

# Aiming for Educational Partnership Between Parents and Professionals: Shared Vision Development in a Professional Learning Community

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## Abstract

In the current qualitative case study, we explored a professional learning community (PLC) that aimed to include both staff members and parents, established in a primary school for a two-year period in the Netherlands. The PLC focused on building educational partnership between parents and school staff. In this study, we explored whether and how the PLC contributed to the development of a shared vision on parental involvement characterized by educational partnership. Thematic analysis of transcripts of PLC meetings and interviews with PLC members at the end of the first and second year disclosed ambiguity. The visions reflected an ambition to build educational partnership but also barriers to this ambition, such as the presence of deficit perspectives on parents, which seemed to result in ambivalence concerning the responsibilities and possibilities of professionals and parents of building educational partnership. The results suggest shared vision development is a multiple staged process, with an initial stage in which existing views and knowledge were exchanged, a second stage focused on the process of shared vision development and practical aspects of executing such a process, and a hypothetical third stage in which the planned process of vision development would be realized. To actually form a shared vision for partnership three elements seem necessary: a substantial amount of time, continuous parent participation in the PLC, and a targeted approach addressing deficit perspectives on parents and creating awareness of the power dynamics present in the parent–school relationship.

Key Words: professional learning community, parental involvement, inclusion, family–school relationships, educational partnerships, shared vision development

## Introduction

A vast body of research indicates that the involvement of parents in children's schooling positively affects children's academic outcomes (e.g., Boonk et al., 2018). Therefore, many schools promote parental involvement. However, the discourse on parental involvement has been criticized for the endorsement of deficit perspectives on parents and for favoring schools' agendas while neglecting parental voices (Auerbach, 2007a, 2009, 2010; Bakker & Denessen, 2007; Cooper et al., 2010). An approach to parental involvement characterized by educational partnership, in which parents and schools are equal partners with a shared responsibility for children's development, may overcome such critique (Denessen, 2019; Epstein, 2011; Epstein & Sanders, 2002).

Building educational partnership often implies an attitudinal and behavioral change in schools and can be viewed as an educational innovation. A shared school vision is regarded as a prerequisite for implementing and sustaining educational innovations (Fullan, 2007, 2011; Hammerness, 2010; Senge et al., 2012). It is thus assumed that successful implementation of a partnership approach is supported by a shared school vision on parental involvement. Research suggests that a shared vision should be developed in a collaborative process involving members from all layers of the school community and that changes in practice and behavior may foster shared vision development (Barnett & McCormick, 2003; Fullan, 2011; Huffman, 2003; O'Connell et al., 2011). However, little is known on how shared vision development happens in practice.

In professional learning communities (PLCs; cf., Lomos et al., 2011), professionals collectively exchange knowledge, investigate, and reflect on school practices in order to improve students' learning. In literature on PLCs, the presence of shared vision among its members is generally regarded as a defining characteristic. In the current study, we suggest a different type of relationship between a PLC and shared vision. We proposed that working in a PLC may stimulate the development of shared vision among its members. In the current qualitative case study, we explored a PLC that aimed to include both staff members and parents, established in a primary school for a two-year period. The PLC's goal was to build educational partnership between parents and the school. In this study, we explored whether and how the PLC contributed to the development of a shared vision characterized by educational partnership in the school. In addition, we explored whether and how engaging in new practices

with regards to the parent–school relationship may contribute to the development of a shared vision.

### **Parental Involvement in Children’s Schooling**

Parents can be involved in their children’s schooling in many ways. Parental involvement can take place at home, for example, when parents assist children with their homework or engage children in home literacy activities such as shared book reading, storytelling, or teaching about letters and print. Parental involvement can also take place at school, such as taking part in parent councils or helping with school events (Fantuzzo et al., 2004). A vast body of research has shown that higher academic performances have been reported for children with more involved parents compared to children with less involved parents (Boonk et al., 2018; Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003; Jeynes, 2005).

However, several scholars have criticized the discourse on parental involvement (e.g., Auerbach, 2007a, 2007b, 2010; Bakker & Denessen, 2007; Baquedano-Lopez et al., 2013; Cooper et al., 2010). Central to the critique is that the term is frequently used without acknowledging the power dynamics at play between schools and parents, in which schools determine what the “right” type of parental involvement is and overlook types that do not fit that mold (Bakker & Denessen, 2007; Posey-Maddox & Haley-Lock, 2020). Types of parental involvement prioritized by schools are practices such as assisting with homework, engaging in shared reading activities, attending parent–teacher conferences, being active in the schools’ parent council, and practical support, such as helping out during field trips. Research shows that such types of parental involvement are more frequently shown by parents from middle and high socioeconomic status (SES) backgrounds than by low-SES parents (Auerbach, 2007a; Lopez, 2001; Posey-Maddox & Haley-Lock, 2020; Weininger & Lareau, 2003). However, parents from low-SES background may show alternative types of support, such as teaching children about the importance of hard work and the value of education and study, setting high standards for their children, and promoting qualities such as diligence and dedication (Lopez, 2001; Rezai et al., 2015). These alternative types of parental involvement are not always recognized, prioritized, or noticed by schools (Auerbach, 2007a; Denessen, 2019; Rezai et al., 2015)

Conceptualizations of parental involvement based on school priorities may engender deficit perspectives on parents. Such deficit perspectives generally pertain to low-SES parents and parents of other ethnic and linguistic backgrounds than the majority group (Baquedano-Lopez, 2013; Chavez-Reyes, 2010; Denessen, 2019) and imply that if parents do not show the type of parent involvement recognized by schools, they are regarded as problematic, lacking

knowledge or skills, and needing to change their attitudes and behaviors in order to meet the schools' norms (Auerbach, 2007a, 2007b; Baquedano-Lopez et al., 2013; Chavez-Reyes, 2010). As a consequence, parents may be blamed for the struggles in their children's schooling, while societal and educational structures that produce or maintain educational inequalities are ignored. Deficit perspectives thus remove the focus from schools' and authorities' responsibilities in diminishing differences in children's educational opportunities (Kim, 2009).

Models of cooperation between parents and school based on the notion of *partnership* may overcome the critique described above. In a partnership model of parental involvement, parents and schools are equal partners with a shared responsibility: optimally supporting children's learning and development (Epstein, 2011; Epstein & Sanders, 2002). Partnerships between parents and schools are ideally characterized by mutual trust and respect, an inclusive approach welcoming families from all backgrounds, a focus on improving students' results and success, and a process-oriented approach, in which the collaboration between schools and parents is regarded as an ongoing process which takes time, attention, and planning to sustain (Epstein, 2011; Epstein & Sanders, 2002; Valli et al., 2016). In a partnership approach, creating and maintaining good relationships between parents and school are regarded a shared responsibility of schools and parents, instead of narrowly focusing on what parents should do or fail to do (Auerbach, 2007a; Bakker et al., 2013; Epstein, 2011; Kim, 2009b).

In the current study, we build on Oostdam and Hooge's (2013) notion of "educational partnership." Educational partnership focuses on the cooperation of parents and school in stimulating children's learning. A typical example of educational partnership is when parents and teachers engage in home-school conferencing: a mutual exchange of knowledge on how the child learns in the home and in the school setting and how to align both contexts. Educational partnership contrasts with other forms of partnership, such as "formal partnership" (e.g., participation in parent councils) or "social partnership" (e.g., organizing community events).

### **Educational Change: The Role of Shared Vision**

Building educational partnerships often implies implementing changes. In the educational innovation literature, shared vision is regarded as a driving force behind successful and sustainable changes in schools: if team members share a vision on the goals of education and how to achieve them, they will be more committed to reaching those goals and applying changes in practice (Fulnan, 2007; Hammerness, 2010; Senge et al., 2012; Thoonen et al., 2012). In

most definitions, a vision entails an understanding of the current situation of the school/organization (descriptive model; Strange & Mumford, 2002, 2005) and an understanding of what the situation should be in the future (prescriptive model; Strange & Mumford, 2002, 2005). Senge and colleagues (2012) emphasized this aspect of creating an understanding of what the future should be in defining a shared school vision as the “images of ‘the future we want to create together,’ along with the values that will be important in getting there, the goals we hope to achieve along the way, and the principles and guiding practices we expect to employ” (p. 80). According to Senge and colleagues, a vision is not only an imagined future, but it also has consequences for practice, as it encompasses shared ideas on the methods for reaching the goals and values collectively formulated.

Despite the widely shared acknowledgement of its importance, little is known on how to develop shared vision in schools (Averso, 2004; Barnett & McCormick, 2003; Hammerness, 2010; Watson, 2014). Research suggests certain key elements in the process of shared vision development. First, it should be a collective process involving members from all layers of the school organization, to ensure ownership of and commitment to the vision. A vision that is solely developed by the school leadership and is implemented top-down will likely not be shared by the school community (Barnett & McCormick, 2003; Huffman, 2003; O’Connell et al., 2011; Pekarsky, 2007). Second, shared vision development should be a collaborative process, in which critical reflection and the exchange of knowledge, experiences, and opinions are crucial (Barnett & McCormick, 2003; Huffman, 2003; O’Connell et al., 2011; Senge et al., 2012). Third, shared vision may not only develop through talking but also by *doing* (Barnett & McCormick, 2003; Fullan, 2007, 2011; Pekarsky, 2007). Research indicates that a mutual relationship exists between practice and vision: changed behavior may result in changed ideas and vice versa (Fives & Buehl, 2012; Fullan, 2007, 2011). According to Fullan (2007, 2011), professionals need to be exposed to meaningful new experiences in order to form or alter their personal and eventually shared vision. As a method to develop a shared vision, initiating innovative practices may get this process started.

### **Shared Vision and Professional Learning Communities**

Working in a PLC may be a means to stimulate the development of shared vision in a school. A PLC is a community of educational professionals who engage in a collective, ongoing, reflective enquiry into their own and colleagues’ teaching practices in order to improve those collective practices with the final aim of fostering students’ learning (Lomos et al., 2011; Slegers et al., 2013; Stoll et al., 2006). PLCs are often defined in terms of their characteristics, such

as shared vision, a focus on students' learning, supportive leadership, a culture of collaboration, collective critical reflection on practice, a focus on teacher learning, and a positive work climate (Bolam et al., 2005; Schaap & De Bruijn, 2018; Slegers et al., 2013; Stoll et al., 2006; Vangrieken et al., 2017; Voelkel & Chrispeels, 2017).

In the current study, we assume that although shared vision is usually regarded as a defining element of PLCs, the relation between shared vision and PLCs may be reversed: working in a PLC may also stimulate the development of a shared vision. In well-functioning PLCs, the conditions for developing a shared vision may be present, as diverse members of the school community collaborate, exchange knowledge and experiences, and engage in collective critical reflection. Furthermore, while the term PLC may also refer to the learning culture in the whole school community including all staff, we use the term PLC for a community of learners within a school (cf., Louis, 2006; Vangrieken et al., 2017). Finally, although some uncertainty exists on the compatibility of the participation of parents with the notion of "professional" in PLCs (Hairon et al., 2017), we believe that parents could and should be part of a PLC that focuses on building educational partnership between parents and school (Cooper et al., 2009). In School Learning Communities (SLC) introduced by Epstein and Salinas (2004), parental participation is common practice established, for example, by introducing an action team for partnership in the school, in which parents and professionals work together (cf., Brown & Beckett, 2007; Epstein & Salinas, 2004; Iliás et al., 2016). PLC and SLC are related concepts, but a key difference seems to be that School Learning Communities are more action-oriented than PLCs. Although improving practice through implementing certain actions may be a PLC's ultimate goal, the core ingredients of the collaboration process in PLCs are critical reflection and continuous inquiry of the school's practice (Bolam et al., 2005; Stoll et al., 2006). These core ingredients make working in a PLC a suitable setting for developing a shared vision.

### **Research Questions**

In the current qualitative case study, we examined the process of shared vision development on parent involvement in one primary school in the Netherlands. We started from two assumptions. First, we assumed that shared vision development would benefit from the collaborative reflective process in a PLC. Second, we assumed that shared vision development would profit from collective engagement in a meaningful new experience (Fullan, 2007, 2011). Starting from the first assumption, we established a PLC in a primary school with the intention that staff members and parents would work together towards the introduction of a partnership approach in the school. Starting from

the second assumption, we introduced a parent–child program in the school that required PLC members to collectively reflect on their perceptions of parent involvement. This program, Early Education at Home (EEH; Dutch Youth Institute, 2020), aims to stimulate kindergartners’ home literacy environments by helping parents to undertake literacy activities at home and assumes that parents and teachers engage in a dialogue on how both can contribute to children’s literacy development. This program will be discussed in separate research articles, as an in-depth discussion of EEH is beyond the scope of the current article (further information may be obtained from the first author upon request).

We aimed to answer the following research question: Does a PLC involving parents and professionals contribute to the development of a shared vision on parental involvement characterized by educational partnership, and if so, in what way? We expected that, at the beginning of the study, PLC members would not (yet) have a shared vision characterized by educational partnership. To answer the main research question, we aimed to answer the following sub-questions:

1. To what extent were the visions on parental involvement expressed by PLC members compatible with an educational partnership approach?
2. How did the expressed visions develop in the two-year period?

## Method

### Case Study Design

The current study is a single-case study (Yin, 2018). The unit of analysis is the PLC in one school that was followed for two years (summer 2015 until summer 2017). This case study is a substudy in a larger project, in which we investigated the effects of EEH on children’s emergent literacy development. For the current study, we made in-depth analyses of the process of shared vision development in one of the participating schools.

### Case Description

#### *School*

The school, which we gave the fictitious name “The Compass,” was located in one of the major Dutch cities, in an area belonging to the 25% of neighborhoods in The Netherlands with the lowest SES scores of the population (Netherlands Institute for Social Research, 2017). At the start of the study, 20% of the school’s pupils came from families with low parental educational levels (i.e., no education or only primary education and/or prevocational secondary education; Dienst Uitvoering Onderwijs, 2015), and according to the school leader, 40% of the children had a migration background (one or more

parents being born outside the Netherlands; Statistics Netherlands, 2016). With a population of 480 pupils from kindergarten through Grade 6 (4–12 years of age; Dienst Uitvoering Onderwijs, 2015), The Compass is considered a large school.

### *Unit of Analysis: The PLC*

The school self-selected participants for the PLC based on the guidelines provided by the research team. These guidelines were as follows: ideally, the PLC should consist of the school leader, teachers from age groups 4–6, 7–9, and 10–12, the parent consultant if present in the school, and two or more parents (non-school employees) of children attending the school. These guidelines were based on the notion that strong commitment of the school leader is a characteristic of successful PLCs (cf., Slegers et al., 2013) and that it is important for shared vision development to involve members from all layers of the school community (cf., Fullan, 2011). Because of the focus of the PLC on the parent–school relationship, the school chose to involve the parent–consultant employed by the school in the PLC, all employees working with EEH, and teachers invested in the topic of parental involvement.

### *PLC Members*

Table 1 provides an overview of the PLC members. Below, we provide a short description of the PLC members.

**PLC Coordinator.** The coordinator of the PLC was the special needs coordinator of the lower grades (kindergarten). In her role as PLC coordinator, she prepared and chaired the meetings, determined the agenda for each meeting (in consultation with the first author of this article) and took the lead in written communication before and after each meeting. She shared the responsibility for the implementation of EEH with the kindergarten teacher and parent consultant, also members of the PLC (see below).

**Teachers.** Three teachers took part in the PLC, a kindergarten teacher (for children aged 4–6 years), a teacher of the “middle grades” (for children aged 6–9 years), and a teacher of the upper grades (for children aged 9–12 years).

**Parent Consultant.** The school employed a parent consultant who also took part in the PLC. In urban parts of the Netherlands, many schools employ a parent consultant. This is a social worker who provides support for parents in several areas, for example, in how to help children with school work or financial topics or child rearing. At the beginning of the second year of the PLC, the parent consultant found a new job and was, after a while, replaced by a new parent consultant. The new parent consultant also took part in the PLC.

**School Leader.** The school leader was present during every PLC meeting, in which she actively participated.



Table 1. Overview of PLC members

Function	Gender	Country of Birth	# of PLC meetings attended	Participation interview 2015–16	Participation interview 2016–17
School leader	Female	Netherlands	13	Yes	Yes
Coordinator PLC/Special coordinator lower grades/responsible for EEH implementation	Female	Netherlands	12	Yes	Yes
Teacher, age group 9–12	Male	Netherlands	12	Yes	Yes
Teacher, age group 6–9	Female	Netherlands	10	No	Yes
Teacher, age groups 4–6/responsible for EEH implementation	Female	Netherlands	11	No	Yes
Parent consultant in Year 1/responsible for EEH implementation	Female	Netherlands	4	Yes	No
Parent consultant in Year 2	Female	Morocco	3	No	Yes
Parent	Female	Suriname	6	Yes	No
Parent/only took part once in 2015–16	Female	Unknown	1	No	No
Researcher (first author)	Female	Netherlands	12	n.a.	n.a.
Researcher (second author)	Male	Netherlands	8	n.a.	n.a.

**Parents.** Parents did not take part in the PLC before the third meeting, because team members were initially not sure which parents to ask to participate and seemed to feel some hesitancy in involving parents. One parent had children in the lower and upper grades. She attended nearly half of the PLC meetings and actively contributed to the discussions. In the course of the second year of the PLC, she found a job which she could not combine with further participation in the PLC. The second parent was a mother of a child in kindergarten, who also took part in EEH. She was present only once, during the third PLC meeting. This mother also found a job that did not allow her to continue participation in the PLC. In our role as PLC facilitators

and researchers, we repeatedly urged the school to ensure continuous parent participation and to involve new parent members after the first parent members could not participate any more. However, staff members were hesitant in following our guidance on this matter. At first, they tried to find replacements, but did not succeed. Towards the end of the two years, the school did not try to recruit new parent members. At that point, they were more explicit in their wish to not yet involve new parents in the PLC. They preferred to first create a plan for shared vision development with the existing PLC members, only staff members. We regard the problem with continuous parent participation in the PLC as both an outcome and a limitation of our study. We further reflect on this matter in the discussion section.

**Researchers.** Two researchers (first and second author) served as facilitators. At least one of us was present during every meeting of the PLC. Our activities in the PLC involved providing access to certain resources, such as research literature, challenging assumptions and beliefs, asking reflective questions, providing feedback, and stimulating critical reflection. As such, our role can be characterized by what Margalef and Roblin (2016) defined as “supporting teacher [participant] learning” (p. 158). The first author is a White female educational researcher. At the time of the project, she worked as PhD candidate at a Dutch university. The second author is a White male assistant professor of educational sciences at the same university and an endowed professor of reading behavior at another Dutch university. The other PLC members were also White, except for both parent consultants and the two parents. Being white-skinned, higher educated employees at an influential knowledge institution, our position in the PLC may not have been neutral. However, especially in the first two meetings, but also throughout the two years, we explicitly discussed our position and role as facilitators in the PLC. In the first two meetings, we took a more active role to serve as a model for the PLC coordinator, who took over this role after the first two meetings. We emphasized that we participated in the PLC for two reasons: to observe and examine the PLC process and to provide support to the PLC members if needed. We explicitly stated that PLC members’ needs and questions, and not ours, should be guiding which topics were discussed, which questions were explored, and which actions were taken during the PLC process. At the end of the project, PLC members evaluated our contribution in the PLC as supportive and informative but not dominant.

### **Procedure**

The first PLC meeting was held in the summer of 2015, just before the summer holidays. Thereafter, the meetings were held every six to eight weeks. Meetings generally lasted for 1.5 hours. The first author chaired the first two

meetings to provide a model of how the meeting could be structured. Subsequently, the PLC coordinator took over this role. The first meeting consisted of exploratory collaborative group assignments and discussions to introduce the topic of “educational partnership.” Thereafter, all meetings followed the same procedure. In the first part of the meetings, members discussed the implementation of EEH. In the second part of the meetings, the focus was extended to educational partnership in the whole school. PLC members were encouraged to work from a research-oriented perspective, following a cyclical approach (Ponte, 2012) with the aid of a format provided by the researchers, inspired by De Koning and Kroon (2011). See Figures 1 and 2 for the format and a description of the stages in the cycle.

Shortly after the first PLC meeting, the school implemented EEH. In the EEH program, schools invite parents of kindergartners every four to six weeks for a parent meeting of 1.5 hours. In those meetings, parents are encouraged to share their experiences with children’s literacy learning at home. School teachers support and instruct parents in how to undertake home literacy activities with their children, such as shared book-reading, discussing prompting boards (de la Rie et al., 2020), playing language games, and doing craft work together. Parents also receive materials to take home. All activities are connected to the themes of the kindergarten curriculum. Ideally, the parent meetings also provide opportunities for parents to bring their own topics to the table and for teachers to tell the parents about the kindergarten curriculum (Kalthoff & Berns, 2014). At The Compass, the kindergarten teacher, parent consultant, and the PLC coordinator were responsible for the implementation of EEH.

Figure 1. PLC Working Method Part 1: Cyclical Approach<sup>1</sup>

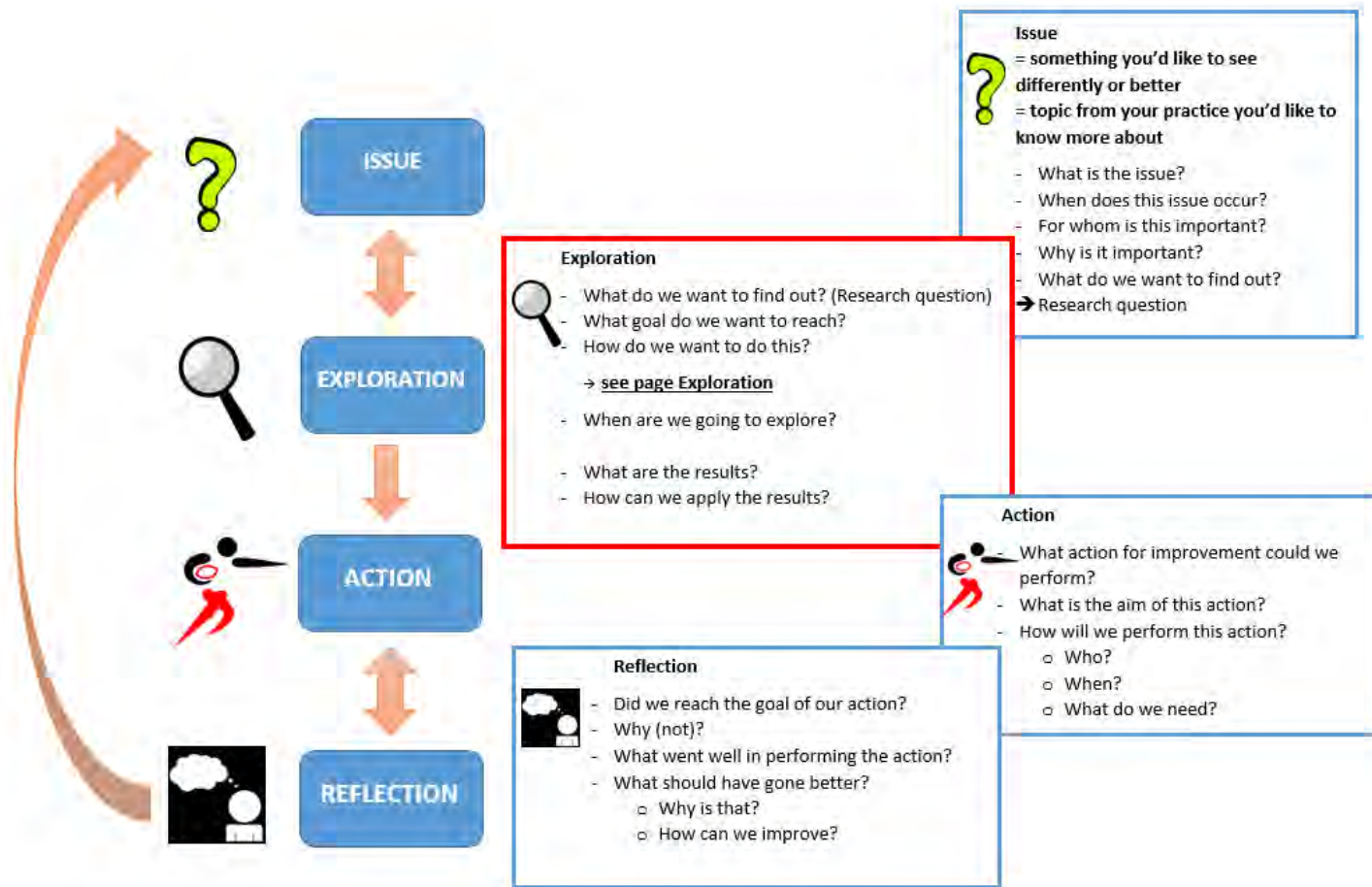


Figure 2. PLC Working Method Part 2: Exploration<sup>2</sup>



Note. Figure inspired by De Koning and Kroon (2011).

## Data Sources

### *Meeting Transcripts*

Audio recordings were made of each PLC meeting (13 in total), which were later transcribed verbatim by a research assistant.

### *Interviews of PLC members*

At the end of each intervention year, all PLC members were approached by a research assistant to take part in a semistructured telephone interview (see Table 1 for an overview of participants). In the first year, however, three members could not be interviewed: two teachers could not be reached because of pregnancy leave and family circumstances, while one parent could not be reached (reason unknown). In the second year, parents had ceased participation in the PLC at the time of the interviews. The interviews consisted of general evaluative questions on the PLC process (e.g., According to you, what went really well in the PLC meetings this year? What aspects need improvement?), questions on the cooperation between parent and school (e.g., How do you evaluate the cooperation between parent members and staff members in the PLC?), questions on the discussion of the implementation of EEH (e.g., What do you think of the discussions of EEH in each PLC meeting?), questions on the development of a (shared) vision on parental involvement in the PLC and in the school (e.g., To what extent do you share the same ideas on parental involvement in the PLC? To what extent do you share the same ideas on parental involvement with your colleagues? Did any changes occur in the school's vision on parental involvement as a result of the introduction of the PLC?), questions on the role of the school leader in supporting parental involvement and the PLC, and questions on the role of the research team in the PLC. Interviews generally lasted about 40 minutes. All 11 interviews were audiorecorded and transcribed verbatim by a research assistant. The transcripts of the interviews and PLC meetings were in Dutch. When quoting from these transcripts in the results section, we translated from Dutch to English.

## Analysis

To answer the research questions, transcripts of the PLC meetings ( $n = 13$ ) and interviews ( $n = 11$ ) were analyzed (see Appendix, available from the authors upon request, for coding scheme). We only selected fragments that expressed PLC members' vision(s) on parental involvement. Based on the notion that vision entails a descriptive mental model of the current situation and a prescriptive, normative mental model of what the situation should be (Strange & Mumford, 2002; 2005), we applied the following rules in selecting fragments:

- Fragments contained PLC members' expectations / norms concerning what parents should do, be, or have in relation to parental involvement. For instance: parents should be involved in their child's schooling.
- Fragments contained PLC members' expectations / norms concerning what the school / professional should do, be, or have in relation to parental involvement. For example: the professional should be open and respectful towards parents.
- Fragments contained PLC members' perceptions / descriptions of what parents currently do, are, or have, in relation to parental involvement. For example: parents are approachable for the school.
- Fragments contained PLC members' perceptions / descriptions concerning what the school / professional currently does, is, or has in relation to parental involvement. For example: the professional facilitates parental involvement.

The first author coded the fragments following the procedures of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) aided by the research software Atlas.ti. Although some themes and codes resonated theoretical insights on parental involvement and partnership, the data were leading in defining codes and themes; the data were coded according to an inductive approach (Thomas, 2006). After the first round of coding all transcripts, codes were organized into larger themes, and more specific subcodes were merged into more general codes. Next, all data were coded again using the adjusted coding scheme. To ensure validity and reliability, the coding procedures and coding scheme were discussed several times with the second and third author of the paper; we discussed the validity of the codes and the organization into larger themes and collectively coded a meeting transcript and an interview transcript. The few cases where disagreements on coding occurred were discussed until agreement was reached. These discussions led to small adjustments in definitions of codes and themes.

To examine developments in vision in the PLC (RQ 2), we analyzed how the expressed visions changed in the second intervention year compared to the first year. To this end, the absolute frequency (total number of times a code occurred) and relative frequency (percentage of total number of codes) of each code in the meeting transcripts in Year 1 and in Year 2 and the number of interviews in which each code was applied in Year 1 and in Year 2 were computed. This allowed us to compare Year 1 and Year 2 by considering: (a) how much attention was given to specific expectations and perceptions in PLC meetings, and (b) how many PLC members expressed specific expectations and perceptions in interviews.

After analysis, the first author discussed the results with the available members of the PLC, namely the school leader and the PLC coordinator, as a

member-check (Koelsch, 2013). Both PLC members recognized the researchers' interpretations of the data and saw no discrepancies between the results and their own perceptions of the PLC process.

## Results

The visions expressed by the PLC members on parental involvement during the PLC meetings and in the interviews were categorized into seven themes, namely, "educational partnership," "formal partnership," "contact and communication," "relational climate," "diversity of the parent population," "responsibility and control," and "vision and team support." See Table 2 for descriptions of the content of the seven themes. Figure 3 provides a schematic overview of the interrelations between the themes. Below, we first present the results of our qualitative analysis, describing the compatibility of PLC members' visions with educational partnership (RQ1). Next, we describe the developments in visions during the two years of the PLC (RQ2).

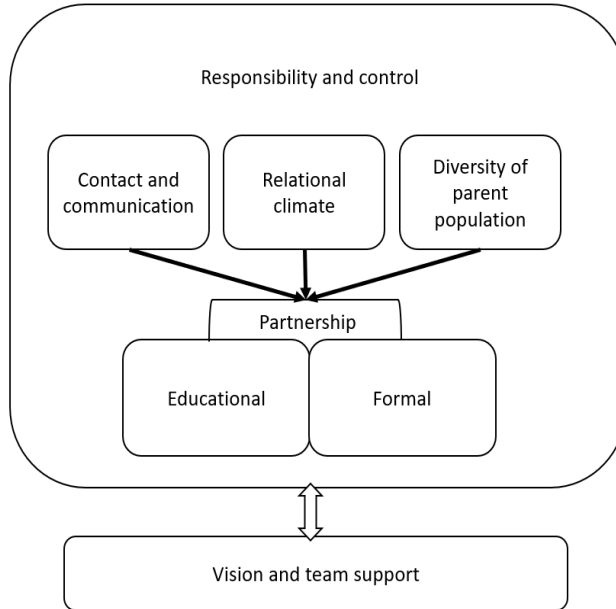
Table 2. Description of Main Themes in Coded Data Fragments

Main Theme	Description
Educational partnership	Codes within this theme concern the cooperation between parents and school aimed at stimulating children's development.
Formal partnership	Codes within this theme concern the cooperation between parents and school aimed at improving the school organization.
Contact and communication	Codes within this theme concern the communication between parents and school.
Relational climate	Codes within this theme concern the relational climate between parents, among parents, among professionals, and attitudinal aspects of parents and professionals towards each other and towards parental involvement.
Diversity of parent population	Codes within this theme concern the diversity of the population, how diversity may influence parental involvement, and the skills parents and professional have, need, or lack related to diversity.
Responsibility and control	Codes within this theme concern professionals' and parents' responsibilities in stimulating parental involvement and the extent to which the degree of parental involvement can be influenced.
Vision and team support	Codes with this theme concern the topic of shared vision and process of shared vision development within the school team and the school community.

*Note.* For all codes and data examples, see Appendix, available from the authors upon request.



Figure 3. Schematic overview of main themes and relations among themes in coded data fragments.



### **Compatibility of Visions on Parental Involvement With Educational Partnership (RQ1)**

PLC members expressed perceptions of and expectations from parents and professionals in diverse themes, such as relational climate or contact and communication. Within each theme, different and sometimes opposing visions can be found. For example, in the theme relational climate, parents were perceived to be both enthusiastic and involved as well as unenthusiastic and uninvolved. Next to the seven themes, we observed four patterns in the expressed visions related to the compatibility of visions with educational partnership. We define a pattern as a coherent set of perceptions and expectations that is systematically observed within and across the seven themes. First, PLC members strived for a parent–school relationship based on education partnership. Second, barriers for educational partnership were present in the expressed visions. Third, the visions contained uncertainties and contradictions in responsibilities in and control over the parent–school relationship. Fourth, PLC members expressed a need for and intention to develop a (formalized) shared vision. The first two patterns were observed across the different themes. The third pattern was only observed in the theme responsibility and control, and the fourth pattern in the theme vision and team support. Below, each of these patterns are described in more detail.

*Striving for Educational Partnership (First Pattern)*

PLC members held norms for parents and professionals that were compatible with an educational partnership approach. First of all, they expected that parents were involved in their children's learning and cooperated with the school to stimulate children's learning. They also expected professionals to cooperate with and support parents in order to stimulate children's learning ([theme:] educational partnership).

I think the ultimate goal is to help those children as much as possible in their development, both in behavior as well as in grades and I think the way to do that is being on the same page with parents. (Teacher upper grades, PLC Meeting [M] 2, Year [Yr] 1).

Additionally, PLC members expected parents and school staff to engage in a reciprocal communicative relationship, and they expected both to adhere to similar norms (e.g., being approachable, sharing information, reaching out; theme: contact and communication). Next, PLC members strived for a relationship between schools and parents characterized by trust, equality, and mutual respect, as evidenced by the expectations that professionals should respect parents and treat them as equals by taking them seriously and being open and welcoming: "That they [parents] are taken seriously and are given the feeling that they are really welcome. That's what...we expect from our teachers concerning parental involvement: openness, showing that we need to do it together" (PLC coordinator, PLC M1, Yr 1).

Similarly, PLC members expected from parents that they were respectful and understanding towards professionals (relational climate). PLC members valued an inclusive approach by expecting from professionals that they knew and responded to diverse parental backgrounds (diversity of parent population) and by expecting from the school that it should involve team members, parents, and children in developing a school vision on parental involvement (vision and team support).

*Obstacles for Educational Partnership (Second Pattern)*

Several perceptions of parents expressed by PLC members may frustrate the development of educational partnership. In various cases, positively formulated parent perceptions were accompanied by negative parent perceptions that reflected a deficit perspective. For example, although parents were sometimes perceived as supportive and involved in children's schooling, concerns were also raised about parents' knowledge, skills, and capacities to support children's learning (educational partnership). Similarly, some parents were perceived as approachable, but others as "hard to reach" (contact and communication), as evidenced by the metaphor of the "dead-end street" in the following quote: "I

have also mentioned that I think it's very difficult to keep on seeking contact if I enter a dead-end street every time" (Teacher middle grades, PLC M1, Yr 1).

Likewise, parents were in some cases perceived as appreciative, respectful, and understanding towards the school and professionals, while in other cases they were perceived as too demanding and critical (relational climate). Additionally, some parents were perceived as involved and enthusiastic, while others were perceived as uninvolved and not enthusiastic (relational climate). Furthermore, although PLC members generally observed good relations among parents and between parents and school, concerns were also expressed that parents may not feel welcome and/or appreciated in the school (relational climate) as illustrated by the following quote, when the PLC members (no parents were present at that moment) discussed the participation of parents in the PLC: "But that is really something to consider; if we're going to put a parent here who finds it difficult to tell things and doesn't feel safe here, then we're not going to get any information out of them" (Teacher upper grades, PLC M2, Yr 1).

The ambivalence in perceptions among PLC members seemed to be related to the diversity of the parent population. PLC members, for instance, indicated that personal circumstances of some parents, such as a hectic family life, work situation, or financial problems hampered their involvement. Additionally, parents' language background, if different from Dutch, was perceived as problematic. Similarly, parents' cultural/ethnic background was seen as a factor determining involvement: some PLC members, for instance, perceived parents with Turkish backgrounds to be less involved than other parents: "We're just missing a whole group of parents who we never see, and those are precisely our Turkish mothers, who we don't see" (School leader, PLC M2, Yr 1).

Sometimes, the deficit perspective was challenged. During one PLC meeting, for instance, the parent consultant opposed the stance that cultural background determined the degree of involvement and, consequently, the deficit perspective underlying this stance. Instead, she argued that parents with different cultural backgrounds may have different beliefs on what parent involvement should be:

There is also the group of parents who, from their cultural perspective, say, "This is the school, and here it belongs. You do it." You know, then it is not about disinterest, but you know, it's a bit of culture. "You are the school, and we are home; we are not school"....I think anyways the word "uninterested" is a pity, that is just something that you cannot fill in for someone else. (Parent consultant, PLC M1, Yr 1)

PLC members' perceptions of professionals also reflected some obstacles for realizing educational partnership. PLC members saw some professionals reach out to parents only in case of problems, instead of building an equal, reciprocal

communicative relationship with parents (contact and communication). Additionally, some professionals were perceived to be feeling tense and vulnerable in contacts with parents (relational climate). Although PLC members expected from professionals that they knew and responded to parental backgrounds, the perception prevailed that professionals lacked knowledge on parental backgrounds and perspectives (diversity of population). Furthermore, perceptions of PLC members reflected lack of skills and discomfort as professionals when engaging with linguistically diverse parents (diversity of population). An example of discomfort with linguistic diversity was expressed by the school leader, when explaining why adherence to the school policy that parents should only speak Dutch in school was important to her:

We want Dutch to be spoken in the school, and Dutch in the school yard, because otherwise we cannot communicate with one another. It causes an eerie feeling if you don't understand. I can stand beside them, but I don't get anything because I don't know what they're talking about, and so forth. She [a parent] was very outraged about that. She felt told off, but it is the only way to communicate with one another. (School leader, PLC M2, Yr 1)

*Uncertainties and Contradictions in Responsibilities and Control (Third Pattern)*

This pattern was observed within the theme responsibility and control. PLC members questioned what professionals' and parents' responsibilities were in stimulating parental involvement: they expressed uncertainties in what belonged to the school domain and the family domain. PLC members observed that team members differed in their understanding of what constituted teachers' tasks in involving parents:

To what extent do you do you go after them, as a teacher, if a parent does not show up at a parent-teacher conference? Everyone here would call the parents or address them if they [staff members] see them [parents], but then there are teachers who say, well, we made this appointment; they did not show up; I called them; I emailed them; there is no reply; here it ends for me—not my job to pursue it any further. But there will also be teachers who say, yes, eventually the child matters, so I will call a second, third, fourth time until I made an appointment. And yes, there are differences in expectations from school and teacher. (Teacher upper grades, Interview [I], Yr 2).

Additionally, PLC members were sometimes ambiguous in their expectations and perceptions of the responsibilities of the school. On the one hand, they expected staff members to maximally facilitate parental involvement by

taking away obstacles for parents to become involved (e.g., by arranging child-care during parent meetings, arranging interpreters for parents who did not speak Dutch). On the other hand, the responsibilities of the school were often nuanced. For instance, many parent involvement activities were perceived as the (sole) responsibility of the parent consultant. Furthermore, PLC members expressed boundaries in the extent to which the school could accommodate parents, for example, concerning planning evening meetings: “There were parents who said ‘yes, but we can [only] do that in the evenings.’ No, we are not going to do that” (Kindergarten teacher, I, Yr 2). Also, PLC members expected and perceived the staff to regulate or even restrict parental input and involvement. For instance, cooperation in the PLC with parents was not seen by all PLC members as desirable: parent participation should be limited to formal parent councils, according to several PLC members. The following quote from an interview with a teacher participating in the PLC illustrates how the school regulated parental input in selecting parents to take part in the PLC:

[interviewer] What do you think of how the cooperation with parents in the PLC is working out?

[teacher] Hm, fine. Yes, they are also, yes, yes, we select them a bit for it, of course. To put it a little bluntly, but, we have two very pleasant parents who, yes, are very well capable of, and that is difficult for some parents, but they are very capable of switching between, what do parents want? And what is feasible for, for a school? (Teacher middle grades, I, Yr 2)

PLC members also expressed contradictory perceptions about the level of control the staff had over the degree of parental involvement, reflecting both a stronger as well as a more limited sense of collective efficacy (Tschannen-Moran et al., 2014). PLC members expressed positive perceptions about the staff's efforts to stimulate parental involvement. They perceived professionals to indeed facilitate parental involvement in the school in many different ways, for example, by considering parents' needs and wishes in organizing parent events. They perceived professionals as able to influence parental involvement, for example, through positive and welcoming teacher attitudes when approaching parents. At the same time, PLC members were pessimistic about the impact of the schools' efforts: they expressed the perception that professionals could not influence parental involvement, no matter how much work professionals put into facilitating it. The following quote of the school leader discussing the implementation of EEH illustrates this perception:

You just cannot figure out how to do it exactly. What is important for me at this moment, is, gosh, I am not going to invest hundreds and thousands of euros in this. You know, this takes so much energy, that I think,

you know, you don't even have the strength to put so much energy into it and keep on going after it...It does not serve the goal, and then I think, yes, where did we take the wrong turn. (School leader, PLC M6, Yr 1)

Remarkably, contradictory perceptions regarding professionals' influence on parental involvement were observed within the same individuals in the PLC. It is unclear what caused the ambivalence in perceived control. Perceived control may vary for the involvement of different groups of parents, but the data did not provide clear evidence for this interpretation.

*Need for and Intention to Develop a (Formalized) Shared Vision (Fourth Pattern)*

The fourth pattern was observed within the theme vision and team support. When discussing the presence of shared vision in the school community, PLC members perceived the school staff to agree upon the importance of parental involvement in the school:

[Teacher upper grades] I think all the teachers recognize the importance of it, of parents being involved. Because I think everyone has numerous examples of that, you just reap the benefits if you have good contact with the parents. I guess so, but maybe I'm speaking for others too much.

[PLC coordinator] I think so, too.

[Teacher upper grades] I think it is supported within the team. (PLC M4, Yr 1)

At the same time, PLC members expressed concerns that team members did not always agree on the interpretation of the concept and goals of stimulating parental involvement. Furthermore, PLC members expressed that in some cases (large) differences existed in the views of parents and team members, as illustrated by the following quote: "Really just very basic stuff that we as teachers here find obvious, but which aren't obvious for all parents at this school" (Teacher upper grades, I, Yr 1).

The discussions in the PLC lead PLC members to note the absence of a formalized school vision and policy on parental involvement. At the end of the first year, PLC members had created an action plan to improve certain parental involvement activities in the school, which was implemented in the second year. While discussing this plan, the school leader made it very clear that this action plan did not contain a formal school vision. She expressed that to reach a shared school vision, certain steps needed to be taken:

Because that means, if you're heading towards educational partnership, you need to develop a clear vision. This is a first step, but you need to develop a vision with each other, like, okay, this is what we envisage as

an educational partnership, but up till here and no further. And it's not about us not wanting to engage in conversations with parents or something, but here [in the PLC] the school's authority still applies, and we don't need to account for ourselves....I think we should brainstorm with the team and create a vision based on that, but we also have the part of involving parents in it. Which is not part of this [school leader points to document on the table]....There is no vision in this. There is no vision in this. This is not a vision document. We did not collectively formulate a vision that says this is how we do it at The Compass. (School leader, PLC M7, Yr 1)

Based on PLC members' observation of the absence of a formalized shared school vision on parental involvement, the wish to obtain such a shared school vision was formulated. PLC members expressed expectations that the school team should have shared ideas and approaches concerning parental involvement. PLC members expected the whole team to be involved, and they also expected that the team/staff would involve parents and children in creating a more formalized shared vision. This formalized vision could then serve as the basis of further policy plans.

PLC members perceived the PLC to play a facilitating role in the process of developing a shared vision. First, the process was facilitated by a shared drive and sense of urgency among PLC members to improve parental involvement: "And that I really notice, that still, within the PLC, when we sit together, I sense that we all want to go for that parental involvement. I feel that very strongly" (PLC coordinator, I, Yr 2).

Second, the discussions within the PLC facilitated a process of reaching consensus when PLC members initially differed in their ideas:

Yes, the school has always been concerned with "how do we get the parents more involved with the children?" They have always done their best for that. But I think that, maybe they were not exactly of one mind yet, or they did not know how give shape to it. I notice during these meetings, that things are more structured and that there is more collaboration....But how do you implement it? And now, now it just becomes clearer that... Yes, you realize, you're sitting down together, you're starting to think about certain things; you realize, "Okay, this is what we want to reach, that is where we are headed." So, everybody, all eyes in the same direction. (Parent, I, Yr 1).

Third, the reading of professional articles on the topic of parental involvement and the collective discussion of those articles aided the process of reaching consensus on the goal of parental involvement, namely educational partnership:

I think because of reading literature, we are much more on the same page. That things are clearer. What I said before: I thought, yes, involvement, parental involvement, what else should we do? I mean, if seven parents are here to help and 12 aren't, yes, so that was my bit of parental involvement. I thought, we have to get them into the school to have them help decorate the school and join the field trip to the petting zoo. But now I think: oh, we're going to focus on more, on sitting down together, on that educational partnership. So yes, I think we all are much more on the same page now. (Kindergarten teacher, I, Yr 2).

The PLC was expected to take a coordinating role in obtaining a more formalized vision by planning the process for involving all relevant stakeholders (parents, team members, children) and setting the agenda. Obstacles for this process were also expressed, such as the differences between views of professionals and parents and among staff members, limited knowledge on parental involvement, and time constraints. The plan to create a formalized, shared school vision on parental involvement was still in development at the end of the research project. PLC members expressed that further systematic efforts were necessary: "Where we should go now is that we should have a certain vision and a multiyear plan based on that vision, or actually integrate it within the school's multiyear plan, and set this up systematically" (Teacher upper grades, I, Yr 2).

### **Developments in Expressed Visions in the PLC (RQ2)**

Table 3 provides a comparison of how codes were distributed across the different themes in Year 1 versus 2. This information provides an indication of the development in visions expressed in the course of the PLC intervention. The data show three developments (marked in bold type in Table 3).

The first development involves an increase in the attention to the theme vision and team support (from 10% to 29%), accompanied by small decreases in attention to other main themes during PLC meetings. This development aligns with the activities carried out during the PLC at The Compass. In Year 1, PLC members mainly worked from an exploratory approach, aiming to answer general questions, such as: what are the school's successes concerning parental involvement; where are improvements needed; what are parents' and professionals' needs and expectations; and how can those needs and expectations be met? Based on these questions, PLC members investigated the school's practice in several small research projects. In discussing the implications of the outcomes of those projects, PLC members noted the school did not have a formalized shared vision and expressed the need to obtain such a vision. This resulted in a focus on the process of vision development in Year 2. The discussions concerning vision development in the PLC meetings focused on how to create a



Table 3. Absolute and relative frequencies with which codes from the main themes were applied in meeting transcripts and number of interviews and percentage of total interviews in which codes from the main themes were applied in Year 1 and in Year 2

Main Theme	Meetings Year 1		Meetings Year 2		Interviews Year 1		Interviews Year 2	
	# of times code applied	% of total <i>N</i> of codes applied in Year 1	# of times code applied	% of total <i>N</i> of codes applied in Year 2	# of interviews in which code is applied	% of all interviews Year 1	# of interviews in which code is applied	% of all interviews Year 2
<b>Educational partnership</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>12%</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>14%</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>40%</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>100%</b>
Formal partnership	23	4%	5	1%	0	0%	1	17%
Contact and communication	110	18%	52	14%	4	80%	4	67%
Relational climate	125	21%	61	16%	5	100%	6	100%
<b>Diversity of parent population</b>	87	14%	39	10%	<b>1</b>	<b>20%</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>100%</b>
Responsibility and control	125	21%	65	17%	3	60%	6	100%
<b>Vision and team support</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>10%</b>	<b>111</b>	<b>29%</b>	5	100%	6	100%
Total codes applied/percentage of total codes applied/number of interviews/percentage of total interviews	598	100%	389	100%	5	100%	6	100%

*Note.* Bold text represents developments discussed in the results section, in answer to research question 2.

shared vision (who needs to be involved in what stage; who will organize the process; what obstacles need to be dealt with?) instead of on the vision itself. In the interviews, also more PLC members in Year 2 (4 members) compared to Year 1 (2 members), expressed the expectation that professionals should base their actions related to parental involvement on a shared vision or plan.

The second development is an increase or stabilization in attention for the theme educational partnership. This theme received more attention in interviews from Year 1 to Year 2 (mentioned by 2 PLC members in Year 1 and 6 in Year 2). In meetings, the share of references to educational partnership remained stable across the two years (12% in Year 1 and 14% in Year 2), while references to other themes, except for vision and team support, decreased. One possible explanation for the relatively large share of attention to this theme during the second year is that through the activities undertaken in the PLC, such as the reading of literature, members obtained a clearer view of what they aimed for in stimulating parental involvement (as indicated in teacher quotations above). Another explanation may be the increase in the expression of a particular perception within this theme, representing an obstacle for educational partnership: PLC members expressed the perception of parents that they lack knowledge, skills, or capacities to support their child's learning more frequently in Year 2 (13 times) than in Year 1 (one time only).

The third development is an increase in attention in interviews to the diversity of the parent population. In Year 1, only one PLC member referred to this theme, while in Year 2, all six interviewed PLC members did so. In Year 2, more PLC members expressed that professionals lacked knowledge on parental background and perspectives, and all PLC members expressed the perception that parents were hampered to become involved because of their family circumstances (e.g., parents' work situations, finances, child care). This development indicates a heightened sensitivity in the PLC towards parents' needs and points to misalignments between what is expected from parents and parents' diverse contexts. However, this sensitivity seemed not to be accompanied by an increased awareness of the school's role and responsibilities in addressing such misalignments, as PLC members mostly explained them in terms of individual parent factors.

## Discussion

In this study, we explored whether and how the cooperation of parents and team members in a PLC focused on building educational partnership contributed to the development of a shared vision on parental involvement. In particular, we examined to what extent the visions expressed by PLC members

were compatible with an educational partnership approach (RQ1) and how visions developed during the project (RQ2).

The PLC proved to be a promising instrument to initiate a process of shared vision development and, especially, in exposing existing views among staff members. Parents, however, were only marginally represented in the PLC meetings, despite the intention of the PLC design. The four patterns in the data described in answer to RQ1 disclosed an ambiguity in PLC members' visions. We observed that the visions of PLC members reflected an ambition to build educational partnership, as the norms they held for both parents and professionals echoed the importance of mutual respect, reciprocal communication, inclusion, and cooperation in stimulating children's development (first pattern) and the visions exposed a need within the PLC for a formalized shared school vision on educational partnership (fourth pattern). Simultaneously, possible barriers to the ambition to build educational partnership were expressed. Some of the visions displayed deficit perspectives on parents and discomfort and lack of skills in professionals in responding to a diverse parent population, which may undermine an equal, respectful relationship between parents and the school (second pattern).

The paradox between striving for educational partnership and the obstacles for educational partnership seemed to result in an ambivalence concerning the responsibilities and possibilities of professionals and parents in building educational partnership (third pattern). On the one hand, PLC members attributed to the school a strong responsibility and agency in facilitating and also regulating parental involvement; on the other hand, PLC members placed the responsibility for (limited) parental involvement within parents and perceived the school to have no control over the level of parental involvement. The main development in visions (RQ 2) is an increased focus on the process of shared vision development rather than on content. During the process, PLC members became aware of the lack of a shared school vision on educational partnership. In the second year, "shared vision and team support" became the main theme in the PLC meetings. These results indicate that shared vision development is a lengthy and multistaged process.

### **Obstacles for Partnership: Persistency of Deficit Perspectives**

Our data show that, although PLC members strived for educational partnership, the role of parents was frequently discussed from a deficit perspective, and this did not decrease during the intervention. Evidence of deficit perspectives were the many instances in which parents' involvement was regarded as somehow hampered because of characteristic of parents, as well as the instances in which professionals expressed discomfort in responding to (linguistic)

diversity. Additionally, the school's voice seemed to be prioritized over the parents' voice, as evidenced by the instances in which PLC members expected the school to regulate or limit parental input and involvement.

Possibly, the PLC provided too little space to critically challenge existing views and perspectives. To illustrate this concern, we highlight three of our observations of the collaborative process in the PLC. First, participation of parents was limited and did not continue throughout the intervention period, contrary to the PLC guidelines. This can be regarded as a direct outcome of the school's practice to regulate and restrict parental input and involvement. Regulation of parental input was also visible in how the school selected parents for the PLC: the interview data showed that the school only invited parents who were perceived to be able and willing to take the school's perspective on matters. A continuous participation of parents in the PLC and a more democratic parent selection procedure may have increased the opportunities to discuss parental perspectives and limit the expression of deficit perspectives. One of the teachers, for example, expressed in an interview that staff members were more careful in formulating their stances when a parent was present in the meetings ("You'll mind your words just a little bit more"). The limited parent participation can thus be viewed as both a factor explaining the persistence of deficit perspectives in the PLC and a consequence of the deficit perspectives on parents present in the PLC.

Second, despite the school leader's proclaimed strong commitment to the ambition of building educational partnership, she also voiced deficit perspectives and advocated a schoolcentric approach to parental involvement. Although support of the school leader is regarded an important characteristic of effective PLCs (e.g., Stoll et al., 2006; Thoonen et al., 2012), due to the power dynamics present in a leader-employee relationship, it may have been difficult for other PLC members to question the school leaders' stances. Third, interview data show that the parent consultant in Year 1, who frequently took a more critical position during PLC meetings and challenged deficit assumptions underlying parent perceptions, was the only PLC member that did not perceive the working climate in the PLC as completely positive. Where the other PLC members praised the constructive and open atmosphere, the Year 1 parent consultant voiced her concern that with other PLC members expressing their convictions and ideas so resolutely, she did not always feel safe.

Our observations hint at negative aspects of shared vision (Hammerness 2010; Watson, 2014). Possibly, an implicit normative vision (Van der Helm, 2009) on what is appropriate in the collaboration between parents and school was operative in the PLC, limiting the opportunities to openly and critically challenge one another's viewpoints. Shared vision can be a constructive force,

fueling positive changes in schools. However, as Watson (2014) describes, shared vision can also “mask difference” (p. 22) and “become a means to produce silence” (p. 22) instead of opening up the discussion. In the PLC in our study, such a silencing mechanism may have been active.

We hypothesized that the implementation of EEH would provide meaningful new experiences to PLC members that could stimulate the development of a shared vision characterized by educational partnership (Fullan, 2007, 2011). However, despite the importance of reciprocal communication advocated by the program guidelines (Kaltfhoff & Berns, 2014), the discussions of EEH in the PLC meetings focused mostly on issues related to transferring the EEH-curriculum to parents. Such a “traditional,” unidirectional method of school-to-parent communication (Cooper et al., 2009; Green, 2017), with few opportunities to explore whether the program met the needs and expectations of participating parents, may have given rise to barriers in the parent–school contact that reinforced rather than challenged deficit perspectives on parents. Possibly, the existing deficit perspectives in the PLC steered the way EEH was approached, while simultaneously, EEH was not innovative enough to provide an actual departure from deficit-based notions of parental involvement. More targeted interventions that explicitly address deficit perspectives may be needed.

### **Development of Shared Vision: A Lengthy and Staged Process**

Based on the outcomes of this study, we hypothesize that shared vision development is a lengthy and possibly three-staged process. The initial stage could be characterized as “taking stock”: in the first year, PLC members expressed their views on a variety of themes related to the topic of parental involvement, resulting in a broad inventory of, and sometimes contradictory, perceptions and expectations. The next phase could be labelled as “setting the stage”: the second year was characterized by a narrower focus on the process of shared vision development and the practical aspects of executing such a process, such as planning meetings with stakeholders (parents, team members, children) and planning the agenda of such meetings. A hypothetical third stage (“creating vision”) would be the realization of the planned process, in which all stakeholders are involved in substantial exchanges and critical reflection leading to the development of a shared school vision. This hypothetical third stage was not reached within duration of the research project.

Previous research provides some evidence for our hypothesis of shared vision development being a staged and lengthy process (Barnett & McCormick, 2003; Boschman et al., 2015; Robertson, 2007). In a study into the quality of design talk in teacher teams, Boschman and colleagues (2015) found that deeper levels of teacher talk, in which information was analyzed and synthesized

rather than simply exchanged, hardly took place and only in later stages of the project. In her study of shared vision development among a group of science teachers, Robertson (2007) found that the group first explored many diverse and broad ideas and assumptions and only after a while was able to concentrate on more focused and pragmatic aims. Possibly, an initial broad exploration of existing explicit as well as tacit knowledge and beliefs (Nonaka et al., 2006) is a necessary first step in shared vision development (Stage 1: taking stock). Based on this exchange, decisions can be made on which issues are prioritized. Consequently, steps can be taken to plan the process of developing a shared school vision (Stage 2: setting the stage). The actual development of a coherent shared school vision (hypothetical Stage 3: creating vision) might require such a deep level of collaboration and group reflection that it may only take place after the collective efforts in the first two stages have paved the way.

Our results indicate that, on the one hand, the PLC was a tool to initiate a process of shared vision development, as it was able to expose existing views on parental involvement, and concrete, practical steps were taken to facilitate a process of shared vision development in the near future. On the other hand, to realize substantial progress in creating a shared vision characterized by educational partnership, the current deficit approaches would need to be challenged in this hypothetical third stage. Perhaps ensuring the participation of parents in this phase, as PLC members intended to do, would bring the discussions to a higher level and help challenge deficit perspectives among school staff. However, as suggested above, more targeted interventions addressing such perspectives may be necessary.

### **Implications for Practice and Research**

The results of this study indicate that PLCs involving both parents and professionals may be a promising instrument to stimulate shared vision development on parental involvement. PLCs may be especially suitable to question stereotypes and raise awareness regarding inequity and power dynamics (Auerbach, 2007b; Cooper et al., 2009), as in effective PLCs, members collectively examine assumptions and co-construct new knowledge. However, our results also highlight that such a critical examination of assumptions does not happen automatically. To engender more profound changes in visions towards educational partnership, sufficient time, continuous parent participation, and targeted support in addressing deficit perspectives may be necessary. Future studies should explore shared vision development on parent–school relations in PLC interventions that explicitly incorporate elements from a “social justice framework” (Green, 2017), directly addressing issues of privilege and power related to racial, socioeconomic, ethnic, and linguistic backgrounds of families

(Cooper et al., 2009; Denessen, 2019; Green, 2017) and family constellation (“traditional” families compared with nontraditional families, such as single parent families and the myriad of other family configurations). Furthermore, future research is necessary to validate our hypothesis that shared vision development occurs in a three-staged process, consisting of an initial orienting phase, a second phase focused on the planning of the third phase, which consists of the actual vision development. Next, the cooperation between parents and professionals in PLCs is understudied, as most studies on PLCs focus only on collaborative processes among professionals. To provide knowledge on what works and what hinders successful collaboration between parents and schools in PLCs, qualitative research that analyzes the different roles that various participants fulfill in such PLCs is needed.

### **Limitations**

The study has several limitations. First, the PLC was not completely implemented as intended, as the participation of parents in the PLC was limited. More extensive and continuous parent participation in the PLC may have given different results. However, the limited parent participation cannot simply be regarded as poor intervention fidelity: it is also one of the outcomes of the study, illustrating a schoolcentric approach to parental involvement present in the PLC. A second limitation is that we only audio recorded and did not video record the PLC meetings. The audio recordings did not always allow us to match all utterances with specific PLC members. Therefore, we could not analyze the unique role each PLC member played in the development of shared vision. Third, we cannot preclude the possibility that, in our role as PLC facilitators in supporting participant learning (Margalef & Roblin, 2016), we may have influenced the expressed visions in the PLC. By asking questions, we could steer the conversation in the PLC and in providing professional literature we possibly induced the formulation of specific expectations and perceptions. At the same time, our role as PLC facilitators in the background prevented us from strongly guiding the discussions in the PLC in a direction that we found fruitful for the development of a shared vision characterized by educational partnership. Possibly, the PLC could have developed a stronger partnership-based vision on the parent–school relationship within the two years if we had taken a more prominent role in guiding the PLC. For example, we could have discussed and criticized more explicitly the deficit perspectives and the schoolcentric approaches to parental involvement present in the PLC and provided clear guidance in which steps the school needed to take to better develop educational partnership. However, such a more dominant role of the research team would not be compatible with the concept of a PLC, in

which members equally participate and learn from each other (cf., Stoll et al., 2006; Vangrieken et al., 2017). Finally, the frequency with which PLC members gathered (every 6–8 weeks) may have been insufficient for facilitating a process of shared vision development. Possibly, more frequent meetings would have enhanced this process more adequately.

### Conclusion

The results of this study provided new insights into the process of shared vision development. The outcomes indicate that shared vision should not only be regarded a characteristic of a PLC, but that a PLC can be a promising instrument to initiate a process of shared vision development, especially in exposing existing views and knowledge among members. The study also revealed how persistent deficit perspectives on parents may hinder the development of a shared vision on the family–school relationship characterized by educational partnership, despite a school’s ambition to build equal, reciprocal, and respectful relationships with parents. To actually create a shared partnership vision and supersede the stages of exchanging and planning, two elements seem necessary. More time may be needed, as well as a more targeted approach addressing deficit perspectives on parents and creating awareness of the power dynamics present in the parent–school relationship in schools with a diverse population.

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>During the first stage (“Issue”), members focused in group discussions on issues they encountered in their daily practice. Members then formulated practice-oriented research questions to further explore these issues. During the second stage (“Exploration”), PLC members were encouraged to explore in order to find answers to their research questions. After conducting practice-oriented research, results were discussed in the PLC meetings. In the next stage (“Action”), PLC members formulated actions to improve practice based on research outcomes. In the last phase (“Reflection”), PLC members evaluated those actions, which could lead to emergence of new issues (first stage), thus continuing in the cyclical approach. However, PLC members could also take an alternative route to the cyclical approach: results of the practice-oriented research in the second stage (“Exploration”) could lead to the formulation of new issues and research questions (“Issue”), after which PLC member could decide to conduct another round of practice-oriented research, thus continuing in the second stage (“Exploration”).

<sup>2</sup>In the second stage (“Exploration”), this format was used to visualize for PLC members which methods and resources could be used to explore practice-oriented research questions, for example, by interviewing parents and team members or examining professional literature.

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