterns may emerge between schools, especially those in similar contexts, there is always a surprise somewhere" (Hayden & Thompson, 2013, p. 89).

Therefore, where does parental engagement stand in the DP of three IBWS in Greece? The following section sheds lights into IBWS in Greece, to explain the context of this research.

2.2.   IBWS in Greece

IBWS in Greece are schools authorized to teach the International Baccalaureate (IB) programme and therefore make part of the International Baccalaureate Organization (IBO). Naturally, IBWS in Greece exhibit uniform characteristics that one finds in all IBWS around the world, and others that pertain exclusively to IBWS in Greece. I will start with an analysis of uniform characteristics and then proceed with exclusive characteristics of participating schools.

Globally, IBWS offer the IB curriculum, implemented through one or more of these four programmes: the Primary Years Programme (PYP, ages 4-11), Middle Years Programme (MYP, ages 11-16), Diploma Programme (DP, ages 16-19), and Career-related Programme (CP, ages 16-19). Then, IBWS are one of the largest genres of international schools, attributed to their composition, curriculum and context (Hayden & Thompson, 2013). Moreover, all IBWS abide by the IB mission, curriculum and pedagogy, centred around the IB Learner Profile and seen as a road map for students' development. Nonetheless, IBWS globally differ in their type, origin and size. For example, there are private international schools, private national schools or public/state schools (Fabian et al, 2018). Accordingly, the type and origin of an IBWS define its culture, curriculum, student and educator body.

Moving on to IBWS in Greece, they exhibit the above-mentioned inclusive characteristics but also some exclusive characteristics. For the purposes of this report, the following paragraphs describe the profiles of the three IBWS that participate in this research.

To begin with their similarities, they all offer the DP in English and abide by the IB curriculum and pedagogy. The DP is considered an international, pre-university level qualification, and hence students who graduate from the DP study at Higher Education institutions around the world (Valassi, 2015; Saxton & Hill, 2014; Culross & Tarver, 2011).

Then, participating schools are 'elite' and private, fee-supported schools, with extremely high tuition fees (Valassi, 2008). This comes into sharp contrast with Greek public schools, which are free of tuition and managed by the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs (Valassi, 2009). Also, this raises two important implications for parental engagement: first, parents actively choose elite schools for their children's education, and engagement increases when parental choice is involved (Yorke and Bakewell, 1991). Second, IBWS cater for families of higher socioeconomic status (SES). Nicholas et al (2006) and Lawson (2003) suggest that these parents have higher levels of educational attainment, bigger parental aspirations from their children, and an increased desire for engagement. In addition, parents with higher SES

often consider themselves 'clients' rather than 'partners' of the school, which leads to pressure on school decision-making processes and the role of educators (Lareau, 1996 in Lawson, 2003).

Finally, all participating schools entail Greek elements to various extents, given that they are located in Athens, Greece. These elements are evident in their culture, administration and organisation, but also in their educator, parent and student population that is predominantly Greek. Consequently, it is deemed essential to refer to existing literature that sheds light into the Greek culture and mentality.

In his book "*Families across cultures*", Georgas (2006) offers insights into the culture, institution of family and educational system in Greece. Georgas (2006) maintains that cultural values of families in Greece include intimate kinship, emotional proximity, and very frequent interaction among family members and across generations. Namely, parents consider themselves responsible for their child's upbringing, especially when it comes to financials: it is common for parents to pay (private) school and university fees and buy homes for their children (and grandchildren) (Georgas, 2006). This springs from the belief that a parent's ultimate goal for their child is to educate them, secure them a suitable job and a successful marriage, always according to parents' standards (Georgas, 2006). Thus, Georgas (2006) describes Greek parent-child relationships as interdependent: there is a Greek traditional saying for parents that goes "I live for my children", portraying that family is considered extremely essential and important in people's lives.

Finally the participating schools are different in their history, mission, size, type, curricula offered –alongside the IB—and populations --educator, parent and student populations. For instance, some schools are considered more 'family-like' and 'personal', whereas others are more 'commercial' and 'impersonal' because of their larger size[1]..

2.3.   Parental engagement in IBWS in Greece

The literature review on parental engagement and IBWS in Greece has established that this is a novel study that addresses both topics concurrently. The four assumptions that drive this study are:

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[1] For a detailed analysis of their differences, see Appendix A: Table 1: General information of the three case study schools.

1. There is no uniform definition and understanding of the term 'parental engagement', influenced by the culture and context in each IBWS.

2. Parental engagement unravels between parents, educators and the child, both at home and at school.

3. Parents and educators perceive their engagement differently and might assume complementary or conflicting roles.

4. When successful, parental engagement is founded upon human relationships, connection and trust and has positive outcomes for the whole school community.

3. Research Methodology

This study used qualitative methods, in particular a case study approach, informed by the interpretive paradigm (Gray, 2014; Cohen et al, 2007). Interpretivism was chosen as it explores a phenomenon that has not been adequately researched or explained before (Crotty, 1998), in this case parental engagement in the DP at three IBWS in Athens.

3.1. Epistemology and ontology

Interpretivism aims to understand people's lived experiences and personal thoughts of those experiences in a specific context (Gray, 2014). 'Lived experiences' is a broad term, perceived here as pieces of a puzzle that fit together and might include participants' attitudes, actions, experiences, background, context, atmosphere, relationships, and interactions. I believe that these elements give shape and form to definitions and practices of parental engagement, operationalised differently in each school.

The interpretive paradigm is conceptualized as having a relativist ontology with a constructivist epistemology (Scotland, 2012). Relativism holds that reality is subjective and individually constructed, representing as many realities as individuals (Scotland, 2012). These realities produce knowledge that is directly related to the topic studied at hand. Then, a constructivist epistemological framework implies that individuals see things *from* a perspective, based upon individual elements – one's identities, beliefs, passions, experiences-- and collective elements -- everyday interactions, shared experiences, and specific contexts (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

3.2.   Methodology

Qualitative methodology was employed in this study, as it took place in a natural setting (schools), highlighted the perspective and experiences of participants (parents and educators), focused on context (schools), and was interpretive in nature (Marshall & Rossman, 2021; Denscombe, 2017). Interviews, dyadic interviews and document analysis were used as methods in data collection and analysis.

Then, case studies were selected as a research approach because they address a contemporary phenomenon in its real-world context, in a comprehensive manner (Yin, 2014). Moreover, case studies were comparative and explanatory: I compared settings to observe similarities and differences, which then explained the causes of events, processes, and relationships among parents and educators (Denscombe, 2017; Gray, 2014; Yin, 2014). Three case study schools were used for data collection, which required the implementation of a multiple case study method, seen in Gray (2014) and adapted from Yin (2009).

Figure 11.2 Multiple case study method (Gray, 2014, p. 909), Source: Adapted from Yin, 2009
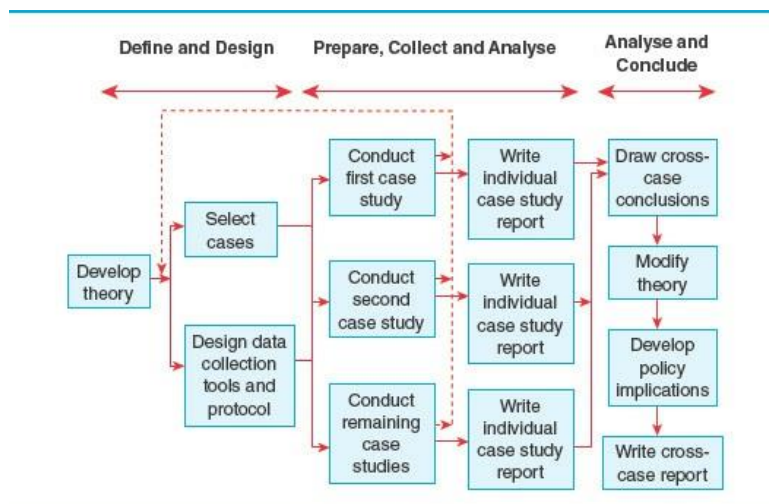
3.3.   Case study schools

The three participating schools were selected based primarily on their voluntary willingness to participate in this study. Then, I used a criterion sampling strategy, choosing cases that "meet some predetermined criteria of importance" (Patton, 2002, p. 238). These criteria included that the schools: are located in Athens; implement the DP in High School; already show an heightened interest in and engagement with parents, for instance through Parent-Teacher Associations (PTA); and consist of varied parent and educator populations. This originates from

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the way IBWS identify themselves, for example, *Greek-American*, *American*, *British* or *International*.

School 1 (CS1)

School 1 is a private, for profit, kindergarten through 12th grade school operating in the last thirty years. Most students attend this school from kindergarten through twelfth grade, which results in families and educators knowing each other well. This school operates in one campus, which adds to the familiarity that exists among educators, students and their families.

The school identifies as Greek, with an outlook to European and global horizons. School 1 offers the Greek national curriculum in all grades (from kindergarten to 12th grade) and the DP curriculum in High School. School 1 is the smallest in size and numbers (students and educators) out of the three participating schools. Also, the DP department of this school is small, both compared to the section of the Greek educational program in this school and to other DP Departments in Greece (IBO, 2021).

School 2 (CS2)

School 2 is a private, not-for profit, kindergarten through 12th grade school operating since the 1920's. Most students attend this school from kindergarten through twelfth grade, although dispersed in multiple campuses. The school identifies as Greek American, with important civic, social, and cultural responsibility towards society. School 2 offers the Greek national curriculum and the IB continuum in all grades (K-12th grade). School 2 is the largest in size and numbers (students and educators) out of the three participating schools.

School 2 has a very active PTA/PTO in all divisions (Primary, Middle and High school) that supports the school in multiple ways. For instance, in liaising parents with administration, helping in extracurricular activities, sports days, celebrations, and other occasions that bring together the school community. The PTA/PTO holds regular meetings with administrators, educators, and psychologists in the school; parents' participation is considered valuable in creating a diverse community of learners that empowers all students.

School 3 (CS3)

School 3 is a private, not-for-profit, 7th through 12th grade school with a rich history of over a century. It is part of a Higher Educational Foundation and identifies as American, with an important serving duty and contribution towards society. The school offers the Greek national curriculum in Middle and High School and the DP in High School. School 3 is middle-sized compared to the other two participating schools. It has the most recently established DP

programme, operating in the last five years. The DP is small in numbers, both compared to the Greek educational section of this school and other DP programmes in schools in Greece.

School 3 has a very active PTA/PTO that supports the school in multiple ways, for instance in liaising parents with administration, helping in extracurricular activities, sports days, celebrations, and other occasions that bring together the school community.[2]

3.4. Data collection

With regards to data collection methods, I had initially planned to use participant observations, semi-structured interviews, dyadic interviews and document analysis. However, because of the covid-19 pandemic restrictions in schools, I was not able to do participant observations. Interviews and dyadic interviews were primary sources of data, while documents were used as secondary sources to triangulate evidence (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Fitzgerald, 2012).

Interviews were employed to understand the thoughts, experiences, and perspectives of parents and educators in engagement. Furthermore, interviews were vital in obtaining personalized data, making individual voices heard in each school, and locating specific ideas with specific people (Denscombe, 2017; Gray, 2014). Dyadic interviews happened in cases where they fitted participants' schedules and allowed for a natural conversation to flow among them. Documents included organisational and institutional documents in each school, publicly available on their websites or in school brochures, and informal notes from my introductory meetings with parents and educators (Gray, 2014; Yin, 2014).

Data collection happened over one academic school year, namely for ten months (September 2021 to June 2022). Thirty-seven participants participated in this research, twenty educators and seventeen parents, in three schools[3]. I conducted thirty-three individual interviews and two dyadic interviews. All participants were recruited from their own will and intention to participate in this research. Participants followed an introductory presentation I delivered on my study's objectives, context and rationale, research design, sampling, timeline, expected outcomes and ethical clearance. Then, they were given a participant information sheet, consent form sheet and interview guide to read, complete and sign prior to our interview/focus group. From the beginning, participants were informed that interviews would be recorded, and anonymity would be ensured, using pseudocodes to identify participants.

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[2] For more information on the three case study schools, see Appendix A, Table 1.
[3] Participants per case study school: 12 in CS1; 13 in CS2; 12 in CS3.

Furthermore, participants were informed that I would conduct all interviews, in Greek or English, according to their wishes, and then transcribe and translate them (if needed).

Following that, we scheduled interviews and dyadic interviews based on the availability of participants. Interviews and dyadic interviews happened either face-to-face or online, on MS Teams. Face-to-face meetings happened in the school premises, in assigned classrooms, or at cafés, depending on the current covid-19 restrictions of each school and participants' wishes. Interviews lasted for approximately an hour, while dyadic interviews lasted for an hour and a half. Immediately after data collection, I would find a quiet place in the school or my office to take notes and reflect on the data collection process.

Then, I transcribed and translated the interviews myself and sent the transcripts to participants for verification and corroboration. Data collection was conducted smoothly and effectively, with meaningful interaction and valuable insights gained.

3.5. Data analysis

Following data collection, I analyzed data using a case study structure, as outlined in the Methodology section. Schools were initially studied individually, as stand-alone cases, and then collectively, as schools that intend to illuminate parental engagement as a phenomenon in Greece (Denscombe, 2017). For each case study, I analysed data using analytic induction and Thematic Analysis, which allowed me to develop an interpretative and comparative account of parental engagement (Braun & Clarke, 2013). I followed seven steps in Thematic Analysis, as outlined by Braun & Clarke (2013):

i. Transcribing the data.

ii. Immersing in the data, reading and re-reading the data and listening to the audios.

iii. Coding the data across the entire data set.

iv. Searching for themes.

v. Reviewing themes and relationships between themes, by creating a thematic map.

vi. Defining and naming the themes.

vii. Writing and finalising the analysis.

Once I completed the thematic analysis of data, I wrote a findings' report for each case-study school. Then, I brought together the findings, research questions and literature review to produce the discussion section and finally arrive at conclusions.

3.6.   Ethical considerations

To conduct this study, ethical guidelines were followed according to the BERA guidelines (2018) and ethical approval was obtained by the Social Science Research Ethics Committee at the University of Bath (UK). Participation in this research, both on a school level and participant level, was entirely voluntary. Informed consent forms, signed by participants, were collected throughout the process of data collection and analysis. The names of schools and participants were encrypted, using pseudocodes, to maintain confidentiality. Also, participants were offered access to their transcripts, to express any possible concerns they might have with my translation or transcription of words. All participants were fine with my transcription and translation, so I proceeded with the analysis of these transcripts.

3.7.   Reflexivity and positionality

In qualitative research, I acknowledge that I, as the researcher of this study, inevitably influenced the research process by engaging actively with participants in data collection (Braun and Clarke, 2013). To alleviate the effects of my influence in this research, I accepted that multiple truths and perspectives exist, rather than a universal one, echoed in the relativist ontology of this research. To uncover and be faithful to multiple truths, I attempted to approach parental engagement holistically and subjectively. Namely, I kept a reflexive journal, took notes to record personal observations and increase self-awareness, with the aim of minimizing the impact of my biases on the data (Tufford and Newman, 2012).

4. Research findings

The following section delves into the most important findings of this research, as outlined by parents and educators. For the purposes of this report, I have thematically summarised the findings and used representative quotes that best illustrate the primary ideas conveyed by participants.

Educators are all teachers with assigned teaching hours and a classroom, while some occupy administrative positions in the DP, like DP Coordinator, DP Deputy Coordinator, CAS coordinator, and DP Core coordinator. Parents are parents of current DP students, either in Year 1 or Year 2. Each parent participated in the interviews for one child, currently attending the DP programme of the school. In this section, all discussions pertain exclusively to the views of participant educators and parents in each school and should not be generalised to encompass all educators and parents.

In all participating schools, parents and educators are offered multiple opportunities for engagement. These include set communication channels (e.g. parent-teacher conferences once a semester; phone communication twice a month; parent-information sessions and presentations; informative letters to parents) and ad-hoc communication whenever an issue arises. Before the covid-19 pandemic, educators invited parents to participate in IB celebration days or IB Open Days, like the IB Visual Arts Exhibition or the Science Fair. They also invited parents as guest speakers in the DP to talk to students about their professional experience, expertise, and mentor students for their future career paths. Finally, the DP organized events outside of school in weekends or evenings, to strengthen family-school collaboration beyond the school walls. Examples include theatre outings, participation in Marathon runs and beach clean ups for the CAS programme, Christmas Bazars and celebrations. However, unfortunately, with the covid-19 restrictions imposed on schools, these events were stalled in the year of data collection.

In the following paragraphs, findings are presented according to the three research questions that underpin this study:

4.1   What does parental engagement mean for parents and educators?

4.2   How do parents and educators perceive their individual and collective roles in supporting parental engagement?

4.3   What are the diverse family and school elements that influence parental engagement, for parents and educators?

4.1.   What does parental engagement mean for parents and educators?

To begin with educators, they revealed interesting debates about the semantic meaning of the term 'engagement'. They wondered about my choice of this word versus 'involvement' or 'participation', as seen in the following quotes:

The term 'engagement' has negative connotations as a word. Why don't we say, for example, 'parental participation', instead of 'parental engagement'? To me, 'engagement' has a negative undertone, and it creates a very negative image in my mind: that I will pick up the phone, and a parent will be lifting his finger up to reprimand me, or that a parent will visit me in school, with the aim of criticizing me and causing problems. (Penelope, educator, CS1).

That is very interesting, because in French as well, the word 'engagement' is very different to 'involvement'. In French, to be 'engaged' means that you undertake some responsibility, a 'faithful' engagement to

do something, and that you mutually interact with something that incorporates values and other valuable elements in human relationships. (Chloe, educator, CS1).

The word 'engagement', in Greek, has a certain, slight, undertone… it creates the impression of parental intervention. (Elina, educator, CS2).

Yet, all educators agreed that parental engagement is a dynamic, necessary, triadic process that necessitates active participation of students, parents and educators.

Parental engagement is a crucial pillar in the educational process and school experience of children; it should be evident, coherent, and intelligible in the work of educators and school administrators. It is important and should be considered important; it should consistitute a distinct part of our work in schools. (Jason, educator, CS2).

I would describe parental engagement as trust and support towards educators and the DP; positive, constructive, and immediate feedback and interaction among parents and educators. (Stephanos, educator, CS3).

Interestingly, the image of a triangle was used as a metaphor by several educators to describe engagement:

It takes three to tango': I want the parent to be there in multiple ways, along with the educator and student (…) parental engagement is a balanced relationship, where student, parent and educator are together. (Iris, educator, CS1).

Now, in practice, parental engagement is an isosceles triangle, while ideally it should be an equilateral triangle. (Alexander, educator, CS1).

I would like parental engagement to be part of a triangular partnership and interaction: the parent-student-educator triangle, a mutual interaction between us three, focusing on a students' wellbeing and support. (Theodore, educator, CS3).

Moving on to parents, they echoed the same idea of engagement as a supportive, collective process between educators and parents, aiming to support the holistic development of the child:

I would like parental engagement to mean support, to mean continuing the educators' effort and work, and to mean happinness for everyone: happiness for parents to see their child blooming, learning and progressing in life; happiness for children to know that their learning is supported from their home and school, this is immense happiness; and happiness for educators to know that parents are not adversaries, but are supporting their effort in teaching and learning. (Niobe, parent, CS1).

If I were to use an image for parental engagement, I would say the following: I see a child, in several stages of life, running, laughing, playing, etc. and the parent standing in the back, as an observer. So, as a parent, one would provide children with whatever they can, e.g. support in studying, support in running around, so that the child can open up their wings. (Melissa, parent, CS1).

Parental engagement is when a parent acts as a bridge of information towards the teachers and school, so that the child can gradually function independently from the parent, in his/her environment. (Irene, parent, CS3).

4.2.   How do educators and parents perceive their individual and collective roles in engagement?

When participants were asked to reflect on their role in engagement, they initially underlined the relative and subjective nature of engagement. They characterised engagement as individualised, multifaceted and unique to everyone, seen as a spectrum of relationships, perceptions, feelings, opinions, emotions and lived experiences. For instance, these relationships depend on various, simultaneous factors, such as: the subject taught, the child's interest in class, the parenting style of a parent, the family situation, the point in time of the DP, and character traits and compatibility among parents, educators and students. These quotes serve as a testimony:

We are in contact and communication with parents who are each unique and different from each other, this is something to remember. We might be different in our interaction with one parent and different in our interaction with another parent. Plus, there are always different perspectives and sides of things – there are as many perspectives and sides as people, as relativism maintains. (Penelope, educator, CS1).

I think that parental engagement is relative, and it depends on which parents we are talking about. (Despoina, parent, CS2).

I think parental engagement has to do with the way a parent chooses to engage. (Maya, parent, CS2).

We are all equal, but we are not all the same… each of us deals with parents following his/her own personal judgement, personality, upbringing, experiences…. (Dione, educator, CS3).

Naturally, not all educators are the same, in the same way that not all children are the same, or none of us, parents, are the same. (Ophelia, parent, CS3).

As our conversations progressed, educators identified three main groups and/or types of parents in engagement. The first group is polite, nice and caring parents, who constitute the majority of the parent population according to educators. The second group of parents is 'tiger' or 'helicopter' parents who hold high expectations and aspirations from their children. The third group of parents are extremely pushy and demanding. In addition, most educators stated that mothers get more engaged than fathers, while fathers show up to deal with 'more difficult situations'.

With regards to roles in engagement, educators and parents agreed that they should assume complementary roles within set boundaries. In such instances, engagement becomes a successful and beneficial teamwork, primarily for the child and then for the whole school community. Specifically, educators need to support and guide students emotionally, socially and academically at school, whereas parents need to show care and interest for the child at home. As per participants:

I think the ideal parental engagement would be for both sides to feel good and supported, namely educators to feel that it is ok to talk to parents, without fearing that any extreme issues or reactions will come about, and from the parents' side, to feel confident and at ease to share things with educators that would benefit the child. So parents and educators should be a team, because the child spends a lot of time at school. (Electra, parent, CS1).

Parental engagement is absolute consistency and synchrony between parents, educators, and school, so children receive common messages from home and school, which is very beneficial. (Philip, educator, CS2).

Children receive common messages from home and school that we care about them and their progress in a holistic way, whether it is academic, social, emotional progress, and this leads to a sense of security in children. Also, it shows children that they are loved, and this is very important to me. (Dione, educator, CS3).

Then, both educators and parents should provide each other with timely and ongoing information on a range of topics. For educators, examples of topics include the DP curriculum,

parents' expectations, students' responsibilities, parent-educator meetings, etc. For parents, examples of topics include a child's situation at home, which often differs from the child's behaviour and image presented at school. Like two participants mentioned:

Parents should tell us things about their child that we do not see in the classroom or the school (...). I might also see the child differently, because I have heard something from the parent that I was not aware of before. (Hermes, educator, CS1).

I feel that it is always enriching, the way in which the parent will give you information about a child, that you wouldn't know, or that the child wouldn't feel confident enough to share with you. (Xenia, educator, CS3).

Commenting on parent-educator relationships, participants aligned in their views that they have built excellent relationships and feel part of a strong partnership. Participants stated that their relationship is based upon 'tolerance', 'respect', 'trust', 'cooperation', 'interpersonal skills', 'teamwork', 'honesty', 'patience', 'positive intentions' and 'understanding'. As voiced by parents:

My relationship with educators is excellent. I feel it is important that I know that educators are there if I need something, and if I call them, they will immediately respond and take action. (Electra, parent, CS1)

I always had a very good relationship with educators. I would say we loved each other, and this surfaced through my children's relationship with them. (Despoina, parent, CS2)

I have very good relationships with educators (...). I think that everything stems from an honest interest towards the child, from both sides. This could be either a parent's honest interest towards the child's wants or needs, and/or similarly, an educator's honest interest towards the student. (Leto, parent, CS2)

My relationship with educators is excellent (...). When I talk to them, I feel that I talk to someone who surrounds my child with love, who has a different level of care towards my child. I think that the DP plays a role here too, it makes educators more relaxed and confident towards their work and towards parents. (Nausica, parent, CS2)

I feel that educators are excellent, they know their job well, they are honest (...) they move forward based on students' needs and schedules and not their –educators'—needs. (Ophelia, parent, CS3)

Accordingly, as voiced by educators:

I would describe our relationships with parents as a 'marital relationship'. It requires a solid basis and understanding that we are part of a common framework, with succinct roles and operations. Sometimes this relationship is marked by intervention, tension, and clashing between parents and educators, because we perceive differently our roles towards children. Other times, this relationship is marked by endless and continuous support, respect, appreciation, when both parties feel that the child is safe and whatever is done is right and efficient for the child. In the end though, we know that all relationships might end up in divorce, and this is all part of life. (Philip, educator, CS2)

It is about trust, respect, patience, understanding, setting boundaries… all these elements in the right amount. (Penelope, educator, CS1)

Our relationships with parents are positive and based on trust, respect, open communication and belief in good intentions. Parents know that they have entrusted us with their child's future, they trust us. (Stephanos, educator, CS3)

4.3. What are the diverse family and school elements that influence parental engagement for educators and parents?

Educators and parents touched upon three main elements that influence engagement: the DP curriculum and pedagogy; the school context; and the Greek culture and mentality.

The DP curriculum and pedagogy

To begin with the DP curriculum and pedagogy, participants discussed elements that favour or hinder parental engagement. Favourable elements include the structure of the program, namely the size, curriculum and ideals embodied in the DP. For instance, classes are small and have a low student-educator ratio, averaging from six to eight students per class. This strengthens bonds between educators and students, and educators and parents respectively. Also, the DP curriculum is personalised, respecting and fitting every child's needs. Consequently, students learn how to be responsible and independent, which is valued by parents and educators alike. Specifically, participants shared:

When parents get to know the DP curriculum and pedagogy, students and parents focus on its advantages: smaller class sizes, targeted, focused, and personalised learning, more frequent communication among all stakeholders. I think that all the above play a role in parents feeling calm and safe in the DP. (Stephanos, educator, CS3)

The way in which the IBDP is structured lends itself to and seeks parental engagement. The program offers parents many opportunities for engagement, that is not only limited to academics, but also in extra-curricular activities because of CAS, for example. (Alexia, educator, CS2)

Shifting gears to elements that hinder parental engagement in the DP, participants unanimously mentioned the wide gap that separates the Greek educational system and the DP. The two programs have substantial differences that render them two different entities, and thus two very distinct experiences for students. For instance, the curriculum taught in the DP is at a pre-university level. This influences the assessment procedures, time-management skills and university applications of students, which is a completely unchartered territory for parents and renders the DP a complicated program to understand. Through the lens of participants:

The Greek system is very rigid, it does not encourage critical thinking, it does not encourage research and combining different sources in research, whereas the DP widens students' horizons, it is very liberating, and it encourages students to maximize their abilities and potential, up to their desired point. (Nausica, parent, CS2)

The DP is a demanding programme, and a complicated programme (…) It is overwhelming for parents: first of all, the level of all subject is very high. What would parents know about Math Higher Level, Physics Higher Level or Chemistry Higher Level, unless it is their subject or profession? (Xenia, educator, CS3)

The school context

As far as each school context is concerned, all participants observed that their school context largely embraces parental engagement and seeks to create positive, meaningful relationships between parents and educators. In CS1 school, participants shared:

I believe it is a school that really wants parental engagement, and invites parents to participate in joint activities and actions with their children… I have experienced this both as an educator, and as a mother of a child who attends this school and is now in IB2. (Iris, educator, CS1)

The school promotes parent-educator engagement to a great extent, and they want parents to be engaged. The school has a 'Circle of Trust', as they call it, and parents are a part of the circle, which is threefold and includes parents, students and school. (Daphne, parent, CS1)

In CS2 school, participants stated:

I believe that the school devotes cosiderable efforts to create and maintain continuous and meticulous communication and partnerships with parents. (Elina, educator, CS2)

I think the school wants parental engagement to a great extent. In the school administration and the teachers, their majority want parents to be engaged, because we are a triangle –parents, students, and teachers-- and we all benefit from parental engagement. (Maya, parent, CS2)

Similarly, in CS3 school participants revealed:

Our school influences parental engagement to a great extent; our school has become successful and respected. Our school has succeeded in promoting and embodying a sense of collaboration, love and honesty that characterizes the whole school community. We care immensely for our students, in all grades and levels, in all programs (both the Greek system and the DP), and we are here to support them endlessely (...) This helps parents feel more at ease with us and that their child is in good hands. (Stephanos, educator, CS3)

What I always liked in this school, apart from academics, is the aura of this school with regards to values, such as respect towards students and parents. (Fiona, parent, CS3)

Within the school context, participants underscored the role of the DP coordinator in creating a fruitful environment for engagement.

The DP Coordinator has a distinct role to play in parental engagement. On the one hand, he/she can set parents aside if they are a strain or a burden. On the other hand, he/she can engage parents more to help in organization, ideas, and providing information about their children, because you will learn things from parents about their children that you can't possibly see in the classroom or in the school. So, the best is to achieve and maintain a balance, like it is always the case in our life. This balance is set by the school, the school administration and the IB coordinator. (Alexander, educator, CS1)

Parents too must feel safe in a communication framework with the school in order to feel they are heard, accounted for and wanted in parental engagement form the school. This 'responsibility' definitely falls on the school's administration, and I believe that the school's administration steers parental engagement to a great extent and sets boundaries and a framework for parental engagement. (Alexia, educator, CS2)

The Greek culture

All participants believed that the Greek culture, with everything it entails, mostly impacts parental engagement. Participants described Greek parents as 'overprotective', 'interventive' and 'pressurizing', to meet parental aspirations and expectations through their child. For instance, educators expressed the following thoughts:

I would say that the most important element that impacts parental engagement is the Greek culture. It is the mentality, it is the way these kids have been brought up, it is the role of the family, which in Greece is very important, and not necessarily in a good way, because sometimes families are suffocating, or they can be liberating, but they are always there. (Xenia, educator, CS3)

The influence of the Greek culture on anything, is extremely powerful. (…) I think that no school will ever 'dethrone' the traditional 'Greek mother' from her position. (Katerina, educator, CS3)

Parents view their children as their own projection, to accomplish things that they have not accomplished. They think that they know better than their children, and they pressurize them to achieve things that children might not always want to achieve, and they have different wants and wishes (…) Parents stress their children and pressure them to get a 7/7 in grades, no matter what. This discourages children a lot. (Chloe, educator, CS1)

Parents in Greece transmit and reflect their ambitions on their children; often, parents believe that if their children reach these ambitions, they feel accomplished themselves – I mean accomplished socially. Parents think that 'my child will become this and that', and if the child succeeds, parents feel successful and accomplished through their child. (Elina, educator, CS2)

Then, educators drew attention to parents' obsession with students' grades and academic performance, described as '*Vathmothiria*' *(βαθμοθηρία)* in Greek, meaning 'grade-chasing'.

Greek parents ask for recipes for success, thinking that the end-goal will be attained for their child, and they will enter the University of their choice. This obsession with grades, i.e. 'vathmothiria' in Greek, does not allow parents, children, and the school community overall to focus their efforts on the educational aspect of their work. This is very unfortunate, of course. (Penelope, educator, CS1)

It has never occurred to me, apart from once, for parents to ask me if their child is ok emotionally and psychologically… they only ask about grades. (Katerina, educator, CS3)

Interestingly, parents were in line with the educators' views expressed above, noting:

We, as Greek parents, care a lot about our children, but this care comes in excess form. We are not next to them, so that they know they can lean on us if they wish, we are on top of them; and we view all the other people around them -- from an educator to anyone else who is around them -- as enemies, who want to disadvantage our child. I don't agree with this mindset and philosophy. (Electra, parent, CS1)

I would say that the Greek culture impacts most the degree of parental engagement. I think that, because of the Greek culture, a lot of parents go in the school and say: 'Why is this happening here', 'Why is my daughter/son doing this and that', etc. I think this is a negative aspect of parental engagement in Greece. (...) I believe that the Greek parent often has the tendency and need to prove that their child is the best. (Daphne, parent, CS1)

I would firstly place the Greek culture, because we, as Greek parents, tend to be overly engaged and on top of our children, much more than parents in other countries. I think that this is very apparent in Greece (...) I think that the Greek culture is above all else, and it shadows everything; the IB is trying to set boundaries, but it's not always easy because parents will always find their way around; and the school is trying to set boundaries, but parents will not listen to the school. (Fiona, parent, CS3)

In the DP in the Greek culture, the notion of student's independency is fading away, due to the negative elements of the Greek mentality. I feel that Greek parents, in their majority, get overly engaged, despite the DP encouraging students' independence and autonomy. I feel that the DP in Greece is different than elsewhere, because of private tutoring and other 'extra' things that parents want to add to the program, on their own initiative. (Irene, parent, CS3)

5. Discussion

The research findings in the previous section offered a window into the viewpoints and experiences of parents and educators vis-à-vis parental engagement in three case study schools. In this section, I will offer my interpretation of how these findings connect to existing literature, based on the four assumptions that drive this study. Then, I will identify whether the three case study schools appear to have similar or different understandings of and approaches to engagement, which will lead to the conclusion of this report.

The four assumptions that drive this study in the literature review are:

1. There is no uniform definition and understanding of the term 'parental engagement', influenced by the culture and context in each IBWS.
2. Parental engagement unravels between parents, educators and the child, both at home and school.

3. Parents and educators perceive their roles differently in engagement and might assume complementary or conflicting roles.

4. When successful, parental engagement is founded upon human relationships, connection and trust and has positive outcomes for the whole school community.

Let me now discuss these assumptions in detail.

1. <u>There is no uniform definition and understanding of the term 'parental engagement', influenced by the culture and context in each IBWS.</u>

Findings suggest that there is indeed an absence of uniformity in the definition and understanding of 'parental engagement'. This is attributed to two factors: first, engagement is an individualised, humanistic and personalised approach by educators and parents. Second, engagement is influenced by the culture and context of each school, meaning the school environment, size, type, people and mechanisms that are in place to support parental engagement.

Taking a closer look at the individualised and personal approach of engagement, it was informed by participants' identity -- educator or parent --, lived experiences, and way of thought. Namely, educators questioned with wonder the semantic and conceptual implications of the term 'engagement', drawing upon its linguistic and cultural connotations. This was not the case for parents, who focused more directly on the practical and experiential implications of engagement. Moreover, parents viewed engagement as centred around the child, whereas educators viewed it more collectively as an 'interactive' and 'dynamic' process. I believe that the educators' emphasis on terminology happens because of their professional and pedagogical background, using metaphors and other linguistic devices to explain 'engagement' – e.g. 'it takes three to tango', 'isosceles triangle'.

Second, educators and parents were aligned in their belief that cultural and contextual factors influence parental engagement the most. Most participants stated that the Greek culture and mentality override all other elements that play into parental engagement. Specifically, educators and parents discussed positive and negative ways in which the Greek culture and mentality influence parental engagement.

To begin with the positive elements, educators and parents recognized the DP programme and school environment as beneficial to parental engagement. They thought that the size, curriculum, ideals and low turnover in the DP, both for educators and families who attend the school, create a sense of loyalty to the school and intimate family-like relationships. In addition, subjects like CAS in the DP invite educators, parents and students to interact in non-academic settings, which reinforces parent-educator relationships. Then, educators and parents admitted that all three schools desire and promote parental engagement in theory and practice, manifested through the role of the DP coordinator in welcoming parents. The schools aspire to create partnerships with parents, viewing parents and educators as a team with interdependent roles to best support the child.

Moving on to the negative elements that influence engagement, educators and parents drew upon the difficulties of the DP programme, as well as the Greek cultural mindset. Educators and parents alike recognized a wide gap between the DP curriculum and the Greek educational system, for instance in assessment procedures and student expectations. This alienates parents from engagement and collaboration with the school and prompts them to resort to extra help outside of school. Furthermore, it surfaces tension, stress, and insecurity in parents, which leads to parents' over-engagement or negative behaviours in engagement. As for the Greek mentality, educators and parents portrayed parents as overprotective, pressurizing and obsessive with grades, through the phenomenon of "Vathmothiria". This leads to increased stress for students, amplified parental demands for educators and deconstructed parent-educator relationships. Having said that, parents were aware of the need for a more balanced and caring approach towards children, judging them not only for academics but also for holistic development.

In terms of context, each school displayed differences in its identity, size, type, and parent, educator and student populations. I believe that these differences played a role in how participants perceived engagement and parent-educator relationships, encapsulated in this quote by an educator participant:

The culture of each school creates a small eco-system and microclimate, and I believe that each DP school in Athens is different, despite all being IB schools. For example, in our school, one might say we have family-like relationships among us and with parents, whereas in another school, these relationships might seem more impersonal. (…) From what we experience in a society, without knowing exactly what happens in other schools but by having a general sense of things, I feel that parental engagement changes in each school, depending on the

school context. This goes back to our argument that engagement does not have a single definition and practice, which is impacted by the surrounding environment and school context each time. (Hermes, educator, CS1 school)

Another element that impacted the contexts of all participating schools was the covid-19 pandemic and its aftermath. All educators and parents viewed covid-19 as detrimental in parental engagement, drawing direct comparisons between "current circumstances/ our life now" versus "our life before covid-19/our pre-covid reality". School closures meant that parents lost any physical contact with educators, which came at a cost. In the words of participants:

With my son's educators, I did not see them at all because of covid. I saw them once or twice face-to-face, in the two years of the DP. I talked to them on the phone, but I am a physical person, so I like face-to-face interaction, otherwise it is more challenging for me. (Zoe, parent, CS2)

Covid-19 has become a huge barrier to parental engagement, and it has impacted human relationships to an immense extent. Before covid, there was passion and enthusiasm in human relationships and human conversations; parent-educator conferences were an important event, we would all dress up nicely and look forward to meeting with parents. Now, we book appointments online, and it is a bet if a parent will book to attend or not, you don't see the same directness in our relationships. (Chloe, educator, CS1)

The last academic year (2020-2021) was extremely challenging for all IB schools in Greece. We would take it week by week to see what would happen on so many fronts, for example waiting from the IBO to decide on exams, grading, and other crucial things that directly affected our IBDP's functioning. I think it was on April 10, 2021, that the IBO eventually stated that we are following the non-exam route, so up until then we were waiting to see what would happen. Uncertainty, stress, and pressure was mounting for students, parents and educators and they were righ.t (Stephanos, educator, CS3)

2. <u>Parental engagement unravels between parents, educators and the child, both at home and school.</u>

Educators and parents presented common ground in the triadic nature of parental engagement, aiming to benefit the child/student. Educators and parents emphasized the need for balanced engagement and clear boundaries, achieved when educators and parents assume complementary roles. For instance, educators were portrayed as primary educators at school, parents as supportive partners at home and students at the centre of the 'triangle'. Subsequently,

parents and educators fulfil different roles to benefit the child, which takes us to the third assumption.

3. <u>Parents and educators perceive their roles differently in engagement and might assume complementary or conflicting roles.</u>

To begin with the role of parents in engagement, participants admitted that being engaged 'just so' allows educators to do their job properly and creates mutual respect among parents and educators. Then, the role of parents at home is to create a safe place, a security net for children so that they can focus on their academics. Participants mentioned that the role of parents in engagement is shaped by parents' own childhood experiences and ubpringing. As for the role assumed by educators, it is to be close to the child and convey information to parents in a comprehensible and proactive manner.

4. <u>When successful, parental engagement is founded upon human relationships, connection and trust and has positive outcomes for the whole school community.</u>

In terms of human relationships and parental engagement, educators and parents acknowledged an intense interplay between positive human relationships and the success of engagement. Precisely, educators and parents delved into the excellent relationships between them. They supported that educator-parent relationships are based on trust, tolerance, empathy, patience, teamwork, open communication, honesty, respect, clear boundaries and a shared commitment to make this partnership work. For this to happen, educators and parents admitted that both parties need to have realistic expectations from each other, being pragmatic and grounded about students.

Nonetheless, educators took a more analytical, professional stance on their relationships with parents, while parents centred on the practical characteristics and positive outcomes of their relationship with educators. For instance, educators underlined the individuality and uniqueness of each parent-educator relationship, attributed to three elements. First, that parents can be categorized into groups in their engagement – e.g. 'caring and supportive parents', 'pressurizing parents', and 'parents with high expectations'. Second, that there is a difference between maternal and paternal engagement, with the former being more prevalent. Third, that

several factors influence educator-parent relationships, like the subject taught, the child's interest in class, parenting styles, family situations, DP year, and personal compatibility of characters.

On the contrary, parents focused on practical aspects of their relationship with educators. Initially, parents discussed the ways in which parental aspirations and their personal background incited engagement. Then, parents touched upon the positive outcomes and experiences that parent-educator relationships bring about for children and themselves. For example, parents appreciated personal connection and collaboration with educators, especially when it comes to educator accessibility and responsiveness.

From the above, one realises that the weight of human relationships in engagement demonstrates the complexity and individuality of parent-educator relationships. This happens because human relationships are influenced by multiple factors: individual differences (e.g. family situation, parents' aspirations, teaching style, students' interest, subject taught), parent typology, gender dynamics in engagement, and the foundational concepts of healthy parent-educator relationships.

Therefore, do the three DP programmes in case study schools appear to have similar understandings of and approaches to engagement? My answer is yes, because, as previously mentioned, engagement is heavily influenced by the Greek culture. The Greek culture is not only the hosting culture of these schools, but also the native culture of most participants. Consequently, the Greek culture is powerful enough to outweigh the 'international' element of the DP programmes, as seen in existing literature (Georgas, 2016; Valassi, 2008). Then, I believe that similar approaches to engagement occur because the three case study schools are 'elite' and private, serving similar affluent families (Valassi, 2008). These families consistently prioritize engagement and hold high aspirations for their children and future (Nicholas et al, 2006; Lawson, 2003). As shown above, I believe that the biggest difference in understandings and approaches to engagement lays on individual differences.

6. Conclusion

This research has attempted to enlighten parental engagement as a phenomenon, from the point of view of parents and educators. Data collection happened in the DP of three schools, as this framework provided an interesting context for the analysis of engagement. This study was made possible thanks to twenty educators and seventeen parents who voluntarily participated in qualitative interviews and dyadic interviews with me.

The educators possessed diverse educational, professional and personal backgrounds, varying levels of teaching and/or administrative experience, and expertise in different subject areas. Also, some educators were parents themselves and others were not. Naturally, the above and other elements contributed to them having distinct personalities and thus views, approaches and expectations of parental engagement.

Similarly, parents exhibited different educational, professional and personal backgrounds, and family compositions. Naturally, the above and other elements shaped their personalities and thus views, approaches and expectations of parental engagement.

6.1. Significance of this research

This study has yielded several main takeaways on parental engagement from the perspective of parents and educators. For parents, parental engagement is viewed as a supportive, reciprocal relationship between parents and educators that aims to reinforce students' independence. It is a relationship based on trust and respect, clear communication and positive intentions from both sides. Also, parents underlined the importance of balanced engagement, where parents and educators do not overstep boundaries and responsibilities of each other. Finally, the DP departments and general school contexts mostly support parental engagement.

For educators, the definition and understanding of parental engagement differs significantly across individuals, cultures and contexts. While all teachers agreed that parental engagement should be a triangular process between parents, teachers and students, they also noted that many parents overly care about students' grades because of the Greek mentality and culture. Then, the quality of human relationships among parents and teachers appeared as essential to successful parental engagement. Namely, trust, honesty, respect and clear boundaries reinforce a balanced relationship between parents and teachers, also considering the different types of parents: 'caring and supportive', 'pressurizing' and 'with high aspirations and expectations. In addition, contextual factors in each school influence parental engagement to a great extent: the DP curriculum and pedagogy create opportunities and challenges in engagement, as is the case for the DP coordinator. Finally, the Greek culture and mentality of parents underpin parental engagement mostly in negative ways, paired with the covid-19 pandemic that significantly impacted parent-teacher dynamics.

Thus, IBWS in Greece appear to have similar understandings of parental engagement as a phenomenon. Differences in the approach and definition of engagement are found across individuals, because of relativism that characterises human nature.

6.2. Proposed directions of future research

This research is the first conducted in Greece, in private IBWS, in the High School grade division. Also, it is the first research that examines parental engagement as a phenomenon within this context, from the eyes of educators and parents. It is my aspiration that the findings of such a comparative and comprehensive analysis will incite meaningful conversations in the field of parental engagement and family-school partnerships, not only in Greece but also abroad. With regards to IBWS, further research "can only be helpful to those schools, and indeed to the families themselves, in helping to ensure that the relationship between school and parents is based on mutual understanding and becomes as productive as possible" (Hayden, 2006, p. 40). Namely, it would be interesting to examine the ways in which educators and parents perceive parental engagement in the DP of public, state-funded IBWS in Greece and in other parts and cultures of the world. Also, it would be interesting to investigate whether the same or different findings would emerge on parental engagement, if research was conducted in other grade divisions, for instance Primary or Middle School.

Having said that, it is essential to address the biggest limitation in my research design, which is external validity. I believe I addressed this by using interviews, dyadic interviews and documentary analysis in data collection to triangulate evidence. Moreover, the contexts, setting and circumstances of this research are thoroughly described so that "the reader can evaluate the potential for applying the results to other contexts or participants" (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p. 565).

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8. Appendices

8.1. Appendix A

Table 1: General information of the three case study schools

Case Study School	Type of school (self-identified)	Type of Owner-ship & Management	Years of operation (school)	Years of operation (DP)	School size (number of students)	Grades offered	Predomi-nant cultures in student & parent commu-nity	Predomi-nant cultures in staff commu-nity
CS1	Greek with a European dimension	Family-owned; for-profit	30	27	Large – 1000+	Pre-K to 12th grade	Greek	Greek
CS2	Greek-American	Belongs in a non-profit foundation	100	26	Very Large – 4000+	Pre-K to 12th grade	Greek American	Greek American
CS3	American	Part of the American College of Greece; for-profit	150	5	Large – 2000+	7th to 12th grade	Greek American	Greek American

* All information is based on the year of 2022. Very approximate numbers indicated in size of school and years of operation to ensure anonymity and avoid possible identification of the school.

8.2. Appendix B: Interview Guide

Appendix B1: Interview Guide for Educators

Elisabeth Neiada

PhD candidate, University of Bath

Email: een26@bath.ac.uk

Interview questions for educators

Research focus:

This research is about parental engagement in IB World Schools (IBWS) in Athens, Greece. Parents and educators in the IB Diploma Programme (DP) will participate in this research. 'Parental engagement' is a big umbrella term, like a large puzzle: we can put it together in various ways, to work out different relationships and 'solutions'. Puzzle pieces include parent-adolescent interactions at home, parental engagement in an adolescent's academics, parental involvement in school, parent-teacher relationships, and family-school partnerships. I am doing this research to explore your views and understanding of parental engagement, which are crucial to my investigation.

The following questions pertain to your present opinions and experiences as they happen in your **current** position and school. Our interview will be recorded and then transcribed by me. The content of our discussion is treated as completely confidential, and data will be anonymised and encrypted in the writing of my thesis.

Ice-breaker questions

1. From the questions you answered, I know that you are teaching … in the DP and you have been in this school since… To start with, please walk me through your day in the life of an educator.

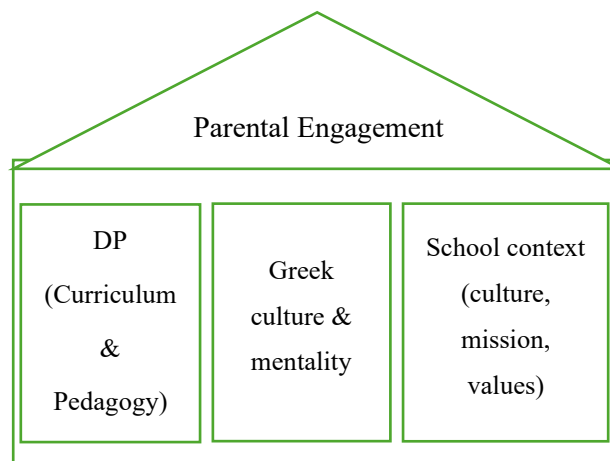2. Great, this leads me to my second question, which is: where do parents stand in this routine?

Main questions

3. In a few words, define parental engagement. What is parental engagement to you?

4. What actions do you take to engage parents in academics or the school? To what extent do you engage them?

5. Have you observed patterns as to which parents are more engaged? What elements help parents to get more engaged?

6. Can you identify potential barriers to parental engagement?

7. What are the benefits and drawbacks of parental engagement?

8. So overall, how would you describe your relationships with parents? Do you feel you are in a partnership with them?

9. In an ideal world, how would parental engagement/home-school partnerships be successful?

Wrap-up questions

10. My last question is the following: my research's overarching topic is parental engagement; I want to see what elements influence it and to what extent. So think of parental engagement as my main topic. I will use an image to describe it: you have a little house and you place parental engagement on the roof. Underneath the roof, you have three little windows of a house, where you put three subcategories:

    i. The DP (curriculum and pedagogy)

    ii. The Greek culture, because unavoidably these schools are geographically located in Greece so whether they are international, or American, they are influenced by the Greek culture or Greek 'mentality' and 'parents'

    iii. Your school.

So, if you create this image in your head, of the little house of parental engagement and the three windows, i.e. the DP curriculum & pedagogy, Greek culture & mentality, and school context, what would you say influences more parental engagement? You could tell me that all of them influence it to the same extent, because they are intertwined, but tell me about your thoughts on the above.

11. Is there anything else you would like to add to our discussion or ask me? May I contact you again if I have any additional questions?

Appendix B2: Interview Guide for Parents

Elisabeth Neiada
PhD candidate, University of Bath
Email: een26@bath.ac.uk

Interview questions for Parents

Research focus:

This research is about parental engagement in IB World Schools (IBWS) in Athens, Greece. Parents and educators in the IB Diploma Programme (DP) will participate in this research. 'Parental engagement' is a big umbrella term, like a large puzzle: we can put it together in various ways, to work out different relationships and 'solutions'. Puzzle pieces include parent-adolescent interactions at home, parental engagement in an adolescent's academics, parental involvement in school, parent-teacher relationships, and family-school partnerships. I am doing this research to explore your views and understanding of parental engagement, which are crucial to my investigation.

The following questions pertain to your present opinions and experiences as they happen in your child's **current** school. Our interview will be recorded and then transcribed by me. The content of our discussion is treated as completely confidential, and data will be anonymised and encrypted in the writing of my thesis.

Ice-breaker questions

1. From the questions you answered, I see that your child is in IB1/IB2. Please walk me through your day in the life of a parent of an IB1/IB2 student.

2. Great, this leads me to my second question, which is where do educators stand in this routine?
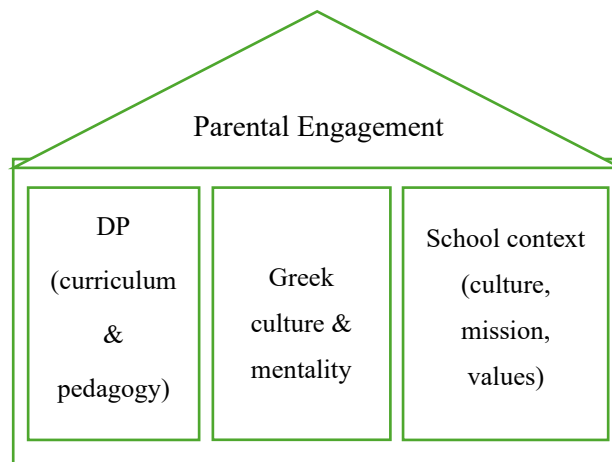
Main questions

3. What is parental engagement to you? How would you define it, what does it entail?

4. In what ways do you engage with educators in your child's school life?

5. Why do you become engaged in your child's education? What motivates your engagement?

6. What would you like/hope to come out of parental engagement?

7. Have you observed any benefits/drawbacks of parental engagement?

8. How does your child respond to the above?

9. Can you identify potential barriers to parental engagement?

10. So overall, how would you describe your relationships with educators? Do you feel you are in a partnership with them?

11. Now tell me about the school. Do you think this school promotes parental engagement?

   a. To what would you attribute your previous answer? To the school's administration, the parents, the teachers, the school's policies and/or the DP curriculum?

12. In an ideal world, how would parental engagement/home-school partnerships be successful?

Wrap-up questions

13. My last question is the following: my research's overarching topic is parental engagement; I want to see what elements influence it and to what extent. So, think of parental engagement as my main topic. I will use an image to describe it: you have a little house, and you place parental engagement on the roof. Underneath the roof, you have three little windows of a house, where you put three subcategories:

   i. The DP (curriculum and pedagogy)

   ii. The Greek culture, because unavoidably these schools are geographically located in Greece so whether they are international, or American, they are influenced by the Greek culture or Greek 'mentality' and 'parents'

   iii. Your school.

So, if you create this image in your head, of the little house of parental engagement and the three windows, i.e. the DP curriculum & pedagogy, Greek culture & mentality, and school context, what would you say influences more parental engagement? You could tell me that all of them influence it to the same extent, because they are intertwined, but tell me about your thoughts on the above.

14. Is there anything else you would like to add to our discussion? May I contact you again if I have any additional questions?

8.3. Appendix C: Case study schools and participants

	Pseudonyms	Participants
CS1	Alexander	Educator
CS1	Iris	Educator
CS1	Chloe	Educator
CS1	Sofia	Educator
CS1	Penelope	Educator
CS1	Hermes	Educator
CS1	Daphne	Parent
CS1	Aphrodite	Parent
CS1	Electra	Parent
CS1	Iole	Parent
CS1	Melissa	Parent
CS1	Niobe	Parent
CS2	Philip	Educator
CS2	Alexia	Educator
CS2	Dimitra	Educator
CS2	Calypso	Educator
CS2	Elina	Educator
CS2	Jason	Educator
CS2	Themis	Educator
CS2	Vassilis	Educator
CS2	Maya	Parent
CS2	Nausica	Parent

CS2	Zoe	Parent
CS2	Despoina	Parent
CS2	Leto	Parent
CS3	Theodore	Educator
CS3	Nicolas	Educator
CS3	Xenia	Educator
CS3	Dione	Educator
CS3	Stephanos	Educator
CS3	Katerina	Educator
CS3	Irene	Parent
CS3	Fiona	Parent
CS3	Lysistrate	Parent
CS3	Myrsini	Parent
CS3	Ophelia	Parent
CS3	Ektoras	Parent