Article

Communication and Involvement: What are the Possibilities of Interconnection between Family-school?[1]

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Abstract: Family and school are considered essential environments for human development and it is desirable that a close bond be established between them. Based on this premise, this study analyzes the relationships established between school and the families of children with low school performance in a context in which the school adopts the Continuous Progression system – an educational system that avoids holding students in the same grade at the end of the school year. Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological perspective is the theoretical framework used in this study. Six children, their parents or caretakers, and teachers participated in the study. Semi-structured interviews and observation were used for collecting data, which were then evaluated regarding two categories: involvement and communication. Even though the results highlight communication as the main means of exchange between both contexts, communication still needs to be improved. Families and schools understand they must collaborate with each other, but such a relationship needs to be re-constructed because it is currently asymmetrical and loaded with prejudice.

Keywords: Parent School Relationship, Elementary Education, Cooperation.

Comunicação e Envolvimento: Possibilidades de Interconexões entre Família-escola?

Resumo: Família e escola são considerados contextos primordiais para o desenvolvimento humano, sendo desejável que haja um elo adequado entre esses espaços. Pautado nessa premissa, este artigo objetiva analisar as relações estabelecidas entre a escola e a família de crianças com baixo rendimento escolar, salientando que a escola pesquisada adota o regime de progressão continuada. O referencial teórico do estudo foi a perspectiva bioecológica de Bronfenbrenner. Participaram da pesquisa seis crianças, seus respectivos responsáveis e professoras. A coleta de dados consistiu de entrevistas semiestruturadas e observações. Os dados foram coligidos em duas categorias: envolvimento e comunicação. Embora os resultados destaquem a comunicação como principal veículo de trocas entre os dois contextos, essa necessita ser aprimorada. A família e a escola compreendem que devem trabalhar em colaboração, mas tal relação precisa ser reconstruída, pois se mostra assimétrica e repleta de preconceitos.

Palavras-chave: Relações Pais-escola, Ensino Fundamental, Cooperação.

Comunicación y Involucramiento: ¿Posibilidad de Interconexión entre Familia-escuela?

Resumen: La familia y la escuela son consideradas dos contextos primordiales para el desarrollo humano y es deseable que haya un enlace adecuado entre esos dos ambientes. Partiendo de esa premisa, el objetivo de este estudio es analizar las relaciones establecidas entre la escuela y la familia de niños con bajo rendimiento escolar dentro de un contexto que adopta la progresión continua. La perspectiva bioecológica de Bronfenbrenner es el referencial teórico utilizado en este estudio. Participaron de la encuesta seis niños, sus respectivos responsables y profesoras. Se utilizó para recolectar los datos entrevistas semiestructuradas y observaciones. Los datos fueron evaluados en relación a dos categorías: envolvimiento y comunicación. Los resultados destacan la comunicación como principal vía de cambio entre los dos contextos, aún necesitada de mejorías. La familia y la escuela comprenden que deben trabajar en colaboración, pero esta relación necesita ser re-construida, ya que actualmente se muestra asimétrica y contaminada por prejuicios.

Palabras clave: Relaciones Padre-escuela, Enseñanza de Primer Grado, Cooperación.

Families and schools are undoubtedly two important child development contexts. Both need to know and acknowledge one another, with a view to elaborating strategies that guarantee better conditions for their children's complete and comprehensive development (Chechia, 2002; Magalhães, 2004; Oliveira, 2004).

This relation is considered to achieve co-accountability in child education, permeated by a democratic posture in which respect for cultural diversity prevails, safeguarding the particularities of each stakeholder's role (Silva, 2001).

Dessen and Polonia (2007) affirm that studying the relations triggered in and between each of these environments

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represents an important information source, as it permits identifying aspects or conditions that arouse conflicts and disagreements in communication and, consequently, in cooperation possibilities between the contexts.

To understand this relation, all influences should be analyzed, in which knowledge on the school and family contexts and their specific conditions is paramount (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998).

In line with this assertion, the aim of this study was to understand the interconnections between school and families of children with low school performance, in an educational space where the educational policy of continued progression is adopted, with a view to identifying the views of students, responsible caregivers and teachers on the relations between both contexts and their information and conceptions on continued progression.

In the study, Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological perspective (1996) is adopted as the theoretical framework. According to the author, development represents a two-way interaction process, established between the person's characteristics and his/her context, developed over time and receiving influences from other contexts. The developing person changes when in contact with a context that offers possibilities, and this environment is also changed through the interaction with the person, i.e. it is a two-way process.

Thus, the bio-ecological perspective conceives development as the producer and product of interaction processes – which should be reciprocal – between the biopsychologically active human being and the multiple contexts. This development needs to occur in a time perspective.

This framework permits a systemic look on the phenomenon under analysis, as it understands psychological processes as "(...) properties of systems, in which the person is but one element, with processes and interactions as the main focus" (Narvaz & Koller, 2005, p. 52). According to Bronfenbrenner (1999), processes are considered the main links between the person's characteristics and the context, identified as the "engines of development". Although they are the drivers, proximal processes are not self-sufficient; their effects on the person will vary, depending on the relations established together with his/her biopsychological characteristics, characteristics of the environment, social continuities and ruptures over time and of the historical period the person lived in. In summary, they will depend on the characteristics of the person, time and contexts.

According to Bronfenbrenner (1996), contexts can be considered as a series of structures fit into one another, with distinctions at four levels: micro, meso, exo and macrosystem. The most internal level is the so-called *microsystem,* which can be the home, classroom, church. The second level is the *mesosystem,* characterized by the interconnections between two or more environments, in which the individual actively participates, like in the family-school relation. The *exosystem,* as the third level in this context, is defined

as an interconnection of bonds between the immediate environment the individual actively participates in and other environments (s)he does not directly participate in, but whose characteristics influence his/her daily life. The final and most external context is the *macrosystem,* defined as a system of ideas, values, beliefs and ideologies underlying the form of the micro, meso and exosystems' contents.

Thus, the adopted framework permits the analysis of the complex relations established between families and school, the aim of this study, within a mesosystem model, in line with the bio-ecological perspective.

This model, however, cannot be studied without an attentive look at the microsystem, comprising isolated contexts, and at the macrosystem, specifically focusing on the school and family culture, ideologies in force and educational policies. In view of that premise, the educational policy of continued progression stands out as an important influence the macrosystem exerts in the school and family environments.

Continued progression was adopted in São Paulo State as from 1998, when the eight-year primary education system became formally organized in cycle I (comprising the former 1st, 2nd, 3rd and 4th grades) and cycle II (covering the former 5th, 6th, 7th and 8th grades).

According to Indication No. 08/97 (1997), school organized in cycles is expected to guarantee the students' continued progression during each cycle, replacing the concept of retention by the idea of progressive and continued learning, distant from judgments and measures.

Despite transmitting the idea of "non-assessment", in the same document, external assessment is established with a view to analyzing the quality of the teaching-learning process schools offer. For the Federal Government, these are the SAEB (Primary Education System) tests and, for the São Paulo State Government, the SARESP (São Paulo State Assessment System).

In the year under analysis, SARESP involved an assessment at the end of the fourth and eighth grades of primary education, which takes eight years, by an entity external to the school, with a view to analyzing cognitive reading, writing and mathematics skills. According to the State Secretary of Education, until 2010, thirteen editions of SARESP had been applied to obtain educational indicators that could support decision making and the elaboration of technical-pedagogical intervention proposals to improve the quality of education in São Paulo State.

This study does not aim for a critical analysis of continued progression and SARESP assessment policies, which are left aside. Nevertheless, understanding educational policies is essential, as the adopted theoretical framework conceives them as important indirect influences in the relations established inside schools. In addition, studies on the family-school relation can support assessments on the repercussions of these policies for the development of each stakeholder (Sigolo, 2009).

Thus, understanding the influences of the context is very important to analyze the interconnections established between family and school, as well as to understand the singularities of both institutions, which are fundamental for child development.

Both contexts display particularities, which need to be understood, respected and valued. Families and teachers can cooperate, close partnerships, so as to learn from one another, to the extent that they are acknowledged specific educational competences that can (and should) be shared to the benefit of the student (Silva, 2001).

For a family-school relation based on premised of equality, parents need to get closer to the school environment. This new view would compulsorily imply changes in traditional and culturally constructed social relations. The family-school relation, commonly developed in a one-way and prejudiced manner, attributes most of the responsibility for children and adolescents' learning difficulties to responsible caregivers from popular social classes; they are considered uninterested families, who are absent from meetings and from the monitoring of their children's education. Contact with these families only takes place when students experience disciplinary or behavioral problems, suggesting that the cause of these problems is the lack of family structure (Romanelli, 2009). Hence, the school acknowledges the importance of responsible caregivers' support and accompaniment in the education process of their children; as Romanelli affirms, however, these conceptions originate in negative representations of the family, based on common sense, which are perpetuated inside schools.

With a view to analyzing these interactions and relations between families and school, in the attempt to understand them and, thus, to move beyond common sense, Bhering (2003), Bhering and De Nez (2002) and Bhering and Siraj-Blatchford (1999) developed some studies involving responsible caregivers, teachers and children, with a view to getting better knowledge on the interconnections established among them. The results revealed that Brazilian families participate actively in the education process, either direct or indirectly, in the belief that they invest in the best possible way for their children to be successful. To confirm the family's participation in the school environment, the authors developed three analytic categories: *communication, help and involvement*.

Communication is considered an essential category to strengthen the others (Bhering, 2003; Bhering & De Nez, 2002; Bhering & Siraj-Blatchford, 1999). It is classified as an "instrument that makes the family-school relation feasible, which can facilitate and promote the relation" (Bhering & Siraj-Blatchford, 1999, p. 210). This exchange can occur in different ways, i.e. through notes, messages transmitted by the children or acquaintances, during two-monthly meetings or through sporadic contacts.

As Silva (2001) highlights, the parents' involvement is related with the child's education activities. According to Bhering and Siraj-Blatchford (1999), this involvement can be related with activities linked with the teaching-learning process, at home or at school. These are diversified and comprehensive and refer to procedures the parents adopt to support their children's education. In line with Bhering and Siraj-Blatchford (1999), these activities were "strongly related with intellectual activities, which demand preparation from the parents, constant orientation by the teachers and periodical assessment of activities and their execution process" (p. 205).

The help category is related with the idea of service delivery (fairs, celebrations etc.) and help to purchase material and equipment needed in school. Participation in the Association of Parents and Teachers (APM), as it has happened in practice, further approach the help category, to the extent that its main goal is to get funding and help the school with occasional difficulties.

To further understand the dynamics between the communication, involvement and help concepts, Bhering and Siraj-Blatchford (1999) developed a metaphor, through which they attempt to explain the function of each of the three categories, highlighting the fundamental role of communication. They compare the relations established between family and school with exchanges and negotiations among islands, involving boats and ships. They describe that families and schools are like islands which, to be efficient and productive, depend on each other's products. Who will help in the product exchange processes among the islands will be the boats and ships, which represent communication, involvement and help. The way teachers and responsible caregivers (active subjects on the islands) establish mutual exchanges, hence, how they communicate, will determine the nature of relations and the utility and function of the products exchanged. Thus, communication is an essential factor, as the authors affirm:

> So, school and parents need to relate more clearly and "negotiations" need to take place to satisfactorily attend to both sides. Here, the basic element is communication. All other forms of parents' involvement are based on the means used to understand one another (Bhering & Siraj-Blatchford, 1999, p. 204).

School is considered an institution that can start communication processes. Thus, if it does not develop effective and adequate ways to practice this communication, this will negatively affect relations among the stakeholders (Bhering, 2003).

Despite the importance and range of studies on the theme, a gap is observed in research that focuses on the continued progression context (Chechia, 2002; Lollato, 2000; Oliveira, 2004; Perez, 2000; Ribeiro, 2004). It is also highlighted that only some studies conceive students as important actors in this interactive process (Lollato, 2000; Magalhães, 2004).

It is affirmed that children/students have an important function in the relations established between family and school. Whether as the cause or effect of changes in the interconnections between actors at both entities, children serve as important social actors and, as such, research cannot ignore them (Perrenoud, 2001).

In that scenario, this study aimed to understand the interconnections between school and families of children with low school performance in a space where the educational police is in force, in the attempt to understand the conceptions and experiences of students, teachers and responsible caregivers.

Method

Participants

The research was developed at a state school in an interior city in São Paulo State, which received students in cycle I of primary education (1st to 4th grade). Data were collected in the school and family environments. It is highlighted, however, that meetings with responsible caregivers were scarcer and more punctual.

Study participants were six students with low educational performance from three different class groups in the final year of cycle I (former 4th grade), six responsible caregivers and three teachers. The teachers indicated the children, based on the criterion of low apprehension levels of reading, writing and mathematics contents. The researcher also verified the children's performance through the application of the School Performance Test (SPT) (Stein, 1994) and psycholinguistic evaluations, confirming the teachers' assessment.

Five of the children indicated did not show a history of failure, while one had failed the first grade. The only case of failure referred to a child from another State, where the continued progression regimen had not been adopted yet. Ages ranged between 10 and 11 years.

Instruments

For data collection, the following instruments were used: (1) punctual observations of parents' meetings in the three classrooms investigated, (2) semistructured interview scripts.

The field notes were adopted as the procedure to record the observations made during the two-monthly meetings. Notes were registered in a notebook divided in two parts, which separately addressed the objective descriptions of the observed event and the researcher's impressions. The scripts were elaborated based on relevant literature in the research area family-school relation, so as to attend to the research objectives. Three specific scripts were constructed for each participant group, addressing two groups of questions: (1) family-school relation, (2) continued progression and SARESP.

The script for the students contained 19 questions and aimed to capture information on the perceived dynamics established between family and school, the students' opinions on the influence of these dynamics on their learning and knowledge about the new educational policies, apprehending their conceptions, opinions and feelings.

The interview script for the responsible caregivers included 25 questions, aiming to apprehend information about the dynamics of the relation between family and school, their feelings, perceptions and suggestions for this interconnection; the questions were also aimed at discovering the families' information about continued progression and SARESP, covering their conceptions and assessments.

The script to interview the teachers included 28 questions, to obtain data on the relationship dynamics between family and school, apprehending the teachers' conceptions on communication, involvement and help between school and family member. The script also aimed to understand their conceptions on the implementation of new educational policies, possible modifications needed and teachers' knowledge.

Procedure

Data Collection

The interviews with the teachers and children took place in the school environment, while the interviews with the families were held at their homes. Besides the interviews, three parents' meetings were observed for each teacher who participated in the study, with a view to understanding the dynamics of these meetings and confronting it with the research subjects' reports.

Data Analysis

After the recordings, the interviews were transcribed. Next, extensive and intensive readings were performed for the researcher to get impregnated by the data, so as to survey the themes the participant groups addressed separately, after which the analyses were written (Biasoli-Alves, 1998). Data were divided in two large categories, based on the studies by Bhering (2003), Bhering and De Nez (2002) and Bhering and Siraj-Blatchford (1999), defined as: *communication* and *family involvement.*

The observations were registered in a field diary and analyzed according to the steps Bogdan and Biklen (1991) proposed, which consist in different readings of the collected data, seeking for regularities, patterns and topics, guided by the categories communication and family involvement. Next, the categories deriving from the field diary notes and interviews were triangulated, that is, divergences and convergences were sought among the subject groups' testimonies (responsible caregivers, children and teachers), concerning communication and family involvement.

Ethical Considerations

All ethical care needed was taken, guaranteeing the preservation of the responsible caregivers, teachers and children's identity and their voluntary consent to participate in the research. Data collection only started after the teachers and responsible caregivers' completion of the Informed Consent Term.

Results and Discussion

The results were combined in two categories. The first, communication, according to Bhering and Siraj-Blachtford (1999); Bhering and De Nez (2002) and Bhering (2003), refers to the existing exchanges and interchanges between two or more environments and/or people, which can occur face to face, through written information like notes or messages, which can be sent orally by other subjects in these contexts. Bhering and Siraj-Blatchford (1999) define the second category, called involvement, as the help and support the caregivers make available to help the children in the education process. This help can occur at home or at school.

Communication

Communication between the environments is fundamental for the development of participating subjects, as Bronfenbrenner affirms (1996): "the developmental potential of participating in multiple environments varies directly with the ease and extent of two-way communication between these environments" (p. 167).

The communication forms the research subjects mentioned were notes in notebooks, punctual conversations with the teacher at the school entry and exit and parent meetings. According to the responsible caregivers, the two-monthly meetings represented a proper time for information exchange between both contexts. Thus, it can be affirmed that these are considered the main institutionalized information channel (Homem, 2000).

All responsible caregivers and teachers indicate the two-monthly meetings as occasions to discuss the children's behavior in the classroom and their academic performance. Although it is a recommended time for conversations, presupposing dialogue, the mothers highlight that they are more listeners than active participants, feeling dissatisfied with the meetings; they mention that they only receive criticism about their children, without any orientations on how to help them.

For the children, the meetings are considered opportunities for the responsible caregivers to get to know their school. During the meetings, proud students could be observed, presenting their classmates, professionals and the institution's physical area to their relatives. Although they like the meetings, they report that they are separated from the discussions held at these meetings, receiving information on what was discussed only when the caregivers charge them with changes in their performance or behavior. In some situations, when they present improvements, they are praised and complimented, thus discovering what was discussed during the meeting.

What can be concluded from the children's reports is that their active participation in meeting situations does not take place. As Silva (2001) affirms, the family-school relation is predominantly conceived according to the "adult-centered" focus, in which the children's perspective has little to add in the relation. Based on the data, however, it can be affirmed that the children present judgments on the relations and receive direct influence from the decisions and behaviors the family and school adopt. Childhood does not receive the right to participate democratically. Discussions happen "about it" and "for it", but never "with it" and "in its perspective", that is, respecting its "voice".

Hence, according to Perrenoud (2001), the child, who is considered omnipresent, turns into the actor forgotten in this interconnection; it is exactly through the child that the family-school relation is established though. This reveals a paradox in the child's role who, despite triggering the relations, is excluded from them.

Also regarding the meetings, although the teachers conceive them as a vital moment for communication between both instances, they criticize the responsible caregivers' lack of participation. The three teachers unanimously affirmed that the "most difficult" children's mothers did not attend the school, sent substitutes or did not even contact them. They mentioned that they understood the factor that meetings were held during work hours, which made it impossible for different parents to attend, but nevertheless labeled them as uninterested and negligent.

This reveals a contradiction in the teachers' testimonies and actions, who say that they understand the families' difficulties and, at the same time, affirm that these are uninterested in their children's learning.

The three teachers justify that this lack of interest derives from the "loss of family structure". They affirm that what characterizes a "structured" family is a father, mother and children living together, in the same house. Despite highlighting that divorce is not a problem, while distancing from the father is, the teachers contradict themselves when they declare that a family organization different from traditional forms is "guilty" of the "problems" the child may present.

As Perez (2009) affirms, families have gone through changes in their structure and organization, due to the social transformations that have occurred in broader contexts. School, however, is based on an ideal family model, i.e. the core family. Attachment to this model ends up strengthening prejudiced discourse, which attributes any and all difficulties of members in families constituted differently from the core family experience to the loss of family structure.

According to Carvalho (2000), the core model "is distant from many families in these times of increasing economic poverty, maternal employment, family stress, divorce and female family head rates" (p. 149), provoking stigma and labeling, defining them as "wrong", "uninterested" and "unstructured" families.

As opposed to what the school disseminates, the families under analysis affirm that they take interest in the children's education, valuing it and considering it as a route for the social ascent of their children. Thus, they seek strategies to respond to the school's requests for involvement, even if they cannot attend the two-monthly meetings. This information reaffirms the result previously presented in Ribeiro and Andrade (2006), in which the valuation of children's education is highlighted as a consensus among the parents who participated in the research.

Thus, the operators of education need to understand that the material, cultural and social conditions of the families they attend are different. Hence, there is no way to create an ideal model of the family, and even less of communication and involvement between the two groups. Families cannot be considered unique and adequate.

Despite seeking involvement and participation whenever possible during the meetings, four caregivers expressed dissatisfaction regarding the dynamics of these encounters, mentioning that some of the teachers' attitudes bothered them. Exposing the children's difficulties to all parents who were present was considered a negative and inhibiting attitude, discouraging that mother's presence at other meetings.

These caregivers also emphasized the one-way sense and hierarchization of these meetings, underlining that, without creating a bond of trust between parents and teachers, it will be difficult to achieve parents' active participation. These characteristics the mothers mentioned clearly interfere in the meeting dynamics, as observed. The mothers hardly talked with the teachers, but complained to one another and asked each other questions during and at the end of the meeting.

The mothers under analysis affirm that, to achieve a balanced meeting, enhancing communication between contexts, this needs to be developed in a climate of trust and respect for the families' viewpoints; in short, a space of listening and equal attendance to all.

The caregivers' indications are in line with Bronfenbrenner's proposal (1996) for the tripod needed for effective interaction to take place, which are: two-way sense, mutual confidence between participants in both contexts and power balance.

If the relation is not reciprocal, no trust is developed and it is hierarchical; retraction may occur, resulting in the families' distancing from the school environment (Bhering & De Nez, 2002). That is the case, according to five caregivers under analysis, who affirm that, after they participate in meetings, during which they feel passive, they start to develop feelings of disinterest towards upcoming meetings. Nevertheless, the school ends up misinterpreting the caregivers' posture, analyzing the parents' absence as resistance and disinterest in topics concerning their children's education.

Other factors triggering retraction and distancing are the themes and ways to address them. According to all caregivers and participating teachers, the meeting contents focus on three aspects: school performance, behavior and help for the school (APM), always focusing on the family members' "errors" and indicating what needs to be improved.

Also concerning the themes addressed during meetings, besides the above, school functioning and pedagogical work are superficially discussed. Four caregivers highlighted that, to get information on the contents addressed in the classroom, they need to consult their children's notebooks or ask them for explanations.

According to the three teachers, these questions do not need to be discussed with the parents, as they are difficult to understand. The teachers alleged that the parents have no decision power whatsoever about these themes and that, therefore, they do not need to be informed. They expressed that they conceive the family-school relation as established between experts and laymen, which distances them and transforms teaching work into an isolated and excluding activity (Silva, 2001).

For the parents to feel that they are participating members of the school, first, they need information on this context, understand its functioning, its educational functions and policies. Therefore, effective communication is essential. In line with Bhering and Siraj-Blatchford (1999), communication is a necessary factor for relatives to get involved and help the school further; in view of the current situation, however, it can be affirmed that this interaction is flawed, which impairs the whole dynamics and hampers the proposed cooperation between contexts.

Through observations from the meetings, it was verified that the school is selective concerning what it transmits to the families, restricting not only information on its daily reality, but also on educational policies, specifically Continued Progression and SARESP.

Information on these two issues reveals disagreements, as apprehended in three mothers' testimonies, who believe that their children can fail at the end of cycle I due to the suspension of the legislation that adopts the cycles, without knowing that exactly the same law prescribes this possibility. Confusions and mistaken interpretations of the continued progression regimen are verified and justified by the caregivers' lack of information on legislation.

According to the three teachers, the information transmitted during the meetings was sufficient to further inform the families on this educational policy. During the meeting observations, at the three classrooms, the merely superficial transmission of information about the possibility of failure at the end of cycle I could be observed, without further explanations, which gave rise to caregivers' mistaken interpretations.

Lack of information was also emphasized in four students' reports, who questioned some actions the school adopts, such as approval without achieving expected performance levels; they did not understand why they had passed until the fourth grade without their adequate learning.

SARESP assessments, on the opposite, received greater emphasis in family-school communication. The three teachers informed the parents about this assessment during the meetings, since the second two-month period, underlining the importance of the family's role in stimulating their children's studies and their co-accountability for the children's performance during the assessment.

It should be emphasized that continued progression was put in practice in São Paulo State without previous discussions with the teachers, in an imposing way and without specific preparations, which can bring about teachers' biased understanding about the cycles' functioning and evaluation forms (Magalhães, 2004).

Although the teachers may not adequately know the new educational policies, however, differences exist in the way they transmit these policies. As observed, the teachers offer the families information, in greater or lesser depth, depending on the help they need from them.

These dynamics can be perceived when families and students' information about continued progression and SARESP is analyzed. Because they do not perceive the need for the caregivers' "involvement" in progression, the teachers transmit information superficially, presupposing that they do not have competences to understand it. They also consider that they lack participatory conditions (Magalhães, 2004), i.e. active voice in intra-school decisions (Silva, 2001). Concerning SARESP, however, when the assessment not only of students, but also of teachers' competences is at stake, at least according to the teachers, they attempt to inform the families and children on the respective roles and functions.

In view of these results, the need for changes in the way communicative relations are established can be appointed, overcoming the culture of negativity and hierarchy and attempting to create further spaces for dialogue between both institutions.

Involvement

Bhering and Siraj-Blatchford (1999) highlight that involvement can be considered as the responsible caregivers' support for activities related with the children's teaching-learning process, at home or at school. According to the teachers, involvement is related with the degree of support the parents offer to the children when doing homework, besides meeting attendance.

In the caregivers' conceptions, more than helping the children with homework, involvement in education mainly comprises the organization of children's daily lives and efforts to enhance adequate conditions for them to continue going to school. Nevertheless, they value homework and consider themselves committed to support the children's

accomplishment of their duties, despite the availability of unequal material and symbolic resources to respond to requirements in this process.

These data reaffirm the findings by Resende (2008), which prove that caregivers from different social groups "unanimously defend the importance of homework and argue that the family cannot leave the responsibility for the children's learning solely up to the school, but should get involved in this process, also supporting the accomplishment of homework" (p. 389), although this support often arouses exhaustion and tension due to the non-mastery of what the school requests.

The school, however, conceives the responsible caregivers' supervision of homework as one of the few forms of involvement with the children's education, considering families that do not offer this support as negligent and uninterested, evidencing disrespect for the symbolic, material and cultural conditions of each child's relatives.

According to Carvalho (1996), sending homework can be considered as intromission the field of family education activities, as it is the school that decides on how to offer this support, thus creating a sole support model that is seen as "correct" and ignoring each family's socioeconomic and cultural conditions.

Demanding equity in task supervision and only considering this effective when complying with the school's preset criteria, thus ignoring different social groups' material and cultural conditions, enhances disparities in the children's learning and, consequently, inequalities among the families. In this perspective, the caregivers can be blamed for their children's low performance levels, as they do not offer the children adequate support (Carvalho, 1996).

The data reveal the need to analyze the conditions involving the accomplishment of homework, with a view to avoiding superficial assessments that create prejudice and disseminate discourses that tend to marginalize family groups.

Although homework supervision is considered a way for the families to get involved in their children's education, the teachers analyzed reported that they decided to suspend this in view of parents' difficulties to understand the academic contents and, hence, to offer adequate support to the children. This situation resulted in homework that was done incorrectly or not at all.

Despite alleging that they understand the families' difficulties to help their children due to lack of knowledge on the addressed contents, the teachers nevertheless criticized them, calling them "uninterested", highlighting that they do not get involved.

In view of data presented in the communication and involvement categories, it can be affirmed that the family-school relation involves multiple facets, demanding discussion and improvement. Despite setbacks, this interconnection reveals to be fundamental for child development, in line with Bronfenbrenner (1996):

The developmental potential of an environment increases in function of the number of support bonds that exist between these environments and others (like the home and the family). Hence, the least favorable condition for development is that in which supplementary bonds either are not supportive or totally absent – when the mesosystem is weakly linked (p. 165).

It is affirmed that, in the relations between the contexts, communication stands out as a key element for involvement, help and democratic participation. Changes are needed to make communication adequate and approach families and the school. Changing a school culture, however, requires a broader understanding of teaching work and education, as well as the historical and cultural issue of parents' involvement and participation in school, lacking further research on these realities.

Final Considerations

The school and family contexts represent the two most important environments for child development in our society. Therefore, communication and cooperation between both is fundamental to constitute beneficial environments for children and adolescents. The study results appoint, however, that a gap still exists in the interconnections developed between family and school.

Data revealed the unequal forces that exist between the contexts, highlighting that the school institution holds the power, i.e. the institution decides *when* and *why* relations should take place; families still depend on it.

It was revealed that communication between both entities was precarious, centered on two-monthly meetings between parents and teachers, during which a hierarchical and "adult-centered" posture prevails in the conduction of the meetings.

During the encounters, the types of information exchanged between the stakeholders were centered on the tripod: school performance, behavioral problems and help for APM, relegating explanations on institutional functioning and pedagogical work. The school did not find it important to share these with the caregivers. The superficial nature of information and the negative focus given to the meetings led to the families' distancing and retraction.

Concerning continued progression and SARESP, it can be concluded that teachers, caregivers and students were considered were spectators and executers of this educational policy. The superficial information exchanged between the family and school institutions provoked disagreements and the caregivers' mistaken interpretations about the functioning of primary education cycles.

Concerning this study's contributions, the urgent need for greater respect for the family group's culture is underlined, as well as for the parents' greater participation and involvement in this environment, acting as collaborators in this context. Also, understanding is needed that the caregivers can get involved in their children's education in different ways, without necessarily being restricted to homework support.

It is also important to alert to the need for children and adolescents' participation in research, with a view to discussing issues that affect them direct or indirectly, considering that their ways of conceiving, acting in and experiencing the world offer us valuable information for reflection and change proposals. It is straightforward that the research does not cover the full range of complexity that exists in the two environments under analysis, but it does offer important contributions for reflections by teachers, managers, family members and other researchers interested in the theme.

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