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FAMILY-SCHOOL RELATIONS:
HOW ENHANCED PARENTAL PARTICIPATION IN SCHOOLING
REINFORCES SOCIAL INEQUALITY
AND UNDERMINES FAMILY AUTONOMY

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Maria Eulina Pessoa de Carvalho

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David F. Labaree
Major professor

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FAMILY-SCHOOL RELATIONS: HOW ENHANCED PARENTAL PARTICIPATION IN SCHOOLING REINFORCES SOCIAL INEQUALITY AND UNDERMINES FAMILY AUTONOMY

By

Maria Eulina Pessoa de Carvalho

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ABSTRACT

FAMILY-SCHOOL RELATIONS: HOW ENHANCED PARENTAL PARTICIPATION IN SCHOOLING REINFORCES SOCIAL INEQUALITY AND UNDERMINES FAMILY AUTONOMY

By

Maria Eulina Pessoa de Carvalho

Current educational policy initiatives (Goals 2000 among them) have been calling for family-school partnerships and more parental involvement in schooling, both in the academic work of children at home, and in shared decision making at school. The rhetorical promises of this policy are various and positive: enhancement in individual student achievement, family cohesion, school productivity, and educational opportunity.

This study presents a theoretical exploration of the negative consequences of parental involvement as a policy, especially for family life, for public instruction as a specific practice, and for the democratic ideal of schooling. Because family material and cultural conditions and the meaning of education are radically different for families in different social classes, ethnic groups, and kinds of composition, the imposition of one model of parenting and family-school relations is likely to frame parents as subordinate actors, and simultaneously to increase the advantage of certain parents and students, further increasing inequality of educational outcomes. In this way, educational policy and practices, drawing on the family as a resource subordinated to the school curriculum, creates and reinforces structures for the play of cultural capital, with contradictory effects.

Different contexts of inquiry and documentary sources are addressed as independent essays focusing on personal experience, history and sociology, research and policy rhetoric, and the case of homework. The analysis suggests the limits of equity within educational policy rationales prescribing the role of family in schooling.

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1997

To Maria, Dora, and Dona Antonia (my Black Grandmother),
unschooled educators of my childhood years.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

PROLOGUE 1

CHAPTER 1
THE ARTICULATION OF FAMILY AND SCHOOL IN EDUCATIONAL POLICY 13
The family as an object of educational policy 14
Background 15
Recent research and policy 16
The problem 19
Significance 21
Analytical approach 25
Conceptual framework 26
Questions for inquiry 31
Data and sources 33
Further analysis 35

CHAPTER 2
FAMILY-SCHOOL INTERACTIONS: LESSONS FROM PERSONAL EXPERIENCE 37
Discovering the problem 38
Parental involvement in pre-school 38
Family distance from public schools 41
Parents as consumers in private schools 43
Parents as producers in cooperative-schools 44
Homework and middle-class mothers 45
Parents versus experts 47
Rediscovering the problem 49
Parental involvement in U.S. schools 50
The price of school success 53
Families, cultural diversity, and the meaning of school 55
Summing up 57

CHAPTER 3
EDUCATIONAL POLICY AND SOCIAL REPRODUCTION: THE QUEST FOR EQUITY WITHIN FAMILY-SCHOOL RELATIONS 62
Family, school, and the democratic ideal 69
Conceptual and historical overview 70
Common and compulsory schooling in the United States 82
Functional differentiation in the constitution of the educational system 89
Education and social inequality 92
The role of the family in the production of school outcomes: the cultural deficit model 96
The role of the educational system in the reproduction of social inequality: social reproduction through cultural reproduction 102
Symbolic capital 109
Symbolic violence 121
Possibilities and limits of educational change 140
Educational policy, equity, and the family 145
The family is not an educational institution 149
The purposes and meanings of the public school 156
Parenting as symbolic capital 165
Policy prospects 173

CHAPTER 4
RESEARCH AND POLICY: CRITIQUE OF THE GROUNDS AND PROMISES OF PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT 184
Parental involvement as a research problem 187
Parental involvement within compensatory programs 187
Family background influence on student achievement 192
Families as learning environments 195
Class and cultural mismatch 200
Family politics and school policy 203
Future agenda 207
Parental involvement as a policy solution 207
Rationale 209
Models of school-family relations 210
Promises of the partnership model 211
Requirements and implications 212
An example 214

CHAPTER 5
SCHOOLWORK AS HOMEWORK: DISCUSSION OF SCHOOL AND FAMILY PERSPECTIVES 218
Historic .....
Recent research 224
School policy 225

Instructional and social relevance 227
Articulation of homework and classwork 229
Teachers 233
Parents 235
Equity and accountability 241
The re-articulation of home and school 245
Rethinking the impact of homework on school achievement 247
Rethinking the impact of homework on family life 248

EPILOGUE
PERVERSE EFFECTS OF PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT: EXTENDING SYMBOLIC VIOLENCE TO THE FAMILY AND WEAKENING THE EGALITARIAN IDEAL OF PUBLIC EDUCATION 250

BIBLIOGRAPHY 258

Prologue

School doors open for parents to help.
Just a little involvement can boost education.

This is the headline of a recent article in the Detroit Free Press (8/25/1997). According to the article it is all a matter of parental sentiment and time, presented as a "simple and inexpensive act." And there is "a ton of research" recommending parental involvement - not just at home but at school - as the remedy schools and students most need at this moment. Impediments to parental involvement are reduced to parents' timidity, uneasiness at school, time constraints, and lack of encouragement from teenagers, which can be reversed by school personnel's openness and warmth, and the provision of a range of opportunities for parents. In addition to the traditional fund-raising, help at special classes, sports, bands, academic clubs, and parties participation is now invited at school governance, curriculum, and budgeting.

Needs and benefits of parental involvement are amply depicted, based on the specialized literature. *Teachers need parents*, therefore the partnership idea combines teachers' expertise in child development and curriculum with parents' expertise about their own children. Young children, in particular, benefit from getting a sense that *the whole family is a part of school* when their parents are around. But "middle and high school students, and the schools themselves, need parents as much as the elementary ones do." Older *students need parental guidance through academic*

choices in order to take the right courses and tests to get into college.

The role of parents in face of the growing complexity of *homework* is also acknowledged, with emphasis on the need to be supportive rather than doing the student's homework: "Thankfully you don't have to remember your high school algebra to be a good parent. More important than helping solve individual algebraic problems is encouraging students to stick with a subject that is tough, but that will expand their range of career and life choices" (The Detroit Free Press, 8/25/97).

Parents, in turn, benefit from *networking* with other parents and families. And *the whole family benefits*. Being school the main external influence in children's lives, parental involvement in schooling builds *family cohesion*, as parents develop a *common language* with their children. Moreover, parental involvement should be *fun*, as in the case of math and science carnivals. Examples of exceptionally involved parents are presented, typically a father who participates in the evening, while his wife, "a stay-at-home mom, pitches in at school during the day." The message for "parents with jobs" is that they "will have to be more creative."

As evidenced above, parental involvement as a policy strategy appears as a peculiar response to a host of school and family issues, promising improvement for schools and families, and combining institutional and individual goals, i.e., gains in school productivity and student success. The fact that it has become a national educational goal - in President Clinton's 1994 Goals 2000: Educate America Act - is suggestive of its rhetorical power in synthesizing cultural meanings and values. As Casanova (1996) notes, "the value of parental involvement has become an acceptable truism across a wide spectrum of political positions in the U. S.. Conservatives and

liberals, religious fundamentalists and secular families have all endorsed parental involvement as a fundamental component of successful schooling" (p. 30). However, it is important to distinguish between parental involvement in education as a desirable attitude and practice of individual parents, in the interest of their child's school success, and parental involvement as a policy strategy designed to promote it where it appears lacking, and as a formal incentive aiming at enhancing school outcomes in an indirect way.

In fact, as Casanova (1996) cautions, the meaning of parental involvement is neither consensual nor is its practice necessarily positive, leading sometimes to undesirable excesses on the part of parents (as individuals or organized groups), with negative consequences for children, teachers, and the school community. Notwithstanding, the general policy formula espouses a very romanticized view of education and family-school relations, enclosing and concealing different parental role constructions and levels of involvement related to both family and school contexts and practices, as well as potential conflicts in family-school and teacher-parent relations, and even among parents, associated with diversity of social class, ethnicity, family organization, and values.

In Epstein's (1992, 1995) model, for instance, levels of parental involvement range from involvement in the home (attending on basic needs, disciplining, preparing for school, supporting school learning, and/or engaging actively in homework) to participation in school activities and events; acting like teacher-aid (volunteering in the classroom and/or tutoring homework), and participating in school decision-making are considered higher (and more desirable) levels of parental involvement towards the

ideal of integration of family, community, and school resources. This model, however, is based on a small number of actual successful school-family-community partnerships, and on the characteristics of the already (and positively) involved parents.

Accordingly, the general policy formula furthers one particular model of parental involvement in education and schooling, judged positive from an abstract school's perspective, apparently aiming at counteracting parental apathy (defined as a discrete problem), while ignoring the very dynamics of differentiation across schools and within communities, of power struggles between parents and educators (Henry, 1996), and of ambivalence in teachers' views (Smrekar, 1996). In seeking to generalize such a model, it neglects the various and complex reasons why a majority of parents are not involved in the terms or degree expected by schools and teachers, in the first place. It also overlooks the implications of mandated and enhanced parental involvement for schools as organizations, teachers' work, family life (especially in the case of those families and parents perceived as non-involved), and the democratic equality purpose of the public school (Labaree, 1997).

Some negative effects of the policy and practice of parental involvement have already been evidenced. A general effect may be to reinforce patterns of discrimination based on social class, ethnicity, and gender through the creation of new stratified structures of participation, with lower class and minority mothers helping in the school cafeteria, for instance, while upper-middle class mothers and fathers act as classroom volunteers and school council members. The specific policing role attributed to parents in monitoring teachers' activities and in controlling the

curriculum and budget, on the other hand, is not only likely to undermine trust and enhance competitiveness between teachers and parents, but also to set groups of parents in competition for influence over school policies, with anti-democratic consequences (Casanova, 1996; Henry, 1996; Smrekar, 1996).

Casanova's (1996) "call for prudence" regarding parental involvement takes the perspective of the school and teacher professionalism. She poses both the need to create bridges - because schools "are dependent on parents to provide resources that affect the academic performance of their students" - and buffers - "to protect the school from interference with the professional discretion of teachers and principals" (p. 31).[1] In this way, she retrieves the "protective model of family-school relations" (Swap, 1993), pointing out that what needs to be protected is the "national interest" and "the greater good" against "parochial considerations" (p. 32). In contrast, most of the discourse (of policy and research) exalts the school-family partnership ideal, taking for granted both its desirability and viability. Though recognizing that the partnership model is hard to implement, requiring major school restructuring, Swap (1993), for instance, envisions parent-educator collaboration to achieve the *common mission of improving the school and supporting the success of all children*, through two-way communication, expansion of the parent's academic role, mutual support, and joint decision-making. But, in general, both the policy and research literature on the issue takes for granted the perspective of parents on family-school relations and on specific involvement in instruction, and the conditions of diverse families in fulfilling

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[1] Casanova (1996) cites Ogawa, R. T. (1996): Bridging and buffering relations between parents and schools. *UCEA Review*, 37(2), 2-3, 12-13.

their appointed role in the partnership.

I take a distinct stance regarding this matter. I am concerned with teachers's work and professional authority, with families' life conditions and parents' choices, and with educational equity, but I have doubts about the viability of the partnership model and about the justice of the mandate on parental involvement. Not that I do not find the partnership vision desirable or parental involvement in schooling, per se, as a sensible idea, but I do not see the social conditions necessary to universalize school-family partnerships in terms of equal political power in defining the curriculum, a specifically academic role for families, and shared accountability for educational outcomes. Moreover, neither do I see school conditions for the implementation of a range of opportunities for all parents to help schools and further their children's learning, nor do I count on parents' capability and willingness to become teachers of their own children within the particular context of the school curriculum.

Therefore, I consider it fundamental to clarify why are schools dependent on parents for student success, and whether they could expand on their pedagogic role independent of family input. This requires unpacking the tacit theory of family-school relations which informs the ideology and policy of parental involvement in schooling. Accordingly, this theory must justify both the desirability and viability of parental involvement in schooling. Why is parental involvement in schooling desirable and necessary, both from the school and the family perspectives, precedes how (a choice of strategies) to promote it; in other words, the question of how effective can this particular policy be surely depends on the previous (theoretical) understanding.

An overview of education and family-school relations reveals two movements

and concepts, which might converge or diverge: one in which the school is considered an (organic) extension of the family, and another in which the family is devised (in an authoritarian way) as an extension of the school. The first movement corresponds to the history of schooling as a middle class institution, originating from local initiative, which came to constitute the prevalent ideology of family-school relations. The second movement is related to compulsory schooling, education as acculturation or salvation for the lower classes, and requires family cultural alignment to school. While within the first movement family-school relations are framed in terms of positive continuity, it is only within the second movement that they become and object of explicit policy intervention.

Accordingly, from the school perspective there are two ways of seeing the family: in the first case, the family is a resource for school achievement, and parental involvement in education in the home and school is taken for granted as natural; in the second case, the family is deficient and in need of education, and parental support of schooling becomes an explicit requirement for student achievement. Within this logic, family-school relations appear as essentially convergent, and school success or failure becomes a matter of family accountability. Hence, educational policy has tended (implicitly and/or explicitly) to encompass the family, frequently focusing on parent education.

An alternative view - the ideal family-school partnership - might pose the school mission in terms of embracing cultural diversity and, thus, learning from families, in which case the formula would be teacher involvement with families and school-community partnerships. For teachers, in particular, this brings up problems

of choice and commitment in face of conflicting interests, and tensions between bureaucratic norms and individual desires. And, fundamentally, there is the unsolved problem of building a common culture amid cultural pluralism. While it seems unquestionable that the school mission is to build a democratic culture, and while schooling has staged 'cultural wars' over curriculum, this problem is curiously absent from the official discourse on parental involvement and family-school partnerships.

If schools need parents and bridges with families, and, at the same time, autonomy and discretion in defining education, as Casanova (1996) asserts, can parents' position in relation to school escape subordination? Apparently it can, when school is truly an extension of the family, i.e., where there is cultural continuity between home and school, in which case parental involvement is natural. However, the fact that a policy is enforcing parental involvement and home-school partnerships reveals two things. Firstly, it recognizes that parental involvement neither occurs spontaneously nor extensively. And, indeed, the perception of the benefits of parental involvement can be interpreted as concretely related to its exclusivity, i.e., involvement pays off against others' non-involvement, becoming a positive marker for teachers and influencing student evaluation (Lareau, 1993). Along this line, is parental involvement simply a main factor of student success or has student success been constructed on the basis of parental involvement as a rare resource? Hence, secondly, the fact that parental involvement is considered a factor of school success suggests that instruction is organized in ways that require individual reinforcement and extra-help out of the school's space and time.

As for policy effectiveness, specifically, I have a series of doubts regarding

parental involvement. Theoretically, how can the promise of parental involvement be sustained? From one perspective, the fact that it has functioned (as power) for certain groups and families, derives from its distinction (Bourdieu, 1987). But what theory (alternative perspective) of family-school relations can promise that parental involvement, granted its general possibility, could function (as power convertible in school success) for all?

On the part of schools, I doubt schools' organizational capacity to carry partnerships in the broad and democratic terms defined. Let's imagine that all parents showed up in school and demanded to volunteer in the classroom, to conference with teachers, to learn about the curriculum, to plan and discuss homework, and to participate in all levels of decision making! When I imagine this picture, I suspect that the call for more parental participation is a bluff.

On the part of families, what is the guarantee that parents (precisely those non-involved) will respond positively to a policy call? An unfortunate consequence of cultural imposition may be growing alienation and resistance. Hence, because it basically depends on individual compliance, the formalization of parental involvement into a mandate, implying its acknowledgement as a legitimate resource applied to student learning and further evaluation, is likely to consecrate and increase discrimination between students of involved and non-involved parents. And here the sad consequence is punishing students - with more or less subtle pressures and, ultimately, with low grades - because of their parents' shortcomings!

In my account, the current policy focus on the family neglects three main points. First, it disregards the fact that family material and cultural conditions, and

feelings about schooling differ according to social class, while proclaiming parental involvement as a means to enhance (and perhaps equalize) school outcomes. In this way, the partnership-parental involvement ideal is more likely to be a projection of the model of upper-middle class suburban community schooling than an open invitation for diverse families to recreate schooling. While the attempt to generalize a model produced within restricted social conditions through a policy mandate is disputable (and its enforcement certainly oppressive), parental empowerment and participation in school reform is unlikely for the same reasons why parental involvement is found lacking, reasons derived from the organization of social (work and family) life, families' diverse cultures, and the organization and culture of schools (Valdes, 1996).

Second, although it appeals to the image of the traditional community school, the pressure for more family educational accountability really overlooks history, as well as present social conditions. A division of educational work and content between family and school was historically constructed and is concretely maintained within the practical organization of daily life and hierarchization of social knowledge. Finally, the third important point omitted is that family-school relations are relations of power, and most families are powerless (Fine, 1993). Thus, in attempting to reach out and bring in families, this model represents a confused vision of the social function and pedagogic mission of the public school which serves the majority and variety of social groups, as well as of the possibilities and responsibilities of families regarding school success.

Two linked effects of this policy seem the gravest, in my view: the imposition of a particular parenting style and intrusion into family life, and the escalation of

educational inequality. Insofar as there are families which cannot fulfill the requisite parenting role, or create a learning environment in the home aligned to the school curriculum, the likelihood that this policy will enhance inequality of learning and outcomes seems obvious, moreover ratifying the possibility of blaming families for student failure.

This dissertation addresses these sorts of complications and implications of parental involvement as a policy, through an exploratory theoretical approach. It develops a series of inquiries into a variety of literary and experiential sources - including historical and sociological accounts, recent policy and research, and personal reflection - focusing on discourses and arguments on the construction of schooling and educational inequality, and patterns of family-school interaction, within the articulation of family, social class, educational policy, and specific instructional practices which draw on family cultural capital, the most obvious example of which is *homework*. In this way, it does not present fresh empirical data on particular instances, but rather looks at some of the knowledge that is already available and may illuminate general tendencies: Bourdieu and Passeron's (1977) theory of cultural and social reproduction via education; Coleman's (1966, 1967, 1987) discussion of the roles of families and schools in American education; important qualitative research contributions to the understanding of family-school relations, such as the studies by Lareau (1991), Henry (1996), and Smrekar (1996); and the rhetoric of research and policy, as representative of actual or desirable practices in this camp. In short, it represents an effort to understand the origins, meanings, and effects of parental involvement as a requisite of schooling, and particularly as a policy 'solution' for low achievement and even

inequity in the American educational scenario.

Chapter 1

THE ARTICULATION OF FAMILY AND SCHOOL IN EDUCATIONAL POLICY

This dissertation explores rationales and implications of family-school relations as defined under the current call for parental involvement, family-school partnerships, more homework, and parental education in U.S. schools. Specifically, I analyze how the educative roles of family and school, the meanings of a public school, the role and scope of educational policy toward the family, and their implications (for parents, teachers, students, and educational goals and outcomes) are framed by policy discourses and grounded by related theoretical and empirical literature.

As a framework for literary and documentary analysis, I draw on Bourdieu & Passeron's (1977) concept of cultural capital as the medium of family-school relations, and an implicit element of educational policy. Cultural capital, as the outcome of family and class socialization, is the (variable) medium of educational achievement, which may be exchanged for (or merely confirm previous) social and economic positions. Parental involvement, as family educational input, has been explicitly pointed out and called on as a resource for school success in recent research and policy literature in the U.S. (Henderson & Berla, 1995). The diversity of family material and cultural resources and the way specific instructional practices capitalize on them, however, has not been acknowledged except in compensatory, short-range

policies. Along this line, I pose educational policy - specifically drawing on the family as a resource subordinated to the school curriculum and practices - as an important set of structures (discourses and practices) for the play of cultural capital, with contradictory effects.

Once the role of educational policy in relation to cultural capital is acknowledged as an instrument of social (re)production, a clearer picture of the educational responsibilities, ranges, possibilities, limits, and specific articulations of school and family may be drawn. Such clearer picture is needed for understanding and redefining the social purposes and possibilities of the public school, delimiting the contribution of the family in a more equitable way, and reassessing the role and implications of educational policy.

1. The family as an object of educational policy

What makes a teacher spend precious time after class telephoning parents about their students' poor performance and urging them to help her instructional efforts, instead of dealing somehow directly with those at-risk students? What are the limits of good teaching, and what - and how effectively - can parents contribute to classroom instruction?

The call for more parental participation in schooling basically acknowledges an undesirable and harmful distance between family and school, and launches an array of policy efforts to make this relationship closer. It finds ground on common-sense knowledge of a continuity of educational roles and experiences between family and school, as well as on teachers' expectations regarding certain learning preconditions

developed in the home and the incentives certain parents place on educational achievement.

Traditionally, to a certain extent and within certain conditions, schools and teachers have always depended on and requested family or parental collaboration. However, what has not been so evident is that family-school affinities and collaboration have had a middle-class character and a social mobility accent. Moreover, they were an organic expression of the community school and of a stage of social development in which school played a central integrative role. Nevertheless, educational policies enforcing parental involvement generalize one model of family-school and school-community relations, assuming that it is the responsibility of the family to help with instruction and whatever curricular goals, and that it is the responsibility of the school and teachers to build or transform the community (Cibulka & Kritek, 1996).

Background

The literature on the articulation of family and school was born under the perspective of the school and under the interest of school success. Recent literature, for instance, following the findings of Coleman's Report (1966) on the importance of family background characteristics for school achievement, has either attempted to illuminate family child care and socialization processes which precede, support, or "cause" educational achievement, or to propose educational interventions in the realm of the family, in order to prevent school failure, specially of poor and minority families (Scott-Jones, 1993).

Most of the literature on family influence on school achievement has appeared in cognitive psychology, focusing specifically on mother-child interactions, teaching strategies and language. According to Scott-Jones's (1993) review, "American researchers concluded that the poor school achievement of low-income children was due to the impoverished language environment in their homes". Low-income mothers were less effective teachers than middle-class mothers due to such factors as "less praise, less asking questions, less orienting the child to the task, and more non-verbal communication" (p. 247).

The cultural deficit view of minority families and children led to a series of intervention programs, funded under Chapter 1 of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, during the sixties and seventies. Head Start, for instance, "provided not only parent-training activities but also a center-based educational component for preschool children and parent involvement in the governance of the program. Involvement in governance was intended to empower the low-income and minority parents who received Head Start services. In practice, however, Head Start came to concentrate on training parenting skills, as did other intervention programs" (Scott-Jones, 1993, p. 248).

Recent research and policy

The movement toward the family as a locus of education and school support has gained force under the conservative political tide of the 80s, with the renewed pressures for excellence and a new quality education required for the productive sector, and the reactionary call for 'family values' and 'hard work', extending

accountability onto the family. Since then, parental responsibility in education has been called on as a remedy for increasing school productivity, countering the failure of disadvantaged groups (poor whites, blacks, latinos), and achieving both the individual's and the nation's economic success (Swap, 1993).

On the other hand, progressive educators have also invested in parental empowerment as a strategy of educational reform within "a struggle to resuscitate the public sphere of public education" (Fine, 1993, p. 683). A few research efforts have also attempted to illuminate teachers about home and community usages of language and cultural differences across classes, geographic locations, and ethnicity, in the interest of enhancing the quality of teaching and learning, specially for disadvantaged groups, and drawing the school and home curricula closer (Heath, 1983).

The focus on family accountability is justified on the grounds of "a growing body of research [that] suggests that increased family involvement is associated with higher mathematics and reading scores, decreased likelihood that a student will be suspended or expelled from school, and greater student participation in extracurricular school activities" (National Education Goals Panel, 1995, p.3; U.S. Department of Education, 1987). The current research agenda on family-school interaction has also joined the present stress on diversity (Scott-Jones, 1993; Valdes, 1996). Furthermore, while previous research on "families as educators" mainly focused on young children, current efforts at educational reform pose "the need to continue to engage families in the education of older children and adolescents" (Jackson, 1989).

Therefore, educational policies and practices have been explicitly and massively oriented to stimulating parental involvement, drawing on family's

"educational resources," "suggesting" and "correcting" families' educational efforts, intervening in the family environment, dictating families' educational activities through homework, with the aim of empowering parents and families. Such is the case of programs like "Family Math" and "Family Science" (Programs for Educational Opportunity, 1995), which merge adult and child education, and promise academic, social and emotional gains for students and parents.

The National Education Goals Report (National Education Goals Panel, 1995), for instance, states Goal 8: Parental Participation, and its related objectives, in terms that clearly assign parents a specific role in *academic* development:

> By the year 2000, every school will promote partnerships that will increase parental involvement and participation in promoting the social, emotional, and academic growth of children.
> Objectives:
> . Every State will develop policies to assist local schools and local educational agencies to establish programs for increasing partnership that respond to the varying needs of parents and the home, including parents of children who are disadvantaged or bilingual, or parents of children with disabilities.
> . Every school will actively engage parents and families in a partnership which supports the academic work of children at home and shared educational decision making at school.
> . Parents and families will help to ensure that schools are adequately supported and will hold schools and teachers to high standards of accountability. (p. 13, italics added)

Apparently (and rhetorically), partnerships will fulfill a variety of desirable (and supposedly compatible) needs: of parents and the home, underscoring disadvantaged, bilingual, and disabled children; of academic reinforcement at home through explicit and detailed homework policies; of parental participation in educational decision making at school; of 'adequate' financial support of schools; and of high standards of accountability for schools and teachers.

Moreover, at school and everyday levels, homework policies have re-defined *"the home as an extension of the classroom"* and homework "as an assignment to be completed outside of school hours *preferably at home*." While one of the declared functions of homework is to "keep parents informed and involved in their child's learning," there are *"consequences* for not completing homework", which explicitly include student after-school detention (East Lansing Educational Foundation, 1996, p. 14, italics added).[1]

Because the obligation of parents to actively support academic learning and homework is taken for granted, such a policy appears merely as the expression of a desirable and generalizable practice.

2. The Problem

The educational policy focus on families, illustrated above, carries implications that deserve careful examination:

(1) It assigns parents the obligation of providing for *academic*, as well as social and emotional, growth of children, overlooking family differences in economic, social and cultural capital that is necessary to achieve academic support from home.

(2) It imposes on parents the conception that the home should be a setting for the explicit and intentional development of the school curriculum, and the obligation to convert family activities into an extension of class activities.

(3) It is based on one model of family: affluent, with a full-time wife and

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[1] For a complete quote on this particular middle school homework policy see Chapter 5.

mother (Thorne & Yalom, 1992), which is odd in these times of increasing maternal employment and family economic struggle and stress.

(4) It promises to "respond to the varying needs of parents and the home," adopting (at least rhetorically) a social assistance model of schooling, instead of the educational - and specifically academic - needs of children.

(5) It seems to imply the re-education of the parents as a pre-condition for the education of children, amplifying the scope of obligation of the school.

(6) It suggests that schools and families have equal power in deciding the education that is carried at school, seducing parents with the possibility of participating in educational decision making at school, which demands time, knowledge, and collective power.

(7) It attributes to parents, though vaguely, formal and direct - and perhaps enhanced - responsibility in 'ensuring' school support.

(8) It assigns parents the role of inspectors of schools' and teachers' accountability, inciting latent conflicts and eventually setting parents against teachers.

(9) It attributes to 'varying' and diverse families the establishment of high - and common! - educational standards, moreover omitting currently conflictive issues of content and values.

(10) It diverts the focus of educational improvement from the classroom to the home.

Policies of parental involvement and family-school partnership, as formulated above, seem to be grounded on ambiguous conceptions that schools can change families and at the same time 'depend' on families for change and improvement, and

that families are deficient and at the same time have an important role in responding to school's agenda and/or charging school's accountability, while prescribing (through moral rhetoric) and adopting (through teachers' expectations) a total approach to family accountability.

The call for more family accountability in education reduces education (a broad social phenomenon carried by various institutions and cultural practices) to schooling, confuses parenting with teaching, and limits schooling to economic purposes and outcomes. Despite the fact that schools have extended their functions and assumed affective, social and moral development objectives (Elkind, 1995; Sedlak & Schlossman, 1985), they can always be found lacking by parents and other interested parties (teachers, researchers, policymakers, business leaders, politicians), in face of a variety of desirable and contradictory educational goals (Labaree, 1997). The intriguing fact is that precisely when schools have changed toward assuming "shared parenting" (Elkind, 1995) they have come to charge families specifically with academic support. Furthermore, the intrusion into the educative practices of families, by requiring specific forms of academic support and assigning more homework, represents an attempt at making the "home curricula" uniform, at a time when diversity is celebrated in the school curriculum.

Significance

I see at least three important issues underlying the problematic of family-school educational responsibilities.

The first is *equity*. To the extent that families are culturally different and

dispose of unequal cultural resources in aligning with school cultural norms, policy that stimulates family input or parental participation in school will enhance differentiated educational outcomes.

Indeed, the current policy discourse, on the one hand, claims the general desirability and effectiveness of parental involvement in schooling. On the other hand, though this is not explicit, it is likely that policy actions will target those families "at-risk" and those parents "in need" of parental re-education, trying to compensate for disadvantages. But, unfortunately, the reach of educational policy is limited by more powerful socio-economic factors, and families at risk are generally the least likely to take advantaged and benefit from educational opportunities in the first place. Thus, there is a chance that even compensatory policy efforts will simply feed on the existent vicious cycle: low socio-economic conditions, low educational achievement.

The second is the *emotionally charged and conflictive character of family-school relations* regarding personal and collective interests, and the *ambivalence of the teaching role* within the division of educational work between family and school and the specific function of social differentiation performed by the educational system.

Long ago, Waller (1965) had defined parents and teachers as natural enemies, proposing a conflict of private and public interests, in which parents are more concerned with the individual characteristics and needs of their children than teachers can possibly be in the context of mass public schooling. Parents depend on schools and teachers for educating their children (as school provides for the main, legitimate and compulsory occupation of youngsters) and on the ethics of personal and social

success within and via school, and therefore they are concerned that their children might be subject to injustice and harm.

Teachers are committed to benefiting all children, but their role includes evaluating students differentially. Hence, attributing the lacks of students to family background excuses teachers' performance and its effect on students' learning, enhancing parents' vulnerability in turn, as parents tend to feel deeply affected by their children's failures. But teachers are also vulnerable in that they are concerned with their professional standing in front of parental interference and negative evaluation (and its eventual repercussions on the institutional evaluation of their professional performance). Thus, there is perennial dispute of accountability in student performance in school, most evident in student failure: did the school and teacher fail to offer conditions of learning or did the student continuously lack family support and could not take advantage of what the school offered?

The third issue is a nuance of the previous and a perverse effect of the current bent of public education toward family accountability: *the ideological, emotional, and moral charge over families*. As already mentioned, a significant trend of the educational literature and a quite common posture among teachers pose as natural and desirable that families (parents) do the school curriculum at home, according to the school and teachers' requests. They advocate active parental participation in children's schooling and don't consider the possibility that some parents may be unable or even unwilling to participate. In this context, parental "choice" not to participate tends to be seen negatively as "omission" or "negligence."

The fact that parental participation is taken for granted as a natural behavior,

or assumed and expected by the school as necessarily consensual and positive, suggests that, when it is found lacking, efforts should be made at promoting it. Neither implications for families nor for schools and teachers are considered. Even when participation is positively envisioned as opportunity for individual empowerment (of parents) and as a medium of institutional transformation (of schools), the price it charges both individuals and institutions is overlooked.

In general, the rhetoric of parental involvement ranges from a more individual to a more social perspective, but it still places the burden on the family in terms of improving individual achievement and or schools. According to a more individual, consumer's choice perspective, parents should learn how to exercise parental responsibility in terms of control of their children's education (Berger, 1985), and how to develop a customized relationship with their children's school. According to a more social perspective, parents should participate in order to reconstruct and improve particular schools and the public school. However, both perspectives seem to ignore the consequences of the play of cultural capital in enhancing the social advantages of a few and the very limits of many (working class, cultural minority, single parent) families regarding social participation.

Moreover, the ideologies of family choice, parental involvement, and family-school partnership bear a nostalgic trace of the original communitarian school, and the ambiguous assumption that either families have the power to transform school as a social institution, or that schools depend principally and directly on families for change or for success. The very diversity and various difficulties of the family as a social institution nowadays are simply omitted.

If educators and policy makers are concerned with equity, with the role of families in producing differentiated school outcomes, and particularly with the effects that ideological and moral pressures on families may have over children, and are willing to productively manage and minimize conflicts and emotional distress among students, parents and teachers, they should attend to such issues.

3. Analytical approach

The object of analysis of this dissertation are the articulations and implications of family-school relations as an object of educational policy understood as both discourse and practice: specifically, current concepts, approaches, and problems of parental involvement in schooling, as framed by policy discourses, grounded by related theoretical and empirical literature, and reflected in my own experience as a parent and educator. The procedure includes inquiry into a variety of literary sources - policy documents proposing parental involvement, selected theoretical and empirical literature on family-school interactions, current newspaper articles, anecdotes, and reflection on personal experience. Inquiry focuses on the roles of family, school, and educational policy, involving background issues of educational accountability, the public character of school, and equity.

In order to explicate the analytical approach, I next spell out my assumptions about family school relations and educational policy, the specific questions and background issues guiding this inquiry, the kinds of evidence and sources informing the analysis, and the plan of the dissertation.

Conceptual framework

Schools and families, as social institutions, are interrelated and interdependent, but also relatively autonomous, as they are situated in distinct spaces and times, respond to diverse needs of daily life, and carry specific practices toward distinct goals, while eventually pursuing common goals. They are also singly differentiated in terms of conditions, workings, and commitments, despite general structures and functions. Moreover, they work within a larger social system, represented by the state. Thus, as school and family are inserted in and affected by larger socioeconomic arrangements, their relative power in determining individual chances is variable and mostly uncertain.

Relationships between schools and families are complex, multiangled, and affected by both family diverse and evolving concrete social circumstances, and changing educational policies and practices. The reach of school policy onto the family is necessarily limited and uneven, as it is the power of the family to influence school outcomes. Families and children are generally vulnerable within the social dynamics, while schools are specially powerful mechanisms of social exclusion (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Lamont & Lareau, 1988). However, a certain cultural continuity between certain forms of families and schools will enhance the possibilities of their mutual influence and alignment (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Lareau, 1993).

The issue of family and school educational responsibilities is a complex one, having evolved historically in the direction of increasing extension and specialization of the school role, and the dynamic articulations between these institutions still need to be conceptualized within specific settings, circumstances, and practices. Bourdieu &

Passeron's (1977) concept of *cultural capital*,[2] within a theory of social reproduction via the legitimation of certain forms of symbolic power, exchanges, and conversions, illuminates those articulations by focusing specifically on the role of the educational system in linking individual behaviors, cultural resources, social class, formal and informal practices, and institutional standards.

In explaining the role of education in class reproduction within a cultural framework, Bourdieu (1977) poses the "natural" alignment of middle and upper class families with school and academic culture, and the subordination of low class families within school and high culture. In other words, the school's curriculum and standards (both formal and informal) represent the dominant culture and implicitly capitalize on the differentiated cultural resources of families and individuals (the "habitus" or dispositions acquired in the process of primary socialization), inflating or deflating them, while proclaiming neutrality; individuals, families, and classes dispose unevenly of the kind of cultural capital necessary to invest in acquiring educational and social success.

The path to educational equity, suggested by Bourdieu's framework, depends on school - and educational policy - assuming *explicitly* that it adopts the dominant culture and that many students lack the required cultural resources to succeed in it, in the line posed by Delpit (1988); and, consequently, "neutralizing" as much as possible

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[2] Bourdieu & Passeron (1977) define cultural capital as "the cultural goods transmitted by the different family pedagogic actions, whose value qua cultural capital varies with the distance between the cultural arbitrary imposed by the dominant pedagogic action and the cultural arbitrary inculcated by the family pedagogic action within the different groups or classes" (p. 30).

what Lareau (1993) calls "home advantage," while offering compensatory resources and opportunities. Along this line, educational policy should focus on maximizing the role of school resources while minimizing the impact of family resources on learning and achievement in the interest of social justice.

I realize that the possibility of the educational system playing the role described above depends on its both acknowledging and exercising its relative autonomy (making its proper political action explicit) in front of the broader socio-economic system, which in turn depends on political circumstances. While the role of the educational system is ultimately social reproduction (in the broad sense of cultural conservation), social reproduction is not automatic but a complexly mediated process which allows for certain choices in the direction of more or less equity.

Parental involvement represents a specific choice in educational policy: in the best hypothesis, granted its viability, it extends compensatory education to the family realm; in the worst hypothesis, by regulating the educational contribution of families, it homogenizes family culture, and legitimizes parental evaluation by the school. Along this line two questions stand out: Is parental involvement - as a strategy to enhance academic learning and outcomes - a legitimate and effective policy? Is parental participation in school conducive to more equity?

Policy rhetoric generally and continually affirms a commitment to improving learning for all students. Parental involvement, the case in point, is proposed as a measure of general benefit: "Schools must inform and involve all families, including those with different cultural backgrounds, to gain their ideas and assistance in helping all children succeed in school" (Joyce L. Epstein, Foreword, in Swap, 1993, p. ix).

However, such a general directive bears implications.

On the one hand, educational policy sets one agenda for all families - specifically about how families can contribute to the curricular goals and their children's school success - disregarding prior diversity of class and culture, the differentiated cultural capital which is the currency of school success (Bourdieu, 1977). In this way, educational policy subordinates families to school, by clearly setting the educational agenda and assigning parents the job of teacher aid.

On the other hand, families have different life conditions and arrangements, and various views and feelings about life, education, and educational responsibility; they respond differently to school expectations and policy mandates on schooling depending on material and cultural circumstances, social class and individual behaviors and values (Lareau, 1993). Therefore, families do not necessarily benefit from "opportunities" to participate and exert influence on their children's education, either in school (attending parent-teacher conferences, discussing the school curriculum, for instance) or at home (tutoring homework, for instance). Moreover, most families are in a position of lesser power to influence school policies and practices and to take advantage of educational opportunities for their children. The visible exception consists of upper middle class families, which have "privatized" the public school (Lareau, 1993), and set the model for all families (Berger, 1985).

If and when policy efforts fail to benefit all families and students, they harm some of them. This is an effect of the contradictory character of policies which define the common good in terms that generalize the desirability of a certain (presently restricted) situation or goal (such as parental participation as an efficient mediator of

school success), without providing the effective means (which are ultimately beyond their reach) to make that possibility viable for those who don't fit in it but *should* aim at reaching it.

Thus, before prescribing parental participation and implementing mechanisms to enhance parental involvement in schooling, educational policy should attend to important underlying questions: Does the nominally democratic state effectively represent the interests of all families in the realm of public schooling and how can it best represent? Can all families and children equitably benefit from schooling as it is and how could they best benefit? More specifically: Is it possible and reasonable to turn all families (or certain "ignorant" or "ill-equipped" families) into efficient mediators of their children's school success? Furthermore: Is it desirable and possible from the points of view of diverse families to actively invest in their children's school performance? Such questions should precede and continuously ground policy goals, designs, implementation plans, and practical decisions within the school and the classroom.

While I acknowledge the need to develop a theoretical framework for analyzing family-school relationships and their mutual implications, I am aware of the enormity of such a task. My simple claim is that educators need to envision a theoretical picture if they are concerned with the broad and subtle implications of their practices. In this dissertation, I hope solely to offer an interpretation of the articulation of theoretical and empirical elements in educational policy, pointing out the contradictory role of liberal educational policy (the discourse of opportunity), particularly when it explicitly aims at reaching the family, in building structures and enforcing practices

for the play of cultural capital in the process of social reproduction via education.

Questions for inquiry

What are the rationales behind present policy efforts aiming at connecting family and school? How are the need and benefits of a close family-school partnership characterized? Is the aim to empower the family - granting families more control over schools and choice over instructional contents and practices? Is the aim to make schooling more effective - subordinating families to the school agenda, and elevating academic learning at the expense of private choices? How are the specific educational roles of each institution depicted within the family-school partnership? What expectations and demands are posed to the family and what implications do they create? How is the idea of a public school redefined within the partnership model? What is the role of educational policy toward the family? What would a close rhetorical reading of the policy and academic literature on the subject say about these issues?

My core analytical issue is the role and implications of parental involvement in school within the articulation of school and family by educational policy. However, this issue is intertwined with important background and parallel issues: the power, both individual and institutional, to define and benefit from education and schooling; the reach and viability of public policy, specially in relation to the private space and practices; the meaning of a public school, including purposes, knowledge, conditions of learning, standards of assessment, the definition of the kind of education that can benefit all (diverse) families, and the delimitation of parental influence and choice

within its curriculum and organization; equity, conceived strategically not only as equal opportunities to learn within equal school conditions, but as positive discrimination (extra and special opportunities) to compensate for unequal - previous and external - social conditions; and the division of work and educational accountability between teachers and parents, including the definition of teacher professionalism.

The issues above suggest interesting questions: To what extent are family education and schooling equivalent? Who defines education and school success? Who contributes to and who benefits from education and schooling? On what forms and kinds of contribution is school success dependent? Who *does* the educational work, and who is accountable for school success? To what extent are all families and parents able to contribute to school success? Should families be entitled or compelled to contribute to schooling by means of direct work? How is teacher professionalism affected by parental participation in instruction? What is the legitimacy, viability, and efficacy of the educational policy reach over families? To what extent can policy induce or regulate families' educational efforts - for instance, change roles, practices and values, or enhance certain practices of certain families? To what extent should public school depend on families and parents playing a particular role? What is the legitimate and viable range of parental involvement and choice within the context of a public school?

I certainly do not answer each and all of such questions in this dissertation. In posing them, my aim is twofold. First, they illustrate the complexity of the focus on parental involvement as a strategy for enhancing school outcomes by pointing out

implicit relations and implications, and some of its problematic aspects, such as the beliefs in a 'natural' partnership between school and family, based on cultural continuity and functional affinity, and in the general benefit of the policy reach over families. Second, they create a necessary context of discussion: definitions or redefinitions of the specific educational roles of schools and families imply a reconceptualization of public education; and the question of to what extent families should be accountable for school success, and why, refers to the limits and possibilities of equity within educational policy rationales.

Data and sources

In this dissertation I mainly explore discourses:[3] educational policy proposals regarding family-school relations, implicit or explicit theoretical formulations on family role in schooling, and exemplars of empirical research that provide evidence of problems affecting those relations and justification of policy solutions aiming at improving them. The recent call on families and parents as educators, and policy rationales for family-school collaboration bear two dimensions: one relative to what is happening (an empirical-interpretive aspect), and another relative to what is aimed at (an ideological-normative aspect). Indeed, the connection between policy and research (the translation of empirically based explanations into proposals of intervention and strategies for action) is a discursive practice, subject to various interpretations.

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[3] Discourses are a more easily accessible object of study than practices, and allow for the study of practices in that they always refer to practices: either as representations of actual or desirable practices, denials or justifications of practices, or calls for improved practices. Moreover, discourse constitutes a (relatively) autonomous practice in its own right.

Moreover, both dimensions - the definitions of problems and solutions - which inform policy proposals (discourse) and implementation (practice) are rhetorical.[4]

Therefore, my data are various kinds of discourse, mainly written texts - research findings, policy rationales, and other pertinent education literature - but also personal experiences. Because family-school relations as an object of educational policy encompass various angles and issues, my analysis draws on a variety of sources: academic literature (basically sociological), both theoretical and empirical, policy documents, school newsletters, newspapers, and eventually anecdotes. Since the literature is vast, I focus closely on a few salient pieces: the theoretical literature on symbolic capital and violence (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977); empirical findings on the mediation of social class or socio-economic status in shaping parental expectations and actions toward school and teachers, and teachers' requirements and responses to students and parents (Lareau, 1993); and a variety of research-based policy recommendations regarding the role of families in student achievement, and specific actions of teachers and parents (Henderson & Berla, 1995).

In reading part of this material , particularly the framing of the school problem and its solution in relation to the family, I found myself rather skeptical about its accuracy and prospect. The sources of my skepticism were my own experiences in relation to schools, first as a child and a student within my social group, later as a parent dealing with private schools and as a teacher educator dealing with public schools in Brazil, and more recently as a parent handling U.S. public schools.

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[4] Problems of interpretation antecede the conceptualization of research and the very production of empirical evidence. Moreover, empirically based explanations are constructed and refined by individuals with specific motivations and beliefs.

Reflecting on such personal experiences provided both temporal and spacial perspective and motivation to inquire further.

Thus, while my empirical data are experiential or second hand, my primary data are arguments. Regarding the normative aspect of policy, I question the explicit or implicit assumptions that guide definitions of problems, proposed actions, and expected outcomes, and discuss their implications in the light of the available theoretical, and empirical elements. Specifically, in mapping this rhetorical terrain, I consider both how the available empirical findings on the role of families in school success support certain policy choices, and how the proposed solutions are consistent with theoretical elements. In addition, as a window into the intricacies of the family-school educational partnership, I provide an analysis of homework as a practice of transferring school work to the home, and its various meanings - as a policy, curricular conception, and instructional practice - and implications for teachers and parents.

Based on such exploratory and diversified analysis, I hope to draw and contribute to a broad - precarious, but indispensable - framework for analyzing the relationships between families and schools and the role of educational policy in articulating them.

Further analysis

This study of the problematic of family-school relations and the role of educational policy attempts to represent a series of explorations from different sources and into various of its aspects. Due to its very breadth and complexity, I found that

such a study would be both more viable and interesting as an open approach, a series of reflective promenades, starting from and returning to the central point of concern: What (and to what extent) is fair and viable for state policy to demand from families in terms of education nowadays and how much more, better, or different could schools do in order to educate all children? Therefore, the chapters that follow were written as independent but interrelated essays, each taking a distinct context of inquiry.

Chapter 2 presents my personal experience and learning about problematic aspects of family-school relations along my life course, as a student, a professional, and a parent. Chapter 3 elaborates on historical and sociological elements informing the current parental involvement policy, focusing specifically on its equity implications, mediated by social class culture. Chapter 4 deals with the articulation of the discourses of empirical research and policy, from the acknowledgement of the role of family in school achievement to the construction of a need for parental academic support. Chapter 5 depicts homework as a concrete illustration of the family-school problematic, pointing out its meanings and implications for curriculum, instruction, teaching, parenting, and family life. Finally, in the Epiloque, I stress the functions and perverse effects of parental involvement as a policy: the intrusion into family life and the threat against the democratic ideal of public schooling.

Chapter 2

FAMILY-SCHOOL INTERACTIONS: LESSONS FROM PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

My personal interest in family-school relations derives in great part from my own experience as a parent relating to my children's school. Besides, as I am also a teacher educator, I have frequently heard how teachers refer to families and parents when they talk about students, specifically how they tend to attribute the difficulties they experience with students to the family environment and lack of parental support. Finally, I am a foreigner trying to make sense of diverse cultures, presently in the U.S., and previously in Brazil. Over time, I have faced episodes and collected anecdotes, across a variety of contexts, which have sustained my perception of the problematic relations between families and schools.

So, in this chapter, I offer an idiosyncratic account and reflection on my own involvement with the problem, as a child within my family and the schools I attended, as a mother (and also a single parent) in front of my children's schools, and as an educator with a special interest in the public school. Reviewing this personal context substantiated my initial impulse to study the issue, and making it explicit provided a preliminary opportunity for inquiry.

1. Discovering the problem

I realized, for the first time, the existence of a family-school problematic when I did a brief exploratory study in poor urban and rural elementary schools, in João Pessoa, Brazil (Carvalho & Ramalho, 1983). In exploring factors of low student achievement through interviews with principals, teachers, and mothers, an interesting (apparently unrelated) problem that emerged was a mutual dissatisfaction and distrust between school and family, more openly expressed by the teachers than by the mothers, and especially evident in the rural context. Generally, mothers expressed the expectation that students should learned in school and that teachers should take a positive interest in their children, but seemed defensive toward school. As the interviewers were identified with the school, rural mothers spoke very little and carefully, while urban mothers (in whose discourse education appeared as a positive value and a condition for upward social mobility) quickly avowed that they liked the school and the teacher.

Family-school relations are usually taken for granted because it is believed that schools serve families and that families need and benefit from schools. I was quite astonished, as I approached a rural home with my colleague in 1981, two strangers that we were, when I heard a boy announce to his mother: "Mom, here comes the school police."

Parental involvement in pre-school

By then my first child was starting his school life in a private alternative 'maternal school,' a common name for kindergartens in Brazil. Maternal schools are

usually small specialized pre-schools, or branches of large primary and secondary schools, not day-care centers, and serve children from two to six years old. 'Alternative schools' are the progressive ones, set in more natural settings (with big yards, lots of trees, gardens and animals), with a great deal of outdoor activities, thanks to the warm climate, with children playing with sand and water, and moving freely around, all day. Pedagogically, 'alternative schools' offer sophisticated developmental programs based on natural-ecological approaches, explicit sensory development frameworks, Piaget, Montessori, Freinet, 'free-arts,' psychoanalysis, Emilia Ferreiro's Vygotskyan constructivism, and anything else novel, scientific, liberating, and appealing. These schools explicitly distinguish themselves from the traditional kindergartens, which are criticized for doing a combination of naive spontaneous play (not utilized as educative interventions according to a sound theoretical framework), and mechanical preparation for literacy by mimicking elementary school activities and pressing children to adapt to them.

In those 'alternative schools,' and at this age level, parental involvement was very intense and complicated. So it was that I watched a few 'school splits,' and learned of others as well. This is an interesting phenomenon: high-educated parents, teachers, psychologists, and school administrators have (or develop, despite apparent cultural homogeneity) different philosophical, psychological, and pedagogical commitments; in the parents' meetings strong disagreements are expressed over nuances of the pedagogical practice and social values conveyed by the curriculum; cases of some parents' stronger influence on the school curriculum and administration arouse rivalry among parents; cases of school interference in family routines further

conflicts; along time, groups polarize and it becomes impossible to compromise; as a result, one of the groups (of parents, teachers, and owners) leaves the school and starts a new school with an alternative theoretical and practical approach.

I attribute the intensity of middle class parental involvement in private pre-school, in Brazil, to the early age of students, and to a central concern with their emotional well-being. Middle-class parents who *have to* send their very young children to school (a new phenomena, in itself, due to the work of the *mother* and/or lack of domestic help) feel ambiguous and insecure about *throwing* them into the unknown, larger world, and into relationships with strangers, and inspect the school environment as much as they can.[1] They simply can't help it, as participation might alleviate their anxiety and uncertainty over the values and practices their children will encounter in school. It is understandable that they project their views onto the school and try to influence it accordingly.[2]

There are two other striking aspects in this recent alternative-private school movement. First there is the fact that homogeneous, middle and upper-middle class, highly educated parents don't succeed in compromising over a common educational

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[1] It must be for this reason that relationships in the Brazilian (at least middle-class) pre-school mimic the family by displaying much physical contact and gestures of affection, and caretakers and teachers (also in public elementary schools) are called *aunts*.

[2] In subsequent levels of schooling, and as children grow older, involvement tends to decrease. Perhaps there are less issues of concern then, as children have grown more independent; or the kind of concern might shift from emotional to academic matters, from which it might be easier to detach. Anyway, in Brazil, primary school is generally seen as a world apart from home, clearly public and ruled by its own edicts, certainly due to a historical origin of autonomy relative to families and communities.

project. Second, the occurrence of the split cuts down the size of a school whenever it grows too fast. In fact, forms and intensity of parental involvement appear to be associated with school size, which facilitates or restrains direct, open, and collective participation. And, as I noticed from experience, parents' active participation in school as a *collective dynamics* constitutes a complicated issue in its own right, involving scale, parents' resources and values, school organizational features, openness of school personnel, and ideological affinities among parents and school personnel.

Family distance from public schools

In Brazil, the kind of parental involvement in alternative-private pre-schools, described above, in which parents fight for influence and control, contrasts with the family-school relations prevalent in most public schools and traditional religious or secular private primary and secondary schools, which are usually larger and more rigidly structured. This other kind of school-family relations is one of distance and exclusive school control over the pedagogic process. Indeed, parental participation in the definition of the educational service has never been a cultural tradition in the public school. In private schools parents tend to act as interested "consumers" in various degrees and forms, and consequently school control against parental interference assumes an ambiguous and subtle character. The fact that school personnel in public schools have job security might lead to ignoring families, whereas in private schools administrators and teachers *see* the direct relation between their earnings and students' fees, assuming a position of deference toward families.

Since the expansion of Brazilian public schooling in the 60s, laments over family disinterest (basically referring to lack of home preparation) have been commonly heard and presented as one of the explanations for the high rates of school failure of poor children. The rhetoric of blaming the family has been an extension of the rhetoric of blaming the victim (i.e., the child), persisting as a defense against the rhetoric of blaming the teacher, the main one responsible for instruction and its outcomes. Thus, teachers constantly refer to certain families' lack of cooperation regarding specific problems and particular students, and parents' absence at school meetings, despite the widely recognized facts that poor parents are underschooled or illiterate, and all they hear from the teachers are complaints about their children's "learning difficulties" and/or lack of discipline. However, in general, public school teachers officially are not supposed to expect much from socioeconomically burdened families in Brazil.[3]

Of course Brazilian progressive educators have hoped that parents' contribution to education, as genuine political-democratic participation, would appropriately flourish in the context of the public school. But despite policy efforts to establish a model of public governance of schools through parent associations in each building, and family and community representatives at local councils of education, little has been accomplished in terms of parental participation in the public school system. On

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[3] In 1985 I acted as multi-age (5-12) teacher in an after-school (4-hour daily) program focusing on children literature in a slum ("favela") in Campinas, São Paulo. I never met any parent or felt I needed input from families in order to work with the children. The program had no concern with formal assessment either of children's progress or of its performance. I mention this point because I believe that the critical and sensitive issue in family-school relations has exactly to do with assessment and accountability.

the one hand, poor and working class parents (who comprise the majority) keep away from school, for obvious reasons. On the other hand, the retreat of the middle class from the public school is lamented, as this group's level of expectations and demands is seen as an important condition to improve the quality of public education.

Parents as consumers in private schools

Since the 70s, the era of educational reforms, the Brazilian middle class has been increasingly shifting to private schools, in the context of the so-called 'decadence' of the public school, the result of its cheap expansion, 'de-elitization,' and loss of quality. A new kind of modern private school has emerged locally - and some have spread nationally, through franchises - as a clear commercial enterprise, basically committed to profit. These new educational enterprises contrast flagrantly with the formerly dominant religious private schools, based on an ethics of community service and affinity with families.

Middle-class parents have an ambiguous relation with such modern private schools (as the fact that they are called 'sharks' indicates), and deplore the mercantilization of education. They certainly take advantage of the competition among schools, but are also suspicious that schools will fake their own advertised offers, as well as parents' demands. Moreover, parents are aware of their own limits as demanding consumers, for it would be disastrous to move children to a new school whenever they find reason for dissatisfaction and do not have their complaints settled.

During the 80s, due to high rates of inflation, private school consumers exerted a tight control over school fees, demanding both regulation from the government, and

"transparent" budgets and "reasonable" levels of profit from each private school administration. Yet, the very fact that parents choose and buy the best quality education they can afford (and eventually battle over its price) limits their participation in the process (and content) of education.

Parents as producers in cooperative-schools

While some middle class educators have lived the contradiction of defending the public school while sending their kids to private schools, and continue idealizing the role of parental participation in public schools, other pragmatic developments have been going on in Brazil. As a reaction to the high cost and unsatisfactory quality of private schools, some parents have started a new polemic movement of 'cooperative schools,' in which a public school (generally a well located and conserved building) is governed by a parent association, through an executive committee of volunteers, and may charge direct financial contributions from parents - a monthly payment, just like a private school.

This initiative has been the object of ideological debates over whose responsibility it is to provide for good quality education (some arguing that it is the State's) and over the implications of direct financial contributions from parents (some pointing out that it promotes differentiation among public schools). There have also been conflicts with teachers who don't like being subordinated to parents, and with the Union (following after other teachers' complaints) due to attempts to increase the salaries of cooperative-school teachers, creating differentiated pay among state employees. In sum, critics of the 'cooperative school' have denounced the

"privatization of the public school" by some middle class parents who have returned to the public school, but continue investing in their own interests at the level of one particular school.

Such episodes inform that parental conceptions of educational obligation, choices and possibilities of participation in schooling are limited, complicated, and, moreover, dependent on concrete needs and resources related to social class. Thus, participation aiming at influencing the quality of education requires substantial investment of time, effort, and knowledge, implying a direct role in the production of the service - a choice only available to some interested middle and upper class parents. On the other hand, access to high quality education - exempt of any form of participation - has always been possible for those who can buy exclusive, tailored, and expensive educational services.

But parents who participate (with time and effort) in their children's formal education have done it primarily at home through the institution of homework, a somewhat obscure form of partnership.

Homework and middle-class mothers

As a child growing up in Brazil in the 60s, I frequented a half-day school (a period of four hours), which remains the norm today. I spent the morning hours at home doing homework with my brothers, around the dinner table, and was not allowed to play before getting it done. My mother made sure we complied with the schoolwork, but she herself did not take interest or enjoy getting involved with it. She had a degree in Law, an unusual career for women then, had given up work to be

a mother and housewife, but seemed to me frustrated with her situation.

I knew other *mothers* in the neighborhood who took as their daily task to supervise their children's homework and reinforce the school program. Their method was to check closely what had been taught the previous school day, and what their children had or hadn't learned well, in order to clarify, review, and drill it. They routinely performed individual oral questioning and answering, giving immediate feedback, and also tested their children's learning before they left to school.[4]

Differently from my mother's generation, I had my children when I was a full-time professional. It was very disturbing for me to leave my first child at school when he was just twelve months old. It was hard to work, find good baby-sitters and deal with them, leave him at home part of the day, and get good quality time with him. Yet, soon I had two more children.

By the time the oldest was finishing elementary school, I decided to shift from the alternative Montessorian school the three frequented to a 'traditional' school. I had no doubt they were very happy in that school, but I found that the oldest hadn't learned as much as I expected - based on my own experience as a student - at the end of elementary school. So, I judged, not without concern, that it was time for them to experience massive dull teaching, to frequent an old building with thick walls, and thus I chose a high-standard Marist school. My problem with homework began then.

In the Montessorian school, my children had never brought schoolwork home,

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[4] Those were full-time mothers with university degrees, whose daughters ended up going to medical and engineering school. As I think back, I realize that girls in my social group, then, faced no intellectual barriers and were frequently more brilliant and academically successful than their brothers, probably due to their mothers' academic role at home.

and so they were not accustomed to doing homework. I would leave work by 11:30 on a two-hour break, in order to eat lunch with them, check their homework, and drive them to school, just to find out that they had spent the morning playing and watching TV. So I had to hire a private tutor to sit with them every morning and help them do their homework independently, a goal she never accomplished, as she became totally indispensable in my family life.

Parents versus experts

As I attended the regular parents' meetings in the traditional religious school, I noted a rhetoric of subtly pointing at families' lacks and all the 'extras' that the school environment and its professionals provided. I also noticed an emphasis on the psychological needs of children and teenagers and the friendliness and involvement of teachers who were constantly listening to the students' *family* problems, especially teenagers who didn't have anyone to talk at home. I wondered, given that, if they had any time left to teach the academic curriculum! Besides this 'content,' another aspect also called my attention in the school discourse: I felt that school professionals (principals, pedagogic coordinators, teachers, and psychologists) talked to parents as if they were talking to children.

Once I had a specific meeting with one of the school psychologists. I was apparently called because my fourth grade son had disrupted the class. But then I was told that he and another boy were caught throwing little pieces of paper which contained obscene drawings. After informing me of the 'real' occurrence, the psychologist immediately started 'interviewing' me about my family sexual education.

As I perceived her 'professional' attempt to find a problem in my home, I counteracted by pointing out that whereas in my house there were no pornographic materials, the school lavatory walls were decorated with obscene graffiti. I offered her my view that my son was a normal child, and I told her, "He certainly learned that in school." As for the inappropriate class behavior, I thought the school should deal directly with the student and apply its disciplinary norms instead of calling me.

The school psychologist explained that they normally called parents in order to avoid further complaints. I exposed my view that problems that are created in the school environment, resulting from its particular patterns of organization, actions, or omissions, should be solved by the school professionals, according to their best wisdom. I also suggested that - while I thought it unsound to expect that parents could prevent children's misbehavior in school - she could make better use of her time by intervening in the school setting and dealing directly with the problems generated there than by calling parents to inquire about their family life, in order to explain a kid's behavior in a particular circumstance. On the other hand, if the school didn't feel quite sure about best disciplinary practices and wanted to find out about parents' views and values, a survey would be a good start.

But surveys or other straightforward approaches to all parents were never tried while I was there. This episode reinforced my perception that an attitude of focusing on individual cases constructed as problematic, and of problematizing the family, is part of school culture and practices, as I had found to be the case in the discourse of public school teachers elsewhere (Carvalho, 1989). I view this attitude as detrimental to focusing on the school context and improving its practices. My point is that I

doubt that educators, counselors, and psychologists have already studied and solved the problems generated in the school context so well, that they are willing to extend their expertise to help problematic families; moreover, school personnel doesn't have (and I see no reason why they should have) the expertise to deal with family problems.

To the extent that what is perceived as problematic in school is not or cannot be solved in its context (for practical, ideological, or political reasons), defining problems as individual and familial may be seen as a defensive strategy. However, the expert discourse does affect individuals and families, and if it does not help to solve problems, in turn, it certainly creates new problems. For one thing, the expert discourse can be an instrument of oppression whenever the means to solve problems satisfactorily are not available.

2. Rediscovering the problem

Being a foreigner,[5] one who speaks with an accent and addresses people oddly in normal situations, taught me how difficult it is to live as a cultural outsider. It was not just that I didn't know people and had no friends, but that all my cultural capital (good education, skills, and values) was initially worth nothing. Because of my accent, peculiar manners, and speech style, I lacked face-value, and was often an

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[5] Perhaps I should inform about my ethnic background, according to the common practice I found here. In my country I am white, but in the U.S. I never felt white, and indeed found it easier to relate to Blacks and Browns. In filling up forms, my first impulse was always to mark Hispanic, because I am Latin-American, but a second thought would tell me that Brazilians of European ancestry are not necessarily Hispanics.

object of suspicion, or bluntly expected to be ignorant and inferior.[6] I needed to work much harder than others in order to 'convert' my cultural background into some sort of prevailing, conventional, local capital.

Within this context, I had the possibility to think about cultural differences and conflicts, and some of their implications, particularly the price that is charged of a foreigner, or any cultural outsider, in order to participate in normal social interaction. This is especially difficult for adults who have already formed a clear adult identity. On the other hand, my children might have suffered doubly: as foreigners in their own right, and as dependent on - and, thus, affected by - a foreign parent mediating their interactions with others. The fact that they avoided speaking Portuguese in public and criticized my accent was not random; interestingly, speaking a foreign language was not a sign of positive distinction or valued as cultural capital in this area.

Parental involvement in U.S. schools

My encounter with the practices and discourses on home-school relations in the U.S. were influenced by my cultural background and situation as a foreign, female, single parent: amount of homework and particular instances of 'interactive homework,' the discourse on the family educational role, the typical family-school

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[6] It didn't take me long to learn, through afflictions and humiliations, that many White Americans, even second generation immigrants, expect third world foreigners to defer to them. The logic (and the prevailing stereotype) seems to be that of the immigrant who left a bad situation and marvels at the goods of America; it follows that any different or critical attitude draws prompt antipathy, and also (as I know from experience) "a little lesson," that is, punishment! Or perhaps it is part of a competitive culture that one has to constantly prove oneself, as if people (especially those in power positions), as a norm, set up others within an initial frame of negative expectations.

communication patterns and opportunities for parental involvement in the school, and the institution of parent education.

I understand that homework is accepted in Brazil on the grounds of a short school day, or insufficient school time that needs to be complemented at home. Coming to the U.S., I thought my kids would attend marvelous, rich, effective, whole-day, public schools and, consequently, would never have homework. Therefore, I was quite surprised when they consistently brought schoolwork home. I was appalled when I *had* to do my part in a 5th grade 'interactive homework' and *confirm* that I had enjoyed it! I was particularly astonished at the amount of homework during the first middle school 'transition' year. And I was perplex when my signature on a high school History homework was worth 5 points extra-credit!

As a parent, I felt constrained to do *my part* in my children's homework and *enjoy* it. This was simply defined as my obligation by the school, and I had no choice if I didn't want my kids to be low achievers, since homework substantially counts toward grades here. One teacher advised parents in a school meeting not to trust children doing homework in their rooms (because they might stay quiet for hours watching TV or listening to music with a headphone), and "to make sure they do it right there at the kitchen table while you fix dinner."

The show of personal satisfaction and efficiency that principals and teachers put up for parents in the open-houses reminded me of private schools in Brazil. The professional aura marked those speedy school-family contacts, insofar as communication was usually initiated and directed by the school personnel. The purpose of those meetings was explicitly stated as to inform the parents about the

goals of each course, and about their role in helping their student understand and reach them. Within such a frame, teachers' discourse toward parents invariably sounded artificial, and few teachers struck me as candid and authentic persons.

The telephone service to inform parents that their student missed a class or a school day puzzled and annoyed me. My reaction was, "Of course I know he missed school for he stayed home - why are you informing me of something I already know and should know better than you?" I was unaware of my obligation to notify promptly the attendance office of my kid's absence, and it seemed absurd to me that the school would employ someone to do the dull job of calling parents. It took me some time to learn that this home-school communication policy revolves around responsibility for truancy and is intended to protect the school.

My first experience volunteering in a school trip to the zoo with the 8th graders was also my last of its kind. I was the only mother not to get a small group of students to chaperon, and instead was put together with that who seemed to be the most prestigious (and clearly the wealthiest) mother in the group of volunteers. Being the only foreigner, I presume I was judged incompetent to accompany a group of teenagers that included my own son.

Finally, the institution of parent education also impressed me. The very term *parenting*, and the scientific, expert definitions of *good parenting skills* taught in the workshops regularly offered by the school district suggested to me that public policy, in this country, has blatantly penetrated into the private, familial, and personal realms of life via education.

The price of school success

In the special situation of a foreign parent, I could understand the meaning of symbolic violence. I felt imposed upon and invaded by the homework dictates; I also felt excluded and often patronized (based on stereotyped cultural assumptions) in my interactions with school people. It was not just that I couldn't pay the price to get in (learn how to socialize) and have my children get in (help them steadily with homework): I didn't want to! This is called cultural resistance: I disliked being treated like an immigrant, meaning someone who has to submit to anything and change personality completely. However, cultural resistance should not be seen as something negative that has simply to be overcome if one wants to adapt and succeed; indeed, cultural conservatism, in this case, doesn't mean mere stubbornest, but also personal integrity and survival. It has its price too: wanting to succeed without having to adapt unilaterally and conform to the system requires struggle and negotiation, mostly unsuccessful for the individual in the lesser-power position. Moreover, as Schutz (1944) argued before, people in between two cultures are in a unique position to be analytical and critical.

Now, putting my foreign condition aside, there is something to be said about the meaning of homework as an invasion of family life, and an imposition on the parent. Every time I had to participate in interactive homework or sign a homework slip, I felt like writing the teacher: "Please don't send *me* homework!" As an adult, I don't want to submit to the teacher authority, not even for the benefit of my child, granting that the teacher knows better what is of benefit to my child, and how best I should employ my time at home and in relation to my child. To be sure, I don't want

my relationship with my child to be constantly, on an everyday basis, mediated by a school topic. I don't want to talk school at home unless necessary, and I don't want to be the kind of parent who is always playing the teacher.

Moreover, I was a student myself, and had to go through all those school subjects and tasks in my time, and don't want to go through it all over again in order to 'help' my children with homework, now that I am free to read and learn only what I like - that is, now that I know that most of the school curriculum, apart from the basics, is useless beyond granting a vague familiarity, perhaps instilling a certain scientific mentality, and allowing for college choices. Therefore, I conceive my role as a parent as one of just encouraging (and sometimes, unfortunately, pressuring) my child to experience it all (bearing its occasional difficulty and unpleasantness), a role certainly to be shared with the teacher, whom I hope has a real passion for Physics, Literature, or other subjects. As for the job of teaching, I want to leave it entirely to the teacher, who should be well prepared and have good work conditions in order to perform well.

And, finally, there is something to be seriously pondered over the price of school success, as to whether it should amount to eliminating cultural diversity by precluding the home curriculum,[7] whatever it might be, and to saddling parents with the obligation to teach the school curriculum at home, when they are not prepared nor paid to do so, to say the least. There is also much to be pondered about the meaning and place of *deregulated* leisure and pleasure at least in family and private life.

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[7] By home curriculum I mean the activities and conversations that make up family life and interactions.

Families, cultural diversity, and the meaning of school

Far from home, and aging, I was flooded by memories of my childhood experiences.

I was sent to kindergarten when I was four years old - something unusual having a mother at home - and went through elementary grades in an extremely strict and repressive Catholic school. There I learned well how to read and write, and had a terrorizing religious education. As I recall my home and community education, though, I can see how many alternative and diverse experiences it offered as compared to school.

I had a four generation maternal extended family. Every Sunday evening we gathered at my grandmother's house, full of relatives and guests, adults and children, plus dogs, cats, and a yard full of ducks and chicken. We also visited regularly my widowed great-grandmother, who lived in a townhouse with other old-aged relatives. In those visits, besides playing outside, children sat in the living-room and listened to adults' conversations, and drank adult beverages: at my grandmother's, coffee, and at my great-grandmother's, a variety of homemade fruit liqueurs.

Our household had maids from the countryside, with whom we children had a very close, affectionate relationship. We joined many of their activities. From them we learned to plant corn, beans, collards, tomatoes, sweet potatoes, peanuts; to make fires; to roast cashews; to recognize snakes. In the beginning of the rainy season, at dusk, we children collected fat flying ants ("tanajuras") on the unpaved streets that the maids would stir-fry and eat. The nutritious value of "tanajuras" was never a topic in the school curriculum. When I was ten, and dying of curiosity, one of them told me

how babies were born in the most simple, straightforward way, information denied by mother and by the school.

I heard many stories as a child, before TV invaded homes. My grandmother told stories of animals, featuring conflicts of power, astuteness, and tricks, and "cangaceiros" - the old bands of rural bandits in Northeastern Brazil. My mother loved to tell the stories of her maternal grandfather - the character she most admired and who inspired her to study Law - of the people in his household, and the sugarcane mills where she spent her vacations. My aunt Mira was a fine story teller, who could entertain me for hours depicting life and people in the boarding school of German nuns, where she had spent her school years. And the maids told tales about fantastic creatures from the woods, protectors of the forest and its animals.

Every Sunday morning my father would take us children to the movies and to the club, so that my mother would get rid of us for a few hours. Back home, we would sit around the lunch table for hours, and have Greek theater for dessert, my mother's passion for a while, when she took some courses to fill her boring time as a housewife. Both my parents did amateur theater during my childhood years, and so I was frequently taken to the theater, and later to all the classic music concerts and art movies in town.[8]

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[8] I could say that my family had a lot to offer in terms of both cultural and social capital, but I don't recall my parents explicitly investing this kind of capital in my schooling on a regular basis. My mother did invest her family social capital when she forced the nuns to take me - the daughter of an atheist (my father) and of a couple not married in the Roman Catholic Church - as their student. My father, who had an individual history of upward social mobility, was more likely to talk school subjects (especially math and science) at home, and occasionally to help with math; he had been a brilliant student and did have high academic expectations for his children. However, my parents neither frequented the religious or the public schools that I

School was a world apart, clearly limited and colorless, but strong in its demands. It became broader when I moved to a big secondary public school, where there was much more freedom, and a variety of boys and girls to whom to relate. I often hung around with my classmates after school, walked downtown or went to the movies, and visited their families out of my neighborhood and immediate social group - and this was the most interesting part of going to school!

Thus, I was educated in and through many worlds, among which school comprised an important, central, but definitely limited part. School and its work were my chief obligation, weekdays' schedules were organized around school time, but school would also function as a bridge to other activities and people, clearly disconnected from the school curriculum.

If I imagine my life as a child limited to the school, and my experiences reduced to its curriculum, I can only see them impoverished. Moreover, I find no evidence that schools have become better (more interesting and spiritually richer) places for the education of children today, as compared to my days.

3. Summing up

My own experience says that family-school relations and educational contexts involve an array of complex issues - social values, institutional purposes, conceptions of public and private, kinds of knowledge, forms of learning, personal meanings, views on the role of parents and teachers - and a variety of practices, all of which,

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attended (in the first case, because they were not part of the community, and, in the second case, because this was not part of the school or family cultures), nor got involved with curricular issues or homework contents.

moreover, bear change and diversity. Though educational issues and practices appear tangled, it is important to keep clear that families and schools are distinct institutions, situated in different spaces and times of everyday life, comprising particular arrangements, responding to different social and individual needs, and carrying exclusive functions. And though children move and develop principally within and between the contexts of the two (as other forms of community have become rare), to be sure, families' functions are much more complex, and families are responsible for more than school in terms of life experiences and education in the broad sense.

Nevertheless, within present social arrangements, the most viable mediation between children and private life, as one realm, and social knowledge and the public world, as another, still is the public school, represented by the teacher, the class-group, and the curriculum-mass organized activities. From this perspective, any family environment is limited, and parents are ill-equipped to exert this mediation role effectively, as they mostly don't have that as their main task; are disconnected from the academic world; are not specialists in cognitive development, or academic subjects; have diverse kinds of public participation, and their own demanding occupations. Moreover, parents are unprepared to 'help' teach the school curriculum precisely the more specialized school content is, and the more remote it is from practical social pursuits.[9]

Since school is a specialized institution of formal education, and since schooling is a big public enterprise, I see the separation of family and school as -

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[9] Attempts to connect school knowledge and everyday life are doomed to be limited, for school knowledge encompasses abstract, non-trivial, and initially non-common knowledge.

more than a functional choice - a requirement for individual freedom and cultural pluralism, and as an approach to equity. Assuring that education (as a function of the state), compulsory schooling (as preparatory for public life), and school culture remain separate from private life means allowing space for other forms of education, responsive to various human needs, to flourish apart from school. And, given that schools are also testing-credentialing institutions, limiting educational assessment to what is publicly designated as school knowledge and offered explicitly by the school might avoid the appraisal and discrimination of other cultures, making academic culture more manageable by those who are not initially socialized into it.

Along this line, one of the issues that has most impressed me in American education is the extension of schooling in day time and life time, and its penetration into family life. On the one hand, the extraordinary development of the educational system and the race for school credentials as a means for social mobility constitute unique American phenomena; on the other hand, this bears upon the role of education both in Protestant ideology and in a land of immigrants, as stressed by Arendt (1961). And, indeed, it is possible to see a movement of family reform via school reform, within the formalization and normalization of parental involvement in schooling, insofar as school culture permeates everyday family practices, homogenizing the basic make up of social life.

I see with concern this policy movement towards articulating a single agenda for schools and families, as it basically narrows down the scope of conceivable educational goals and practices, while loosing sight of the specificity of public education (which cannot be conceived except in dialectical opposition to private

experiences). In my view, what school and family share is a *division* of educational work and responsibility for children, the specific educational role of school being to provide for a common culture (beyond cultural diversity), a special kind of learning (systematic, skilled, refined), and knowledge (intellectual, significant and useful for all social groups), through its specialized professionals, and unique collective environment. Obviously there are many areas of human development and many cultural contents which are not, and cannot possibly be, attended to by schools. Schools are limited: they cannot represent all the diversity of human experience. Of course, the challenge for the public school is to overcome social discrimination and exclusion based on cultural diversity. However, the present call for diversity is doubtful, as the problem of cultural pluralism cannot be solved within schools. How is cultural diversity going to be conciliated with necessarily restrictive definitions of school knowledge, and specially with valuation of knowledge and evaluation of learning?

So, I take the opposite direction of current educational policy addressing families, by assuming the perspective of the family expressed by this question: How are families going to recreate their immediate, everyday conditions of life, freely, if they are to be converted into partners of schools, guided by expert definitions, and occupied with academic goals? If schools and families represent distinct interests in terms of individual and social development, if their normal interaction comprises potential conflict as posed by Waller (1965), and if the attempt to define a common (interinstitutional) educational agenda is likely to trigger struggle I would bet that institutional separation is more viable than mutual involvement. The seeming

intrusion of schooling into the family at this point in the history of American education suggests not only that there is actual struggle over social values and definitions of academic knowledge, but also that the school detains the dominant position within that struggle in detriment of the family.

Therefore, ideally, educators and policymakers must consider family perspectives and face the issues of social purposes, knowledge, and the public character of schooling, so that school can account better for the task of educating all children, and families can be set free to educate their children in their own ways.

Chapter 3

EDUCATIONAL POLICY AND SOCIAL REPRODUCTION: THE QUEST FOR EQUITY WITHIN FAMILY-SCHOOL RELATIONS

In this chapter I consider possible equity implications of educational policy prescribing a family-school partnership in terms of parental involvement in schooling and parental implementation of academic activities in the home. I frame this issue according to the current rationale that parental involvement is a resource for improving individual student success, counteracting minority group failure (therefore minimizing inequity), raising educational standards and general outcomes, insuring individual and national economic competitiveness and, moreover, building family and community relations.

If the promises of education and schooling for human and social development held true, we should expect more individual achievement, the enhancement and equalization of school outcomes, and increasing social equality over time. Under this assumption, parental commitment to students' educational success would be natural and all parents would be positively involved on schooling. However, demographic evidence shows that school success does not happen for all and, furthermore, that successful schooling does not automatically create more social equality. In this context, parental apathy has been pointed at as an educational problem - indeed as a justification of school failure - by teachers and policy makers, while the belief in the

power of education and the function of schooling remains unexamined. To be sure, some parents' apparent neglect has appeared as a problem precisely in comparison with a certain image of positive parental involvement, one associated with school success. Put in this way, the issue seems at once simple and intriguing: Why wouldn't all parents want the best (defined as educational and socioeconomic success) for their own children? If it is all (apparently) a matter of individual (parental) effort and commitment, how can we (teachers, policymakers, researchers) get some parents more involved?

Even more complicated seems to be the issue of the social purposes and outcomes of education. In 1848, Horace Mann wrote: "Education, then, beyond all other devices of human origin, is the great equalizer of the conditions of men -- the balance-wheel of the social machinery" (Twelfth Annual Report, in Cremin, 1957, p. 87). This is one vision of the social role of education, but another understanding is that the educational system serves to reproduce social inequalities rather than eliminating them (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). There are two visible actors in this drama -- schools (meaning teachers and the educational structures within which they operate) and the families (parents) of the children who attend schools. Each plays a specific role in shaping the learning outcomes, the acquisition of credentials, and the social outcomes of education, in the context of their interactions and of the larger dynamics of economic, political, social and cultural life.

But what are the particular educational roles of school and family? According to Mann's ideal, the school, as the principal agency of education, should promote social equality despite prior individual and family differences, in which case the role

of school is preponderant. As stated by the second view, the power of school has been exerted not to minimize inequality but to perpetuate it, meaning that the school operates on the basis of family and class differences. In contrast, educational policy is now calling for the specific contribution of the family in enhancing and equalizing school outcomes, in which case the role of the family is recognized as decisive. Nevertheless, as long as either schools or families appear as more or less accountable for school success and social equality, the specific role of educational policy in shaping and regulating their interaction (and the ensuing educational and social outcomes) remains off the fray. Educational policy, as a function of the state within social organization, must therefore be assessed precisely in its power to frame the roles and interactions of school and family.

Though we have come to think usually of education and educational policy as restricted to school (and do not consider the private policies of families), public policy touches the private and, in the case in point, precisely articulates families and schools in social reproduction.[1] Along this line, educational policy deals, either implicitly or

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[1] Social reproduction is used here in the generic sense, as practices of social continuance, involving physical/material and cultural/symbolic relations, and both creation and preservation. In "Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture," Bourdieu & Passeron (1977) define education as "the process through which a cultural arbitrary is historically reproduced ... the equivalent, in the cultural order, of the transmission of genetic capital, in the biological order" (p. 32). Although there is a common reaction against this concept as one that doesn't allow for human agency, I understand that social reproduction happens necessarily through human agency: only by specifying what is reproduced (as there are various possible choices) can we account for conservation and transformation, and attribute specific sense and value to either of them as related to specific goals; and only by specifying who are the productive actors, and whose actors are alienated from decision making, participation, or the enjoyment of certain outcomes, can we account for human agency and disempowerment. Bourdieu & Passeron (1977) also speak of the social conditions of existence in terms of social conditions of production and reproduction, involving

explicitly, with aims and meanings, conditions and practices of these social institutions in defining the politics of knowledge and the social role of education. Understood as state interventions amid social demands, as generative rules and resources within social systems (Giddens, 1979), as discourses-practices (Cherryholmes, 1988) within institutions, or as authoritative frameworks (goals, conditions and means) for collective action, as well as the concrete choices of policymakers, researchers, teachers, parents and students, whose complex combination draws courses of action which are never the automatic realization of the official agenda, policy-politics[2] is in fact the main force within the quest for educational equity and social equality. Here I find it necessary to stress that policies only exist as politics - as actions in pursuit of particular interests - and that agents, such as teachers, parents and students, do politics and exercise power in intricate, asymmetric, and contradictory ways.

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restructuring and reinterpretations.

[2] The term politics has negative connotation in common discourse, but it can be simply defined as the practice or strategy of obtaining power or control. This sense agrees with the concept of policy: "a judgement, derived from some system of values and some assessment of situational factors, operating as a general plan for guiding decisions regarding the means of attaining desired objectives." (Dictionary of Education, Third Edition, McGraw-Hill, 1973) Perhaps favored by my native language (Portuguese), in which both policy and politics are the same word, I conceive both moments - policy (calls and directives for implementation, as registered in official documents) and politics (formal and informal practices that follow or oppose, resist or recreate those directives) - as one complex process. Therefore, I use policy-politics to suggest that policy is more than goals and means or frameworks and resources and must include practices and outcomes, collective courses of action and their broad effects. Along this line, though it usually is not formulated by teachers, parents or students, formal policy is implemented or rejected, re-produced or resisted by them, and therefore its conceptualization must include practice and all of its participants. In their reactions to formal policy, actors may always, in some degree, recreate it differently than the original intentions of those who conceived it.

This posed, a few points are in order. Though both schools and families are subordinated to the state, they do not have equal power in the larger political context, or within the particular context of their interactions. On the one hand, the authority of an official agency (the school as a branch of the state) supersedes the prerogatives of isolated families and individuals. Thus, insofar as the school represents the state interest (or the interest of a generic community in front of particular communities), it is necessarily in a position of power over families and students in enforcing policies and practices. On the other hand, the counter-assertion of a two-way school-family interaction doesn't necessarily deny the differentials of power between family and school as social institutions, and between particular families and schools according to the class and cultural conditions of their individual members (parents and teachers) - or, as Bourdieu (1986) would say, according to the relative value of the forms of capital (economic, social and cultural) possessed and invested by them. In other words, while it is true that family pressures have continually shaped school policy and practice, concrete specification (in time and space) is required as to which families have exerted power over schools and succeeded in shaping their educational service. Concrete specification is needed in order to prevent undue generalizations, as it is obvious that the power of families to influence school depends on both macro and micro sociopolitical variables, among which are included, in particular, parental educational levels and socioeconomic resources, and teachers' political and pedagogical commitments. On the other hand, it is also evident that the power of education or school credentials hasn't had the same practical value for all families, therefore motivating uneven family investments in schooling.

Considering the complexities sketched above - particularly the ostensible, monolithic and all-pervasive political character of schools as contrasted with the diversity and dispersal of families, and the policy challenge of how best to link the educational efforts of families and schools towards the egalitarian ideal - my aim is to analyze the assumptions and implications of the current family-school partnership and parental involvement model, within a project of improvement of school outcomes. My initial suspicion concerns both the viability and justice of its promise. Therefore, I pursue two interrelated questions: how this kind of educational policy is likely to affect different families, and whether it is likely to create more educational equity or inequity, within the understanding that these questions affect the overall quality of education.

In what follows, I offer a reflection on some common ideas and situations, grounded in historical and sociological perspectives, and a critique of a particular policy trend - the current call for parental involvement - which frames family-school relations in problematic ways. Initially, I delineate conceptions and meanings of education, family, schooling, and family-school relations, pointing out the construction of schooling (particularly in the United States) within ideological perspectives of class, namely, social mobility and social equality. Next, I consider the specific power of schools and their limits in promoting social equality, featuring Bourdieu & Passeron's (1977) theoretical explanation of the crucial role of the educational system in the reproduction of social inequality by building on families' diverse class cultures. Finally, I discuss implications of the current educational policy framework for family-school relations, and particularly for those families which don't

fit its parenting model advancing family responsibility for schooling.

I understand that current theoretical and policy formulations carry a typical middle-class bias in terms of the ideology of education for upward social mobility and consequent family adhesion to the school pedagogical project. In this way, they tend to automatically benefit those families who are already cognizant of academic culture and 'naturally' perform the role expected by school, while creating automatic disadvantage for families unfamiliar with school culture and unfit (by their very life conditions) to meet its expectations. Moreover, in regulating family-school relations - specifically, by defining the home as a learning setting for the school curriculum and imposing upon the parents a certain educative (parenting) model - educational policy is in fact extending political regulation onto the diffuse realm of the family and private life, affecting particularly working class and lower class families. If this movement to promote uniformity in family cultural and educational practices apparently might facilitate instruction by enhancing the prior conditions of school achievement, it seems like a rather odd egalitarian strategy in aiming to correct family and social (external) differences, as well as a rather doubtful attempt to re-educate certain families, moreover leaving the school's internal mechanisms of discrimination untouched.

Therefore, I suggest that a policy promoting parental involvement will tend both to exaggerate educational inequalities and to foster greater political subordination of family to school, penetrating and annihilating whatever diversity is left in family cultural and educational practices. It will certainly create more burdens for family life, as well as additional complications for teachers and instructional processes, pushing new demands in planning and evaluation of the articulation of home and

school learning. In defining what most students and families lack or need to do in order to succeed in present school and society, and pressing families to change in order to fit the school agenda, instead of trying to compensate for family educational shortcomings (defined in terms of school requisites) by its own means, schools (teachers, policymakers, and educational researchers) will miss the opportunity to redefine the specific educative function of schooling and broaden the meanings of education by drawing on the richness of families' diverse educational contributions.

1. Family, school, and the democratic ideal

We need to think of education, its forms and possibilities, and the educative roles of families and parents, schools and teachers, as well as other agents, within their historical and social contexts, in order to understand specific origins, evolution, and variation of practices, and the production (including change and endurance) of meanings relative to changing social needs of diverse groups. While I do not intend to account for all of these, the picture I will sketch here suggests historical, class, material, and cultural variations in modes of education, family organization, and interaction between families and schools in social reproduction. Along my elaboration I will stress a few key ideas: that meanings of education, family, and schooling are unsettled and problematic, and related to concrete (evolving) material arrangements; that social reproduction, education, and family intersect, evolve in articulation, but engender their own dynamics; that forms of families and education vary across time and social class; that families have lost their once central position in the production and reproduction of life conditions and have become subordinated, in various degrees,

to institutions of work and school; that schooling is a function of the state, which represents the interests of the powerful social groups; that education today has been restricted to schooling and to its exchange value (Labaree, 1997); that conceptions of education and schooling are defined and carried by professionals (such as researchers, psychologists, policymakers, and teachers) entrusted with specific power over lay people (such as parents); that schools were constructed within social production and reproduction as providers of a service most (working) families cannot afford and, therefore, need.

Conceptual and historical overview

Education, as a social institution, plays a main part in cultural and social reproduction[3] by creating individuals who can function autonomously according to internalized social norms and values, and adapt to specific scenarios at times produced by social transformations. As intentional socialization linking generations and individuals, education consists of two dimensions: a social dimension concerned with imparting in the new generations a certain cultural heritage through the work of various institutions, and an individual dimension involving the formation of dispositions and views, and the acquisition of knowledges, abilities, and values. The individual dimension is secondary to the social dimension[4] within the frame of objective interests and power relations, be it in the microcosms of the family or

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[3] For a clarification of social reproduction, see Note 1. Indeed, all processes involved in social reproduction, including economic production, involve education.

[4] I adopt here Parson's concept of socialization but also assume social conflict and contradiction in social relations.

elsewhere in the context of larger institutions or the institutional network.

Modes of education and social reproduction are historically and culturally variable and arbitrary.[5] Both the ways of imparting and the contents of the dispositions and knowledges, which are socially valued and come to constitute the process of education (the curriculum), have varied in time and space in terms of organization and practices (where, how, for how long), contents (which knowledges become habits, skills, school subjects), agencies and agents involved (who is responsible for organizations and deliverance), and target-subjects (according to categories like age, gender, class, and race). We can think of education, for instance, as formal and informal, as an organized social effort and as individual experience, as a plan implemented by an educator and conscientization via diffuse socialization and participation, as the process of teaching and the experiences represented by a learner, as knowledge and learning, as work and leisure, as performance and feeling, as self-education and collective construction. As a multifaceted process of human learning and development taking place within social practices, across various social spaces and during all the course of individual life, education must initially be distinguished from schooling, which is its current predominant mode. And although there are knowledges and educational practices of different statuses, education must also be recognized as the learning that occurs through random experience and general participation in social practices. The very fact that education currently came to be

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[5] They represent *cultural choices* which cannot be explained in terms of natural or rational determination, but else are grounded in and the expression of material and power relations (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). Modes of education and family organization, for instance, represent dynamic and specific modes of interaction of material and symbolic resources and contexts in social and cultural reproduction.

synonymous with schooling is in itself an interesting historical and sociological phenomenon.

Historically, to educate, in the general sense of rearing or bringing up children (Williams, 1983), hasn't been the exclusive or main attribute either of biological parents, families, or schools. Caring for the young, imparting the culture of the social group (instructing them in modes of knowledge, production, relation and participation), and preparing them for adult roles (war, citizenship, community, family, and work) have constituted the educative tasks of various individuals, groups and institutions (mothers, fathers, elders, teachers, extended families, clans, neighborhood, churches, schools) through a variety of arrangements. In primitive societies, the education of children was a community task, totally informal and merged into practical life, as it is still the case nowadays in rural areas of the third world or for the socially marginalized groups in urban areas anywhere.[6] In European pre-modern times children were normally brought up by other adults rather then their biological parents; formal education, a sign of class and cultural distinction, was then a consequence of being born in the apex of the social scale. Montaigne, born in 1533 in France, to a family of landlords, was first cared for by a foster family, before being 'ready' for formal education, initially through exclusive home-tutors, and later, from ages six to thirteen (when he concluded his schooling), at the best College in France. This is how he expressed it:

If I had any sons I would readily wish them a fate like mine: God gave me a

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[6] We can think of the inner city drug dealing gang and leader as an educative community and teacher, for instance as shown in Spike Lee's *Clockers* (Universal City Studios, 1995).

> good father. (...) From the cradle he sent me to be suckled in some poor village of his, keeping me there until I was weaned - longer in fact, training me for the lowliest of lives among the people: Freedom consists, for a large part, in having a good-humoured belly.
> Never assume responsibility for such up-bringing yourself and even less allow your wives to do so: let boys be fashioned by fortune to the natural laws of the common people; let them become accustomed to frugal and severely simple fare, so that they have to clamber down from austerity rather than scrambling up to it. My father's humour had yet another goal: to bring me closer to the common-folk and to the sort of men who need our help. (...) And the reason why he gave me godparents at baptism drawn from people of the most abject poverty was to bind and join me to them. His plan has not turned out too badly. (Montaigne, 1993, pp. 405-406)

To a certain extent, social reproduction and education are rooted in the family, since sexual and physical reproduction (the daily care of the body) are located in the home and constitute their initial conditions. According to Sanders (1995), "*education* is first used in English in the early seventeenth century to refer to rearing children by paying attention to their physical needs - in the earliest years of the child's life this meant attention to nursing" (p. 190). That is why education was originally a gendered word and work:

> *Educatio prolis* is a term that in Latin grammar calls for a female subject. It designates the feeding and nurturing in which mothers engage, be they bitch, sow, or woman. Among humans only women educate. And they educate only infants, which etymologically means those who are yet without speech.... Men ... engage in *docentia* (teaching) and *instructio* (instruction). The first men who attributed to themselves educational functions were early bishops who led their flocks to the *alma ubera* (milk-brimming breasts) of Mother Church from which they were never to be weaned. This is why they, like their secular successors, call the faithful *alumni* - which means sucklings or suckers and nothing else. (Ivan Illich, in Sanders, 1995, pp. 187-188)

The distinction between education, on the one hand, and teaching and instruction, on the other, is pertinent in that it brings up a distinction between an original realm of spontaneous physical and affective relations as context of child

growth, and another realm of intentional relations providing specific training to function or do things in certain ways. While the first is a realm of silent nurturing, the second is a realm of explicit (verbal and written) control, which indeed expresses a very masculinized view of education. And while the first realm used to be more encompassing of the whole of social relations in traditional societies, the second came to be increasingly predominant in contemporary society, with the scientificization and regulation of all aspects of everyday life.

The reorganization of education and family in modern times[7] occurred within a context of profound economic, political, social, and cultural transformation.[8] Under capitalism, both evolved through differentiation and specialization: "Whereas the family once had reproductive, economic and educational functions, in modern societies specialized institutions of work and education have developed outside the family" (Abercrombie, Hill, & Turner, 1994, p. 118). In contrast with its earlier sense of

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[7] According to Abercrombie, Hill, & Turner (1994), "there is disagreement about the periodization of modernity, some writers associating it with the appearance and spread of capitalism from the fourteenth to the eighteenth centuries, some with the religious changes of the fifteenth century onwards which provided the basis for rationalization, others with the onset of industrialization in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and still others with cultural transformations at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century which coincide with modernism" (p. 270). Geographically, it was a phenomenon initially restricted to the western capitalist hegemonic world.

[8] In general lines, modernity was characterized by the advent and development of capitalist industry, democratic organization, class-based social structure, urbanization, secularization, scientific rationalization, the social and human sciences, and national school systems. Furthermore, its social and cultural changes entailed the separation of public (work and politics) and private (domestic) spheres of life; the transformation of the family, which lost its productive function and became the locus of private life; and "a tendency to the fragmentation of experience, a commodification and rationalization of all aspects of life, and a speeding up of the pace of daily life" (Abercrombie, Hill, & Turner, 1994, p. 270).

nursing, by mid-seventeenth century, "in the heart of the scientific revolution, the word [education] had expanded to include habits, manners, and intellectual concerns" (Sanders, 1995, p. 190), indicating the advent of schooling.

The remarkable historical transformation of the family, as a social institution and locus of the first education, can be traced through the evolution of the word, offered by Williams (1983). Family first meant (from the late fourteenth to mid seventeenth centuries) *household*: "a group of servants or a group of blood-relations and servants living together in one house". It also meant, in aristocratic use, a *house*: "a particular lineage or kin-group, ordinarily by descent from a common ancestor", a sense "extended to indicate a people or a group of peoples" (p. 131). In the modern sense, family became "a small group confined to immediate blood relations" (p. 132). But "there was considerable overlap, between mid seventeenth and late eighteenth centuries, of these varying senses of lineage, household, large kin-group and small kin-group" (p. 133). In the twentieth century, the distinction between nuclear family and extended family expressed the split between the household sense and the kin-group sense:

> The specialization of family to the small kin-group in a single house can be related to rise of what is now called the **bourgeois family**. But this, with its senses of household and property, relates more properly, at least until the nineteenth century, to the older sense. From early nineteenth century (James Mill) we find this definition: '*the group which consists of a Father, Mother and Children is called a Family*'; yet the fact that the conscious definition is necessary is in itself significant. Several late seventeenth and eighteenth century uses of family in a small kin-group sense often refer specifically to *children* (...), where the sense of household, however, may still be present. (Williams, 1983, pp. 132-133, italics added)

The meanings of family expressed interesting class connotations. While the

bourgeois family was "the isolated family as a working economic unit," there also appeared "a distinction between a man's *work* and his **family**: he works to support a family; the family is supported by his work. It is more probable, in fact, that the small kin-group definition, supported by the development of smaller separate houses and therefore households, relates to the new working class and lower-middle class who were defined by wage-labour: not **family** as a lineage or property or as including these, and not **family** as *household* in the older established sense which included servants, but the near kin-group which can define its social relationships, in any positive sense, only in this way." As for the middle class, family "combined the strong sense of immediate and positive blood-group relationships and the strong implicit sense of property" (Williams, 1983, p. 133).

Education, in its forms and contents, has also expressed class connotations. During pre-modern times, when the space of formal education was very narrow in social life and mainly restricted to the dominant class, the space of socialization and informal education through 'familiarity' and community work and life was broad and diffuse; then, for the majority of individuals, education had a concrete content, and oral and practical culture was its vehicle. Within the modern secular trend toward social and functional differentiation and bureaucratization, families lost functions and came into relationships with "specialist organizations ... through which they can be supplied with goods or services that they themselves no longer produce" (Bidwell, 1991, p. 190). The transformation of the mode of economic production precipitated drastic changes in family life and in the mode of education, bringing in the organization of the educational system, as we know it today:

> This story of differentiation begins with the movement of economic production out of the household, away from the control of kin-based groups and into markets. Then, in large part as a result of the economic disablement of the family, one functional activity after another is stripped from the household, moving from the primary control of the family to the control of formal organizations and their increasingly professionalized staffs. This process is very clear in the case of education. (Bidwell, 1991, p. 190)

In this context, the constitution of modern schooling is connected with the emergence of a middle class or, perhaps more precisely, with the constitution of the small bourgeoisie which made use of education as a sign of distinction, meaning both identification with the upper class and distance from the lower classes. Bidwell (1991) illustrates this point with the account by the social historian Lawrence Stone on the "educational revolution" during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in England:

> Middle-class families wanted their children to be educated, but they lacked the land and large inheritances that could support an enclosed, multifunctional household in which a child's education could be accomplished. Thus, the rise of the middle class created a market in which charitable schools were turned into grammar schools, beginning a sustained, market-driven process in which formal education became a normal, lengthening life-course stage for the bulk of the English male population. (Bidwell, 1991, p. 190)

In this way, education was separated from the household and "elite boarding schools, supported by endowments and by tuition fees from parents, came to be known as 'public' schools, in contrast to the other principal means of schooling, which was the private tutor" (Coleman, 1987, p. 32). This movement, starting as early as the fourteenth century in England, inscribes the public school originally as an arrangement to provide collective (as opposed to individual, exclusive) instruction to boys from many families in a specific public (in the sense of common, shared) setting which still recreates the household in its unique regime of total living experience. However, "for all children other than those of the elite, schooling was even more fully

lodged in the family. It was schooling via the household's productive activities and via a system in which children and youth learned trades, other than that of their household, in nearby households" (Coleman, 1987, p. 32).

Within a specialized division of the work of social reproduction, and the deepening chasm between public and private life, families and homes - at least, clearly, those at the upper socioeconomic levels - were redefined within the confines of sexual, physical, and psychic reproduction, as the exclusive domain of affection and intimacy. Schools took charge of the reproduction of erudite (dominant) culture, sociopolitical values, and work training, assuming ideological and economic purposes. Gradually, as families became nuclear, secluded, and fathers and mothers left the home for the workplace, a movement that reduced their social and cultural reproductive functions to a minimum, schooling grew as a systematic and extensive mode of education, indeed as the central context and dimension of individual development, assuming additional social and emotional goals. Moreover, with its increasingly distinctive and exclusive practices, through which special knowledges and skills were granted access and/or developed, the modern school came to constitute a stage of mediation between the private and the larger public worlds (Arendt, 1961).

The institution of a state-supported system of mass compulsory schooling in the late nineteenth century finally represented, according to a British historian, "the triumph of public over private influences as formative in social life and individual development; in particular, it tardily recognized the obsolescence of the educative family, its inadequacy in modern society in child care and training" (F. Musgrove, in Tyack, 1976, p. 363). A similar perspective was spoused in Sociology by Durkheim

(Bidwell, 1991) in terms of the superior fit of the role of the school in socialization for modern life, as compared to the family. And, indeed, from both macro and micro perspectives, the advent of mass schooling represents a solution to social reproduction and individual education within the new urban-industrial order, substituting for the family and the near community. Concretely, the provision of schools responded to needs of care, training, and liberation of children - a solution for both the leisure of the well-off and the exploitation of the many poor - as child labour was eradicated, ingress of the young in so-called productive work was increasingly delayed, and employment often took both fathers and mothers away from home.

However, mass compulsory schooling recreated the meaning of the public school in new and contradictory ways. On the one hand, the consolidation of liberal-democratic industrial-capitalist states demanded social reforms, among which the creation of a national school system was strategic. Educational policy and bureaucracy originated, then, as systematic and permanent action of the State towards provision, orientation and supervision of the school system toward broad social ideals: the public school assumed political-ideological and economic functions, related to corresponding goals of citizenship and labor-force training.[9] On the other hand, access to formal education as a means of upward (individual and class) social mobility

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[9] "The rise of the national state and, with it, the expansion of citizenship are, in this account intrinsic to the development of the differentiated industrial society. As functional differentiation proceeds, there is a strong tendency for each of its emerging institutional sectors to define citizenship rights or entitlements, which the state defines and regulates. Education is among these sectors. Everywhere in the West ... efforts at centralized governmental control of the schools through formal organization and procedure are evident, driven variously by egalitarian and stratifying impulses" (Bidwell, 1991, pp. 190-191).

was also an aspiration of many, based on concrete prior historical experience.[10]

The belief in the power of education, specifically literacy, as a means of moral improvement and salvation also had historical bearings in Protestant Reformation. In the process of constitution of the modern republican states, the ideal of social equalization through education turned into one of the central tenets, along with universal suffrage, of contemporary democratic ideology: the hopes for social equality, freedom, political participation, and fraternity (solidarity) converged to education as the main tool of social construction through the formation of a new individuality. Conceived as a catalyst, education represented the means to liberate and develop human powers and to construct a just society by transforming natural inequalities and overcoming previous social hierarchies based on birth rights. In the new republican regimes of the Old World, and in the emergent nations of the New World, public education appeared as a way of precisely eliminating family and class privileges and the extremely restricted access to the literate, erudite culture, associated with the previous aristocratic or colonial order. Individual freedom, rationality, ability and merit became the new beliefs and values associated with liberal-economic, scientific and technical progress; the self-made 'man,' active and rational, became the model citizen.

Thus, ideals of social progress and order, productivity and just distribution of wealth, individual liberation and economic security initially inspired the call of

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[10] The earlier ascension of the bourgeoisie and that of various middle-class groups during the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth century, was connected to educational expansion, scientific and technical advancement, and the constitution of the professions.

education for all, inviting the lower classes into the democratic project: the ideological agenda of schooling pointed at granting access to a previously exclusive knowledge, extending the traditional canons and the bourgeoisie's new culture -as the very condition for both sociopolitical participation and personal enjoyment - to the masses. The ideology of education as the great social panacea, combining socioeconomic progress and individual social mobility, became the counterpart of compulsority, a bait into the school, the labor-market, democratic life, insofar as it corresponded to the aspirations of part of the lower (especially urban, working) classes to the 'good' life. In a sense, the public (compulsory) school materialized a new social contract (an exchange of interests), pretending to offer a 'neutral' educational terrain for acquisition of a common, non-familiar, secular knowledge which would erase cultural and social distinctions linked to family and class, thus consolidating a new democratic order.

However, while the universalization of schooling meant democratization of formal knowledge or high culture, it also meant the imposition of one cultural form over others; while it meant access to a good and service from which the lower classes were excluded, it also meant cultural uniformization via compulsory learning of an arbitrary knowledge. Furthermore, the organization and the functioning of the school system limited democratization to the lower level of schooling, and set off selection processes (based on gender, race and class) toward its higher levels. Meritocracy, as the justification for selection and discrimination, and social mobility (as both an individual and systemic goal) within tight limits and through specific cultural codes, recast the ideology of education as the main instrument of social equalization.

Therefore, the meanings of the public school were recreated by the interactions of its new diverse clientele and the specific kinds of home, family, and social class they originated from, and the evolving organization of the enlarged, bureaucratized, horizontally and vertically differentiated, system. The social mobility meaning that the upward classes assigned to schooling was generalized in the ideology of education as the great equalizer; however, as curricular differentiation and inequality of outcomes advanced, both the social equalization and mobility ideals fell short of meaning in the concrete experience of many underprivileged groups.

Common and compulsory schooling in the United States

In the United States schooling also appeared as an extension of the family, and took the form of communitarian schools organized through local initiative and control within small religious (puritan) communities. The association of liberal capitalism and protestantism in a 'land of opportunity' caused rapid and intense educational progress "while the nation was largely rural and agricultural" (Guest & Tolnay, 1985, p. 201); indeed, according to Tyack (1976), "even before the common-school crusade of the mid-nineteenth century and before any compulsory laws, Americans were probably in the vanguard in literacy and mass schooling among the peoples of the world" (p. 359).

The motivation for the common school movement - which is interestingly called a 'reform' - was already the need to centralize state authority over local schools, and "to find an effective substitute for the mechanisms of social control and socialization that had characterized the preurban and preindustrial small stable

community" (Church & Sedlak, 1976, p. 80) by instilling common values (respect for private property and authority, value of hard work) onto the lower orders or classes. Indeed, according to Church & Sedlak (1976), the rhetoric of education for social progress (meaning an efficient work-force) and democracy (meaning an educated citizenry), and of the role of school in solving social problems was also present then. However, under the republican-protestant-capitalist ideology, the common school seemed to have served more a particular moral than a political-democratic enterprise, as "schooling should stress unity, obedience, restraint, self-sacrifice, and the careful exercise of intelligence"[11] (Kaestle, 1983, p. 81); in fact, as Kaestle (1983) notes, "both gender and racial stereotypes contradicted the value placed on equality and perfectibility in native Protestant ideology, and both kept the schools from being truly *common*" (p. 89).

It is interesting to note that the very idea of a 'common school' carries ambiguous connotations: a school destined to the "generality of mankind," but to the "commons, as contrasted with lords and nobility" (Williams, 1983, pp.70-71), as well, according to the etymology of the word *common*. "The tension of these two senses has been persistent. Common can indicate a whole group or interest or a large specific and subordinate group" (Williams, 1983, p.71). Even in the sense of generality, common carries the same tension and a derogatory meaning:

> Common can be used to affirm something shared or to describe something *ordinary* (itself ambivalent, related to *order* as series or sequence, hence *ordinary* - in the usual course of things, but also to *order* as rank, social and

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[11] I am not implying that moral values are not political or do not bear specific political interests and consequences, in that they conform body and mind in certain (exclusive) productive ways.

> military, hence *ordinary* - of an undistinguished kind); or again, in one kind of use, to describe something *low* or *vulgar* (which has specialized in this sense from a comparable origin, *vulgus*, Latin - the common people). (Williams, 1983, p. 71)

Therefore, the common (in the sense of ordinary, second order) local school-houses contrasted from the beginning with the higher quality, exclusive, elite boarding schools, which continued to serve the wealthy.[12]

The peculiarity of the educational development in this country is that schools were created by local, parental initiative. Indeed, from 1850 to 1890, following the common school movement, schooling evolved in the United States with minimal coercion by the states, consistently with the liberal creed. Apparently there was no need to enforce the existing compulsory-attendance laws, and besides compulsion contradicted parental rights. According to Tyack (1976), there is evidence to suggest that the enactment of compulsory-education laws came merely to formalize what was already accomplished fact. Tyack (1976) calls this first period in the history of compulsory school attendance in the United States the *symbolic stage*.

But the beliefs in the value of education had also an economic appeal. Horace Mann, who had claimed that "nothing but universal education can counter-work this tendency to the domination of capital and the servility of labor," also offered an economic justification for greater investment in schooling (Twelfth Annual Report, 1948, in Cremin, 1957, p. 86). Anticipating human capital theory, he argued that

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[12] It is also interesting to note that higher education unfolded in the United States within the model of the boarding school, a unique case in the world. Here middle and upper class students go away to college (moving away from the family household, always a more costly enterprize), while lower class students attend the local community college. Elsewhere, limited public university housing is reserved for low income students originated from small towns or rural areas.

schooling contributed economic benefits both to society as a whole - through greater productivity, and to individuals - through greater earnings, and that uneducated individuals were "economic burdens to the community" (Tyack, 1976, pp. 378, 382). Moreover, he claimed that education "made workers punctual, industrious, frugal, and too rational to cause trouble for their employers" (Tyack, 1976, p. 378). Later, in the 1880s, "a committee of the United States Senate which took testimony on 'the relations between labor and capital' found that businessmen and employees across the nation tended to agree that schooling increases the productivity and predictability of workers" (Tyack, 1976, p. 379).

By the end of the nineteenth century, the liberal, laissez-faire capitalist venture had created enormous and new social problems, due to periodical crisis in production, expansion, shifts and relocations of the wage-labor force, and overpopulation in precarious cities. While new monopolist arrangements took shape at the economic level, a strong regulative State materialized in various extensive social reforms aiming at national consolidation via the incorporation of the new urban masses, including the new immigrants. The need to form 'citizens' (in the sense of subjects of the Republican State), by teaching a common language, a national history and ideology, thus breaking with the diverse loyalties to families and ethnic groups, religions and regions, and other interest groups, clearly appeared at that moment as a crucial political role of education and schooling, especially in this country where the school system had to come to grips with localism and religious conflicts, particularly among various Protestant denominations and Catholicism.

The effective institution of compulsory schooling in the United States is

associated with various complex factors. On the one hand, "waves of immigration intensified the concern over the incorporation of new groups into the polity" (Tyack, 1976, p. 366). On the other hand, according to Bowles & Gintis (1976), the expansion of schooling also responded to labor-capital conflicts, as extreme exploitation of workers and concentration of wealth aroused labor militancy and claims for educational access. Says Tyack:

> Advocates of compulsory schooling often argued that families - or at least some families, like those of the poor or foreign-born - were failing to carry out their traditional functions of moral and vocational training. Immigrant children in crowded cities, reformers complained, were leading disorderly lives, schooled by the street and their peers more than by Christian nurture in the home. Much of the drive for compulsory schooling reflected an animus against parents considered incompetent to train their children. Often combining fear of social unrest with humanitarian zeal, reformers used the power of the state to intervene in families and to create alternative institutions of socialization. (Tyack, 1976, p. 363)

Thus, the function of 'political socialization' had a clear nativist intent combined with ethnic and religious bias: compulsory school meant to impart the 'pietist' American character to "the emigrant, the freedman, and the operative" (Tyack, 1976, p. 372).

It is also plausible that, in practice, school came to assume a function of socialization for urban life and for the new conditions of work. This is understandable in terms of the practical difficulties of disseminating the 'high culture', a culture which was produced and reproduced in life conditions very different than those of the masses. Therefore, social efficiency became a basic goal expressed as social (more than intellectual) discipline: teaching the future workers the attitudes adequate to the novel mode of production, which required a steady, regular, daily rhythm of work, one very different from those of the peasants or autonomous

craftsmen (Bowles & Gintis, 1976). After all, the great social challenges of the time were in the economic realm, specifically in the incorporation of workers and immigrants into the new economic arrangements, preventing social dissension and turmoil.

In this context, "laws compelling school attendance were only part of an elaborate and massive transformation in the legal and social rules governing children" (Tyack, 1976, p. 363). The definition of the needs of children (typically by middle-class professionals) is closely connected to political definitions of economic and social needs, insofar as children incarnate the possibilities of social reproduction. By then, the State had clearly assumed a 'parental role,' as the Supreme Court of Illinois proclaimed in 1901:

> The natural rights of a parent to the custody and control of his infant child are subordinate to the power of the State.... One of the most important natural duties of the parent is his obligation to educate his child, and this duty he owes not to the child only, but to the commonwealth. If he neglects to perform it, or willfully refuses to do so, he may be coerced by law to execute such civil obligation. The welfare of the child and the best interests of society require that the state shall exert its sovereign authority to secure to the child the opportunity to acquire an education. (In Grubb & Lazerson, 1982, p. 25)

In sum, then and now, the notion of the right of every human being to education - meaning formal education and literacy - finds its antithesis in the institution of compulsory schooling in the name of constructing citizenship. To that right corresponds both the obligation of the State to guarantee equal opportunities by providing a single good quality school for all, and the obligation of the individual and the family to take such opportunities and put them to best use in order to accomplish both individual and social benefits, according to a tacit social contract. On the one

hand, notions of individual advancement, social mobility, economic productivity, and social stability are implicit in the democratic ideal. On the other hand, the right of access to valued universal knowledge and techniques may eventually be the object of coercion in the name of the protection of children and in the interest of consolidation of the social order. In fact, compulsory schooling came to be required for those who didn't see the value of education or for the recalcitrant.

Therefore, in the United States, the striking belief in the power of education, with all its economic and cultural connotations, and the typical (Protestant) call for effort and self-improvement, both justified and continues to justify the upward mobility of some groups (mainly white-protestant, but also Jews, and more recently Asians) in detriment of others (generally poor, black, Hispanics, and other ethnic minorities), and the imposition of specific practices of acculturation - variably called salvation, character reformation, liberation, empowerment, or else, from another perspective, colonization, domestication, oppression - over poor, disenfranchised groups. Moreover, it is clear that there are two distinct histories of education related to social class: one in which a class has created and seized the value of schooling within a particular (utilitarian) conception of education, and another in which schooling, a non-familiar kind of education, has been imposed upon a class as a means of salvation.[13] The former is the history of the credentialing system; the latter is the history of socioeconomic exclusion and school failure which continues to feed on the

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[13] This is seen all the time, for instance in current welfare programs for single teen-age mothers which reward with additional money or punish with cuts in their checks, according to school attendance or drop-out. See, for instance, the articles by Besharov and Gardiner, in The Public Interest, Number 122, Winter 1996; and Goertzel and Young, in The Public Interest, Number 125, Fall 1996.

various policies of 'organized child saving' (Cravens, 1993), currently directed to the so-called 'at-risk' students.

Functional differentiation in the constitution of the educational system

Tyack (1976) calls the second period in the history of compulsory school attendance in the United States, starting at the turn of the century, the *bureaucratic stage*. "School systems grew in size and complexity, new techniques of bureaucratic control emerged, ideological conflict over compulsion diminished, strong laws were passed, and school officials developed sophisticated techniques to bring truants into school" (p. 359). The movement toward centralization created city boards and state departments of education, enforcing uniform educational standards, and gradually, throughout the first half of the twentieth century, mass education reached the secondary school. In this process, the bureaucratic educational machine grew under a "corporate model of governance," and the "rational expansion and functional specialization of the schools" was informed by the scientific paradigm of technical rationality; the human sciences - psychology and the new 'educational science' - played an important role in justifying the new reforms. Interestingly, "advocates of these new forms of governance argued that education should be taken out of politics and that most decisions were best made by experts" (pp. 373-374).

Tyack (1976) suggests that the structural differentiation of the schools developed as an intrinsic part of the machinery of compulsion: "Schools developed not only new ways of finding children and getting them into school, but also new institutions or programs to cope with the unwilling students whom truant officers

brought to their doors: parental schools, day-long truant schools, disciplinary classes, ungraded classes and a host of specialized curricular tracks" (p. 374). At the same time (as a result of the consolidation of the distinct process of middle-class schooling), a movement towards a 'new school' took shape (attuned with a particular middle-class educational culture), reaching its apex in the second decade of the twentieth century.

Liberal educators strongly publicized the need to revise traditional educational principles and practices and create a new pedagogy destined to elevate spiritually human beings and convert school into an instrument of peace and democracy. The attack on traditional schooling focused on its non-democratic character, teachers' verbalism, and the imposition of a static knowledge on the students; in turn, Progressive Education was based on the emergent psychological knowledge of child development, and aimed at shifting the unilateral act of teaching into active participation of the students in the process of learning. Considering students' diversity of backgrounds, conditions, inclinations, and aspirations, the new methods should focus on the act of learning, and attend simultaneously to the individual's unique conditions of development, and to differences across individuals - quite a new challenge for mass education.

What occurred, then, was a contradictory "amalgamation of democratic ideals and bureaucratic techniques" (Higham, in Tyack, 1976, p. 375). There was a striking historical convergence between a conception of liberal-democratic education concerned with individual needs, expressed in the new curricular and pedagogical arrangements, and the function of differentiation school was called to perform. The outcome was the creation of a unique curricular 'choice' system, based on 'natural' intelligence or

talent, and effort or merit. Indeed, the American solution for educational democratization is unparalleled: the system embraces all and comports everyone but grants differentiated experiences and outcomes. Gagnon (1995) calls this system one of "different but equal schools," which is more encompassing than the "separate but equal" racist system, and has well survived it.

Bowles & Gintis (1976) explain educational expansion and progressivism as an attempt to control workers by improving social conditions and inhibiting conflict, while legitimating and perpetuating the capitalist social relations of production. They argue that school has performed a critical role in regulating social and economic crisis, through its very expansion and differentiation, amplifying access but providing differentiated and hierarchized school curricula corresponding to the productive requirements of an increasingly segmented labor force. In this process, all are accommodated, but differential treatment based on sex and ethnicity concretely separates and alienates low class students. Ultimately, the rhetoric of equality of opportunities through education rationalizes unequal educational outcomes, further converted in unequal income and status, justifying prior social inequalities.

Thus, the horizontal and vertical expansion of the educational system provided for a continual and ever more complicated "mass triage," based on race, ethnicity, language, social class, sex, "deportment," and intelligence (as measured by tests), all apparently originated in family conditions (Gagnon, 1995). It did away with the idea of a common education in various aspects and degrees, mostly with respect to access to valued knowledge. In this way, schooling became the great symbolic institutional mechanism of recomposition of social hierarchies in a rapid-pace changing society.

2. Education and social inequality

What has schooling accomplished for the entire society and for its diverse groups so far? The development of schooling in the United States is perhaps the most illustrative case of tremendous social equalization in terms of access, and extreme social differentiation, in terms of school conditions (both material and curricular) and individual and group outcomes. Indeed, as much as educational access expanded at all levels, comparative assessment of individual and group levels of attainment across sex, ethnicity, linguistic background or style, and social class has shown patterns of differentiated outcomes related to these categories. Open access has not meant equality of opportunities and conditions in the first place, insofar as horizontal differentiation of the quality of school and curricular experiences has followed, as exemplified by racial segregation, tracking, and striking contrasts between wealthy suburban schools and depleted inner city schools (Rist, 1970; Anyon, 1981; Oakes, 1986; Kozol, 1991). But even where students presumably enjoy equal opportunities, differentiated outcomes are produced through complex and subtle processes within the school's workings, through the interaction of students' prior cultural and individual traits with those which characterize the school's knowledge/discourse and norms/practices (Keddie, 1971; Heath, 1983; Michaels, 1986; Mehan, Hertweck, & Meihls, 1986; Cadzen, 1988). Furthermore, the vertical expansion of the system has also preserved the rarity of higher education experiences and credentials for a restricted group (Labaree, 1997). Overall, increasingly higher levels of general educational attainment have not affected basic social hierarchies nor made significant difference in minimizing social inequalities.

In the sixties, following the Civil Rights Act of 1964, an extensive survey was carried out in order to assess inequalities of educational opportunity for minority groups (African-Americans, Puerto Ricans, Mexican-Americans, Native-Americans, and Asian-Americans) in the U. S. educational system. Known as the Coleman Report (Equality of Educational Opportunity, 1966), its findings revealed that the achievement of the average Native-American, Mexican-American, Puerto Rican, and African-American (in descending order) was much lower than that of the average white and Asian-American in grades 1, 3, 6, 9, and 12, as measured by standardized tests. In effect, "at the beginning of the twelfth grade, these groups were, on the average, three, four, or five grade levels behind whites in reading comprehension, and four, five, or six grade levels behind in mathematics achievement" (Coleman, 1967, p. 21). But the survey also indicated that

> within broad geographic regions, and for each racial or ethnic group, the physical and economic resources going into a school had very little relation to the achievement coming out of it; ... variations in teacher salaries, library facilities, laboratories, school size, guidance facilities had little relation to student achievement - when the family backgrounds of the students were roughly equated. (Coleman, 1967, p. 21)

Moreover, the "strong relation of family economic and educational background to achievement" increased over the school years: "at the end of school, the conditional probabilities of high achievement are even *more* conditional upon racial or ethnic background than they are at the beginning of school" (Coleman, 1966, p. 73).

Coleman (1966) interpreted these findings in the following terms:

> (1) these minority children have a serious educational deficiency at the start of school, which is obviously not a result of school; and (2) they have an even more serious deficiency at the end of school, which is obviously in part a result of school. (Coleman, 1966, pp. 72-73)

> Altogether, *the sources of inequality of educational opportunity appear to lie first in the home itself and the cultural influences immediately surrounding the home; then they lie in the schools' ineffectiveness to free achievement from the impact of the home, and in the schools' cultural homogeneity which perpetuates the social influences of the home and its environs.* (Coleman, 1966, pp.73-74)

The determining weight of the educational and economic resources provided by the home was also evidenced in the connection between school social environment (resulting from family background) and variation in achievement across schools, in the specific context of racial, class, and cultural homogeneity of both the student and teacher bodies of U. S. schools: "Per pupil expenditure, books in the library, and a host of other facilities and curricular measures show virtually no relation to achievement if the *social environment* of the school - the educational backgrounds of other students and teachers - is held constant" (Coleman, 1966, p. 73). Given this homogeneity, "the principal agents of effectiveness in the schools -teachers and other students - act to maintain or reinforce the initial differences imposed by social origins" (p. 73). Whereas "homogeneity works to the disadvantage of those children whose family's educational resources are meagre" (Coleman, 1967, p. 22), heterogeneity aids achievement: "students do better when they are in schools where their fellow students come from backgrounds strong in educational motivation and resources.... This effect appears to be particularly great for students who themselves come from educationally-deprived backgrounds" (p. 21).

Therefore, the policy challenge then was simultaneously to desegregate the schools (promoting cultural heterogeneity), and to provide equal opportunity for educational performance (raising the achievement of minority groups):

> In some part, the difficulties and complexity of any solution derive from the premise that our society is committed to overcoming not merely inequalities in the distribution of educational *resources*, but inequalities in the opportunity for educational achievement. This is a task far more ambitious than has ever been attempted by any society: - not just to offer, in a passive way, equal access to educational resources, but to provide an educational environment that will free a child's potentialities for learning from the inequalities imposed upon him by the accident of birth into one or another home and social environment. (Coleman, 1967, pp. 20-21)

On the one hand, Coleman (1966) recognized the need to make the educational program of the school more effective, for "the weakness of this program is apparent in its inability to overcome initial differences" (p. 74). Along this line, he stated that "equality of educational opportunity implies, not merely 'equal' schools, but equally *effective schools, whose influences will overcome the differences in starting point of children from different social groups*" (p. 72, italics added), pointing at equality of outcomes. On the other hand, he was cautious to say that "the only kinds of policies that appear in any way viable are those which do not seek to improve the education of Negroes and other educationally disadvantaged at the expense of those who are educationally advantaged. This implies new kinds of educational institutions, with a vast increase in expenditures for education - not merely for the disadvantaged but for all children" (p. 74). Indeed, he proposed a very ingenious solution - the *open school*, which I address subsequently; yet, he did not say how it would be possible to overcome disadvantages while maintaining advantages, that is, without any specific costs for the advantaged or redefinition of the very meaning of advantage.

The role of the family in the production of school outcomes: the cultural deficit model

By calling minority children's background knowledge and home experiences "a serious educational deficiency" (1966, p. 72), and by referring to their "educationally-deprived backgrounds" (1967, p. 21), Coleman is clearly adopting the cultural deficit view. According to this view, the ways of life of those who don't belong to a particular (hegemonic) culture are not legitimate and, therefore, are not even recognized as a distinct culture. Likewise, it does not recognize any other form of education different than schooling, formal learning, or the subjects and sentiments historically constructed by the dominant classes. An alternative view contemplates diverse cultures and respective modes of education within power relations, so that white schooled individuals, for instance, could be considered deficient in Ebonics, or deprived of certain knowledges foreign to their life style. Because white schooled individuals, within prevalent social relations, have nothing to lose by not speaking Ebonics or by ignoring a variety of knowledges typical of the experiences of oppressed groups, they tend to be blind to (as they find themselves in a comfortable position to deny) the culture and the mode of education of those groups.

By stating that "the sources of inequality of educational opportunity appear to lie first in the home itself and the cultural influences immediately surrounding the home" (1966, pp.73-74), by curiously conceiving the home as a setting of *educational opportunity*, Coleman does not explicitly distinguish between an institution (school) expressly entrusted with the political function of providing educational opportunity and another (family) which cannot be properly defined in terms of this function. Thus,

whereas sources of social inequality *lie* in the home and its environs, and inequalities (previously produced) are originally "imposed ... by the accident of birth into one or another home and social environment" (1967, p. 21), sources of inequality of educational opportunity *are produced* at school (for instance, ability grouping, tracking), and *not by accident*. In other words, original social inequality is reproduced through the production of educational opportunities of a certain kind, either through the provision of differentiated opportunities (again, tracking), or even of equal opportunities for individuals who are not equally able to take advantage of them. To attribute to the family the function of providing educational opportunity (but opportunity of an education of a certain kind), when families vary in their economic and educational conditions, means making them responsible for the fate of children across the other institutions of a very complex society; to recognize the incapacity of families (prey of social inequality) to provide equal education (the argument for compulsory schooling), means to establish their dependency upon effective schools. In other words, the school is the institution which mediates between original social *(family)* inequality and the construction of social equality or inequality; to imply that the family should exert such a mediation role defeating social inequality, conversely, seems unrealistic and unfair.

This is not about inconsequential language minutia; it reveals specific conceptions and a precise type of family-school relations: "The schools were once seen as a supplement to the family in bringing a child into his place in adult society, and they still function largely as such a supplement, merely perpetuating the inequalities of birth" (Coleman, 1966, p. 75). Here Coleman recognizes the role of

schools in reproducing social inequalities, by functioning as "a supplement to the family," an extension of a particular type of family - a setting in which a family's standing is projected, advanced, fortified, continued - "in bringing a child into his place in adult society," into a pre-determined place within a static social project. In fact, as it was empirically demonstrated by Lareau (1993), upper-middle class families are the ones which exert an active mediation role within the interaction between their children's individual traits and the school format, precisely because they are in a condition to do so.

How could schools function differently, in order to promote equality of educational opportunities and outcomes? Despite some rhetorical ambiguities, Coleman offered in the sixties a radical policy solution, a whole systemic reform, which is especially interesting in that it anticipated many of the reform attempts that followed and are now being implemented in the nineties.

In order to attend on the specific backwardness of minority achievement, and consonant with the deficit view, Coleman proposed the substitution of the home environment of the educationally-deprived by larger amounts of schooling: "For those children whose family and neighborhood are educationally disadvantaged, it is important to replace this family environment as much as possible with an educational environment - by starting school at an earlier age, and by having a school which begins very early in the day and ends very late" (1966, p.74). Here what is basically required are funds for special programs targeted at minorities, in order to improve the

education of the disadvantaged at minimum cost[14] for the advantaged: "the solutions might be in the form of educational parks, or in the form of private schools paid by tuition grants (with Federal regulations to insure racial heterogeneity), public (or publicly subsidized) boarding schools" (1966, p. 74).

But the reduction of the social and racial homogeneity of the school environment was (and still is) quite a challenge. Coleman argued that "heterogeneity of race and heterogeneity of family educational background can increase the achievement of children from weak educational backgrounds with no adverse effect on children from strong educational backgrounds" (Coleman, 1967, p. 22). Because educationally strong middle class students are the prototype, the model to be followed (hence they supposedly would need to be in greater numbers in order to influence the educationally weak), Coleman found a peculiar difficulty in desegregating schools and classrooms: "there are simply not enough middle class children to go around" (1967, p. 22). He also saw obstacles in institutions like the neighborhood school and tracking - which (he didn't say) have served well the educationally advantaged.[15]

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[14] Indeed, extra educational expenditure targeted at the disadvantaged means a minimum cost for the advantaged insofar as the whole educational mode remains untouched, which comes down to reproduction of the advantage. Of course, the ideal situation for the advantaged would be no investment in compensatory education, and therefore no cost.

[15] Indeed, heterogeneity could have a (so-perceived) adverse effect on white middle class children if they became minority in a school and classroom, submitted (even to a minor degree) to the educational and cultural standards of the majority. The adoption by white middle class students of the speech and dressing styles of black teens, for instance, would surely bother their parents. The equity-cultural homogeneity relation is phrased in these terms: the findings show that "integration aids equality of opportunity ... Conversely, of course, greater equality of performance facilitates integration, making 'grouping' or 'tracking' within schools unnecessary" (Coleman, 1967, p. 24).

Thus, the solution he envisioned was a radical and inventive school choice system: *open schools* as centers of operations towards the two goals of achievement and integration.

Coleman's model conciliates state control and free initiative, social efficiency and consumer choice. *Open schools* are "a home-base that carries out some teaching functions but which serves principally to coordinate [students'] activities and to perform guidance and testing functions" (1967, p. 24). The teaching of each subject-matter "would be opened up to entrepreneurs outside the school, under contract with the school system ... and paid on the basis of increased performance by the [students] on standardized tests.... The payment-by-results would quickly eliminate the unsuccessful contractors, and the contractors would provide testing grounds for innovations that could subsequently be used by the school" (p. 25). While some schools would outlast the competition, others might lose most of their teaching functions: "The contract centers [would] provide the school with a source of innovation as well as a source of competition to measure its own efforts, neither of which it has had in the past" (p. 27). Parental choice would be a key element of the model: "The school would find it necessary to compete with the system's external contractors to provide better education, and the parent could, for the first time in education, have the full privileges of consumer's choice" (p. 25), "as well as the opportunity to help establish special purpose programs" (p. 27). To overcome the problem of racial and class segregation, classes and activities could be organized on a cross-school basis, with students from different home-base schools gathering as members of the same team or club in a variety of interscholastic academic events.

Community organizations would also be able to act as contractors, offering cultural enrichment and community action programs involving students from several schools and diverse class and ethnic backgrounds, according to the free choice of parent or student. Finally, state control would both prevent resegregation along racial or class lines in the organization of the contracted-classes by regulating enrollment, and would maintain the common standards "always with the public school establishing the criteria for achievement, and testing the results" (p. 26).

One interesting aspect of this model is the reduction of the educational bureaucracy to control of educational outcomes, while parental control would focus on the educational process, with ample choice of methods, but not of the tested contents. Coleman (1967) recognized that the public educational system is a monopoly where consumers lack free choice and, therefore, can only exercise their interest through organized power, but he seemed to suggest that a better locus of consumer organized power may be found outside the educational system. Ultimately, he diverts the focus from issues of curricular content, school knowledge and culture.

Albeit vaguely, Coleman (1966) pointed at the need to make the educational program of the school more effective, by reorganizing the curriculum within schools and adopting new instructional methods: "One of the major reasons for 'tracking' is the narrowness of our teaching methods - they can tolerate only a narrow range of skill in the same classroom. Methods which greatly widen the range are necessary to make possible racial and cultural integration within a school - and thus to make possible the informal learning that other students of higher educational levels can provide" (pp. 74-75). (Here, again, the problem and the solution is not content but

method.) However, he seems to find school reform limited in face of social inequality of students' backgrounds: "Thus, a more intense reconstruction of the child's social environment than that provided by school integration is necessary to remove the handicap of a poor family background" (1967, p. 23).

Finally, Coleman (1966) also stresses the importance of attitudes for minorities (the feeling of control of one's own fate, the belief in effort over luck) in overcoming obstacles: "those Negroes who gave responses indicating a sense of control of their own fate achieved higher on the tests than those whites who gave the opposite responses. This attitude was more highly related to achievement than any other factor in the student's background or school.... The determination to overcome relevant obstacles, and the belief that he will overcome them ... may be the most crucial elements in achieving equality of opportunity" (p. 75). This reveals a choice of individual and symbolic factors (personal qualities) over social and material factors (institutional and economic constraints), and blindness to the stronger original determination of the second group of factors within their mutual interaction, in the explanation of the construction of inequality.

The role of the educational system in the reproduction of social inequality: social reproduction through cultural reproduction

Let's retrieve Coleman's fundamental questions: Why are schools ineffective to free achievement from the impact of the home? How can schools reduce the dependence of a child's opportunities upon his social origins?

In the seventies, theories of social reproduction through education,[16] presenting a macro, socio-structural view, and theories of cultural production, focusing on micro, institutional processes of cultural imposition and individual and group processes of opposition and resistance (Willis, 1977), offered challenging accounts of the *re-production* of social inequality through and within schools.

The most encompassing and original sociological approach to the role of the educational system in the reproduction of social inequality - and, more generally, the intersection of capitalist schooling, symbolic production and domination - has been offered by Bourdieu & Passeron (1977) in "Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture," and further elaborated by Bourdieu (1977; 1986). In these works, they present rich possibilities to think of social interactions as power-charged symbolic exchanges[17] within the simultaneous play of class and individual, objective and

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[16] Reproductivist theories provide a structural-dynamic account of the general process of social *re-production,* illuminating particularly one way (the current plot) of this process. The process of social reproduction always entails renewal, despite inherent inertia, and potentially allows for transformation within the parameters of complexly regulated collective practices. It is important to stress here that individual agency can only be played in concert, and this play (including the part each individual plays and the whole plot) is still mostly unconscious: it has been powerful in recreating relations of domination and oppression through negative resistance (Willis, 1977), for instance, and powerless so far to produce radical transformation. It is also crucial to recognize that it is not possible to change the plot (the current way) of social reproduction without learning well its dynamics and contents. As reproduction and transformation basically depend on both individual and collective practices of conscientization and organization, this corresponds precisely to the need and the task of an education which aspires to go beyond conservation of the unjust status quo.

[17] Bourdieu (1986) proposes *a general science of the economy of practices*, expanding the realm of economy to include all forms of exchange, and precisely those which appear as *disinterested*: "those forms of exchange which ensure the *transubstantiation* whereby the most material types of capital - those which are economic in the restricted sense - can present themselves in the immaterial form of

subjective, systemic and personal interests, and to envision education as symbolic violence (necessarily including cultural imposition, discrimination, and exclusion), and as a main site of production of (class) cultural hegemony. Therefore, they allow us to understand that the problematic of equality of educational opportunities and inequality of school outcomes - and, more complicatedly, the social outcomes of education - is not enclosed by the actions and interactions of individuals, schools and families, but is broadly inscribed into cultural struggles rooted in (class) economic competition.

Briefly, Bourdieu & Passeron (1977) explain school's ineffectiveness to free achievement from the impact of the home in terms of its effectiveness to reproduce social inequality on the basis of family and class cultural differences. Bourdieu (1986) frames the specific role of the school in the reproduction of class hierarchies within the complex interplay of various forms of symbolic and economic capital across family, school, and market. Finally, Bourdieu & Passeron (1977) and Bourdieu (1977) indicate how cultural and class reproduction works pedagogically and how the school and the teacher keep its cycle.

The cycle of cultural and social *re-production* articulates individuals and structures within capital exchanges and conversions: symbolic and economic forms of capital, initially available in the home environment, produce and reproduce the cultural capital (valued knowledge and skills) which is further developed in school, and converted into educational credentials, which in turn are exchanged by social and economic capital (jobs and income), according to the broader rules of the market. In this cycle, the modern educational system plays a specific role in the "reproduction of

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cultural capital or social capital and vice versa" (p. 242).

the structure of power relationships and symbolic relationships between classes, by contributing to the reproduction of the structure of the distribution of cultural capital among these classes." Rather than promoting equity or social mobility,[18] the educational system provides a *solution* "to the problem of the transmission of power and privileges (...) by contributing to the reproduction of the structure of class relations and by concealing, by an apparently neutral attitude, the fact that it fills this function" (Bourdieu, 1977, pp. 487-488).

Thus, the function of cultural reproduction (proper to all educational systems) is connected to their function of social reproduction: cultural reproduction legitimates the fact of economic and class reproduction. This is so because the "different pedagogic actions (...) carried out by families from the different social classes as well as that which is practised by the school **[do not]** work together in a harmonious way to transmit a cultural heritage which is considered [by classical theories] as being the undivided property of the whole society" (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 488). In fact,

> ... the inheritance of cultural wealth which has been accumulated and bequeathed by previous generations only really belongs (although it is *theoretically* offered to everyone) to those endowed with the means of appropriating it for themselves. In view of the fact that the apprehension and possession of cultural goods as symbolic goods (along with the symbolic satisfactions which accompany an appropriation of this kind) are possible only for those who hold the code making it possible to decipher them or, in other words, that the appropriation of symbolic goods presupposes the possession of the instruments of appropriation, it is sufficient to give free play to the laws of cultural transmission for cultural capital to be added to cultural capital and for the structure of the distribution of cultural capital between social classes to be

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[18] We can envision social mobility at moments of economic expansion with the eventual redefinition of cultural capital and redistribution of economic capital among class fractions. Social mobility via education, specifically, has been accomplished (to a limited extent) within the vertical expansion of the educational system, which recreated social hierarchies in new and more complex ways.

thereby reproduced. (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 488)

The process of education, or internalization of cultural capital, initiated in the family environment, consists of "the production of the *habitus*, that system of dispositions which acts as a mediator between structures and practice" (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 487). The school builds upon a prior particular habitus, hence legitimating a certain kind of family cultural capital. It follows that the action of the educational system is the most effective the more it involves individuals who have enjoyed a prior familiarity with the symbolic wealth that constitutes 'legitimate' culture in their family upbringing.[19] In this way, says Bourdieu (1977), "the educational system reproduces all the more perfectly the structure of the distribution of cultural capital among classes (and sections of a class) in that the culture which it transmits is closer to the dominant culture and that the mode of inculcation to which it has recourse is less removed from the mode of inculcation practised by the family" (p. 493). In effect, the school at once ensures a cultural monopoly and benefits those families that are capable of transmitting by their own means the instruments necessary for the reception of its message.

The problem for lower class families and their students is that, while they lack the cultural capital to take advantage of educational opportunities, the school precisely

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[19] "Indeed, it would seem that the action of the school, whose effect is unequal (if only from the point of view of duration) among children from different social classes, and whose success varies considerably among those upon whom it has an effect, tends to reinforce and to consecrate by its sanctions the initial inequalities. [Thus] ... what is measured by means of the level of education is nothing other than the accumulation of the effects of training acquired within the family and the academic apprenticeships which themselves presupposed this previous training (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 493).

fails to transmit explicitly the means of appropriation of the dominant culture, thereby creating the opportunity for their acquisition of educational credentials - and, hopefully, for the development of critical consciousness. In this way, lower class students tend to fail in the formally neutral academic market, and the school system ends up reinforcing and consecrating initial social inequalities. As Bourdieu (1977) explains, "the educational system never succeeds quite so completely in imposing recognition of its value and of the value of its classifications [credentials] as when its sanctions are brought to bear upon classes or sections of a class which are unable to set against it any rival principle of hierarchical ordering" (p. 504).

On top of that, academic credentials depend on the objective sanctions of a market dominated by the symbolic products of the educational work of the families of the dominant classes, who also hold the monopoly of the most prestigious schools. In reality, academic capital (a form of cultural capital) is a weak currency which depends upon the economic and social capital which can be put to its valorization; so, whereas the academic investments of the ruling classes cannot fail to be extremely profitable, the diploma is utterly indispensable for those from families less favoured in economic and social capital. Therefore, the educational system enjoys small real autonomy, exerting mainly a function of legitimation, by converting social hierarchies into educational hierarchies, in this way anticipating the objective sanctions of the symbolic and economic market.

The specificity of the pedagogical action of the school - the conversion of the primary *habitus* into knowledges and skills exchangeable by formal qualifications or credentials - is further explained: As the mastery "of the available instruments of

appropriation and, more specifically, of the generic and particular code of the work of art" [or any cultural object][20] is "the necessary condition for the deciphering of [and appropriation] of the work,"

> in the specific case of works of 'high' culture, mastery of the code cannot be totally acquired by means of the simple and diffuse apprenticeships provided by daily existence but presupposes an education methodically organized by an institution specially equipped for this purpose. It is to be noted, however, that the yield of pedagogic communication, entrusted, among other functions, with the responsibility of transmitting the code of works of 'high' culture, along with the code according to which this transmission is carried out, is itself a function of the cultural competence that the receiver owes to his family upbringing, which is more or less close to the 'high' culture transmitted by the colleges and to the linguistic and cultural models according to which this transmission is carried out. (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 493)

In sum, the contribution of schooling to social equalization - that is, the provision of equality of educational opportunity for social and economic advancement and minimization of inequality - is restricted initially by the very cultural-pedagogical processes which produce unequal school outcomes, and further by the market-driven relationship between educational credentials and economic and social rewards:

> The laws of the market which fixes the economic or symbolic value, i.e. the value qua cultural capital, of the cultural arbitraries produced by the different pedagogic actions and thus of the products of those pedagogic actions (educated individuals), are one of the mechanisms - more or less determinant according to the type of social formation - through which social reproduction, defined as the reproduction of the structure of the relations of force between the classes, is accomplished. (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977, p. 11)

Ultimately, the school is nothing but a specific setting of social exchanges and circulation of cultural capital in a society marked by differentiated distribution of material and symbolic resources.

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[20] Bourdieu (1977) is focusing here particularly on theatre, concert, and museum attendance.

Symbolic capital

In "The Forms of Capital," Bourdieu (1986) proposes the expansion of the concept of capital to include various symbolic forms, also liable to "accumulation and all its effects" (p. 241). He develops the concepts of *cultural and social capital*, "transformed, disguised forms of economic capital" (p. 252), not quite reducible to it but, nevertheless, on certain conditions, convertible into it[21] - forms which "produce their most specific effects only to the extent that they conceal (not least from their possessors) the fact that economic capital is ... at the root of their effects" (p. 252). Furthermore, he describes how the conservation of capital works precisely through conversions from one type of capital into another, and how symbolic conversions are marked by "the essential ambiguity of social exchange, which presupposes (...) a much more subtle economy of time" (p. 252).

For Bourdieu, *capital* is power. He defines it as "*accumulated labor (in its materialized form or its 'incorporated', embodied form) which, when appropriated on a private, i. e., exclusive, basis by agents or groups of agents, enables them to appropriate social energy in the form of reified or living labor*" (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 241). As material resources and internal powers of individuals, subject to appropriation and assimilation, exchanges and conversions, capital is a "force inscribed in objective or subjective structures" (p. 241), a voucher, a password; and,

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[21] Bourdieu (1986) claims that the understanding of the logic of capital requires that two opposing views be superseded: "economism, which, on the grounds that every type of capital is reducible in the last analysis to economic capital, ignores what makes the specific efficacy of the other types of capital," and "semiologism (nowadays represented by structuralism, symbolic interactionism, or ethnomethodology), which reduces social exchanges to phenomena of communication and ignores the brutal fact of universal reducibility to economics" (pp. 252-253).

most importantly, it is a structuring force: the condition of *time* for acquisition and accumulation, the specific cumulative effect of *inertia* in reproduction, and the existence (at any given time) of unequally distributed and diverse *forms* of capital demarcate the possibilities of social practices.[22] He defines *symbolic capital* as "capital - in whatever form - insofar as it is represented, i.e. apprehended symbolically, in a relationship of knowledge or, more precisely, of misrecognition and recognition, [which] presupposes the intervention of the *habitus*, as a socially constituted cognitive capacity" (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 255), ergo education.

Cultural capital presents itself in three forms: (a) in the embodied state - its fundamental form - "as long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body;" (b) in the objectified state, as "cultural goods, which are the trace or realization of theories or their critiques;" and (c) in the institutionalized state, a distinctive form of objectification, as educational qualifications, which "confers entirely original properties on the cultural capital which it is presumed to guarantee" (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 243).

Embodied cultural capital is "external wealth converted into an integral part of

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[22] As he says it:
Capital, which in its objectified or embodied forms, takes time to accumulate and which, as a potential capacity to produce profits and to reproduce itself in identical or expanded form, contains a tendency to persist in its being, is a force inscribed in the objectivity of things so that everything is not equally possible or impossible. And the structure of the distribution of the different types and subtypes of capital at a given moment in time represents the immanent structure of the social world, i.e., the set of constraints, inscribed in the very reality of that world, which govern its functioning in a durable way, determining the chances of success for practices. (Bourdieu, 1986, pp. 241-242)

the person, into a *habitus*" (Bourdieu, 1986, pp. 244-245). Therefore, it "implies a labor of inculcation and assimilation, costs time, time which must be invested personally by the investor.... The work of acquisition is work on oneself (self-improvement), an effort that presupposes a personal cost, an investment, above all of time, but also of that socially constituted form of libido, with all the privation, renunciation, and sacrifice that it may entail" (p. 244). This can be visualized, for instance, in the learning how to play well a musical instrument, or any intentionally developed competence.

But cultural capital is also acquired "in the absence of any deliberate inculcation, and therefore quite unconsciously" (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 245) during the initial period of socialization. "The process of appropriating *objectified cultural capital* and the time necessary for it to take place mainly depend on the cultural capital embodied in the whole family" - through the automatic educative effect exerted by all cultural goods present in the child's environment, like books and computers, "and all forms of implicit transmission" (p. 246) - such as the images suggested by 'parental involvement.' Thus, cultural capital "always remains marked by its earliest conditions of acquisition which, through the more or less visible marks they leave..., help to determine its distinctive value" (p. 245). This is the case of linguistic accents, social manners, dressing styles, tastes, etc., naturally acquired - without that much effort - by immersion in social situations.

In class societies, where the distribution of capital is uneven - more precisely, where access to the means of producing and enjoying cultural and material resources is unequal and an object of competition - and where power asymmetries among social

groups determine differentiated values for the available resources, scarcity generates profits of *distinction* for the owners of a large or highly valued form of cultural capital.[23] The advantages secured by distinction are "based, in the last analysis, on the fact that all agents do not have the economic and cultural means for prolonging their children's education beyond the minimum necessary for the reproduction of the labor-power least valorized at a given moment" (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 245). Thus, the time available for acquisition - "*time free from economic necessity*" (p. 246) - is what makes the link between economic and cultural capital:

> ... the initial accumulation of cultural capital, the precondition for the fast, easy accumulation of every kind of useful cultural capital, starts at the outset, without delay, without wasted time, only for the offspring of families endowed with strong cultural capital; in this case, the accumulation period covers the whole period of socialization. It follows that the transmission of cultural capital is no doubt the best hidden form of hereditary transmission of capital, and it therefore receives proportionately greater weight in the system of reproduction strategies, as the direct, visible forms of transmission tend to be more strongly censored and controlled. (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 246)

Furthermore, says Bourdieu (1986), because it is "linked in numerous ways to the person in his biological singularity and is subject to [an almost invisible] hereditary transmission," and "because the social conditions of its transmission and acquisition are more disguised than those of economic capital," *embodied cultural capital* tends to be "unrecognized as capital and recognized as legitimate competence"

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[23] "The structure of the field, i. e., the unequal distribution of capital, is the source of the specific effects of capital, i. e., the appropriation of profits and the power to impose the laws of functioning of the field most favorable to capital and its reproduction" (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 246). We can think here of the structure of parental involvement, the uneven distribution of available parents across students' families, generating distinction - a distinction that is discernible in homework completion, and parental visibility in the school -, and the likely agreement between teachers and involved parents about its benefits tending to legitimate and perpetuate it.

(p. 245), the result of innate talent or discrete, independent effort, conferring prestige or merit to its possessor.

Along this line, the properties of *objectified cultural capital,* "are defined only in the relationship with cultural capital in its embodied form" (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 246), for "the cultural object, as a living social institution, is, simultaneously, a socially instituted material object and a particular class of habitus, to which it is addressed" (p. 256). Thus, the specific appropriation of "the cultural capital objectified in material objects and media, such as writings, paintings monuments, instruments, etc.," presupposes "the possession of the means of consuming" (pp. 246-247), that is, embodied capital. Nevertheless, "cultural capital in its objectified state presents itself with all the appearances of an autonomous, coherent universe ... irreducible to that which each agent, or even the aggregate of the agents, can appropriate" (p. 247). Such appearance of autonomy is even greater in the case of *institutionalized cultural capital*:

> The objectification of cultural capital in the form of academic qualifications is one way of neutralizing some of the properties it derives from the fact that, being embodied, it has the same biological limits as its bearer. This objectification is what makes the difference between the capital of the autodidact, which may be called into question at any time, ... and the cultural capital academically sanctioned by legally guaranteed qualifications, formally independent of the person of their bearer. With the academic qualification, a certificate of cultural competence which confers on its holder a conventional, constant, legally guaranteed value with respect to culture, social alchemy produces a form of cultural capital which has a relative autonomy vis-à-vis its bearer and even vis-à-vis the cultural capital he effectively possesses at a given moment in time.... In this case, one sees clearly the performative magic of the power of instituting, the power to show forth and secure belief or, in a word, to impose recognition. (Bourdieu, 1986, pp. 247-248)

Academic qualifications work as a way to grant institutional recognition on the

cultural capital held and manifested by individuals, making it possible "to compare qualification holders, ... to establish conversion rates between cultural capital and economic capital by guaranteeing the monetary value of a given academic capital, ... [and to establish] the value, in terms of cultural capital, of the holder of a given qualification relative to other qualification holders and, by the same token, the monetary value for which it can be exchanged on the labor market" (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 248). Furthermore, the material and symbolic profits of academic qualifications are subject to scarcity, to fluctuation "in the conversion rate between academic capital and economic capital," and to uncertainty due to "changes in the structure of the chances of profit offered by the different types of capital" (p. 248).

Social capital[24] is defined as "the aggregate of the actual or *potential* resources[25] which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition - or in other words, to membership in a group - which provides each of its members with the backing of the collectivity-owned capital, a 'credential' which entitles them to credit,

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[24] For a different concept of social capital see Coleman (1987), who defines it as "the norms, the social networks, and the relationships between adults and children [in the family and in the community] that are of value for the child's growing up" (p. 36). His notion of social capital as social values, resources, and patterns of interaction within intergenerational relationships and communities, is not that of a symbolic currency linked to group membership; Coleman seems to focus on discrete structures which have educational value, whereas Bourdieu refers to structuring forces which create value or power within a system of exchanges.

[25] Contrasting examples of such resources are the title of nobility - "the form par excellence of the institutionalized social capital which guarantees a particular form of social relationship in a lasting way" (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 251), and manners - "insofar as, through the mode of acquisition they point to, they indicate initial membership of a more or less prestigious group" (p. 256).

in the various senses of the word" (Bourdieu, 1986, pp. 248-249). Hence, "the volume of the social capital possessed by a given agent depends on the size of the network of connections he can effectively mobilize and on the volume of the capital (economic, cultural or symbolic) possessed in his own right by each of those to whom he is connected" (p. 249).

In this way, the reproduction of social capital requires continual endeavor of sociability, "which implies expenditure of time and energy and so, directly or indirectly, of economic capital" (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 250). Moreover, this work "is not profitable or even conceivable unless one invests in it a specific competence (knowledge of genealogical relationships and of real connections and skill at using them, etc.) and an acquired disposition to acquire and maintain this competence, which are themselves integral parts of this capital. This is one of the factors which explain why the profitability of this labor of accumulating and maintaining social capital rises in proportion to the size of the capital" (p. 250). Moreover, "the profits which accrue from membership in a group are the basis of the solidarity which makes them possible" (p. 249):

> ... the network of relationships is the product of investment strategies, individual or collective, consciously or unconsciously aimed at establishing or reproducing social relationships that are directly usable in the short or long term, i. e., at transforming contingent relations, such as those of neighborhood, the workplace, or even kinship, into relationships that are at once necessary and elective, implying durable obligations subjectively felt (feelings of gratitude, respect, friendship, etc.) or institutionally guaranteed (rights). (Bourdieu, 1986 , pp. 249-250)

The constitution of meaningful social relationships is linked to the institution of occasions, places, and practices which control the legitimate forms of exchange and

guarantee the homogeneity, identity, and boundaries of a group.[26] In turn, the individual-group dynamics related to concentration of social capital creates interesting effects of power and control through more or less institutionalized mechanisms of affiliation and delegation.[27] Thus, the concept of social capital and the images suggested by its active maintenance - and specially its profitable use in the context of the constitution of social groups and social identities (involving inclusion and exclusion), and increment of social resources and status - are interesting for the consideration of processes of group affiliation, participation, and social classification, as well as competition and individual achievement within selective institutions, as it is the case of the educational system. As Bourdieu points out,

> [The concept of social capital addresses] ... the principle of *social effects which*, although they can be seen clearly at the level of singular agents - where statistical inquiry inevitably operates - *cannot be reduced to the set of properties individually possessed by a given agent*. These effects ... are particularly visible in all cases in which different individuals obtain very unequal profits from virtually equivalent (economic or cultural) capital, depending on the extent to which they can mobilize by proxy the capital of a group (a family, the alumni of an elite school, a select club, the aristocracy, etc.) that is more or less constituted as such and more or less rich in capital.

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[26] "This is done through the alchemy of *consecration*, the symbolic constitution produced by social institution ... and endlessly reproduced in and through the exchange ... which it encourages and which presupposes and produces mutual knowledge and recognition. Exchange transforms the things exchanged into signs of recognition and, through the mutual recognition and the recognition of group membership which it implies, re-produces the group. By the same token, it reaffirms the limits of the group, i. e., the limits beyond which the constitutive exchange ... cannot take place" (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 250).

[27] By acting as custodians of the limits of the group (for "the definition of the criteria of entry is at stake in each new entry") agents can maintain or "modify the group by modifying the limits of legitimate exchange through some form of misalliance" (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 250). Agents also compete for representation and, in this way, capitalize on the collectively owned capital and exercise power, including the power of expelling other members.

(Bourdieu, 1986, p. 256, italics added)

The reproduction of capital (and, consequently, of social hierarchies) is effected through various strategies of conversion of the different types of capital, albeit at the cost of some losses of capital. *Conversions* are understood as institutionalized mechanisms aimed at controlling and legitimating "the official, direct transmission of power and privileges"[28] by disguising "the arbitrariness of the entitlements transmitted and of their transmission"[29] (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 254). It follows that "the different types of capital can be distinguished according to their reproducibility or, more precisely, according to how easily they are transmitted, i. e., with more or less loss and with more or less concealment" (p. 253) - concealment and loss tending to correlate inversely. However, contradictorily, concealment of the "economic aspect also tends to increase the risk of loss (particularly the intergenerational transfers)" and, besides, "the (apparent) incommensurability of the different types of capital introduces a high degree of uncertainty into all transactions between holders of different types" (pp. 253-254). The transmission of cultural capital, for instance, as compared to economic capital, is subject to a more veiled but more risky transmission, as its "diffuse, continuous transmission within the family escapes observation and control," and as its "full efficacy, at least on the labor

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[28] "Because the question of the arbitrariness of appropriation arises most sharply in the process of transmission ... every reproduction strategy is at the same time a legitimation strategy aimed at consecrating both an exclusive appropriation and its reproduction" (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 254).

[29] Bourdieu (1986) notes that, historically, new strategies of concealment of the arbitrariness of transmission are created in order to face struggles to change the prevailing social order - "the subversive critique which aims to weaken the dominant class" (p. 254).

market," increasingly depends on validation by the educational system, i. e., on conversion into a "capital of qualifications." Similarly, exchanges of favors aiming to conserve or produce social capital imply "the risk of ingratitude, the refusal of that recognition of nonguaranteed debts which such exchanges aim to produce" (p. 254).

Conversions, a form of indirect transmission, require time and specific work (including affective investment), according to a logic of minimization of both the work and losses inherent to the process of conversion. *As capital is accumulated labor-time, so conversions also require labor-time to be effectively performed*: "In accordance with a principle which is the equivalent of the principle of the conservation of energy, profits in one area are necessarily paid for by costs in another.... The universal equivalent ... is nothing other than labor-time (in the widest sense); and the conservation of social energy through all its conversions is verified if, in each case, one takes into account both the labor-time accumulated in the form of capital and the labor-time needed to transform it from one type into another (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 253). Therefore, "the different types of capital can be derived from *economic capital*, but only at the cost of a more or less great effort of transformation, which is needed to produce the type of power effective in the field in question" (p. 252). Such is the case of certain goods and services which are not immediately attainable through economic capital and impose secondary costs, particularly the cost of specific long-term previous investments - investments "not necessarily conceived as a calculated pursuit of gain," but likely to be "experienced in terms of the logic of emotional investment, i. e., as an involvement which is both necessary and disinterested" (p.

257).[30] The conversion of economic capital into social capital, for instance, requires long-term investments in social relationships performed prior to their period of use:

> ... an apparently gratuitous expenditure of time, attention, care, concern, which ... has the effect of transfiguring the purely monetary import of the exchange [of a gift, service, visit] and, by the same token, the very meaning of the exchange.... From a narrowly economic standpoint, this effort is bound to be seen as pure wastage, but in the terms of the logic of social exchanges, it is a solid investment, the profits of which will appear, in the long run, in monetary or other form" (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 253).

Similarly, the conversion of economic capital into cultural capital depends on the possession of economic capital, which enables and secures the expenditure of the time necessary for the transmission and acquisition of cultural capital:

> More precisely, it is because the cultural capital that is effectively transmitted within the family itself depends not only on the quantity of cultural capital, itself accumulated by spending time, that the domestic group possess, but also on the usable time (particularly in the form of the mother's free time) available to it (by virtue of its economic capital, which enables it to purchase the time of others) to ensure the transmission of this capital and to delay entry into the labor market through prolonged schooling, a credit which pays off, if at all, only in the very long term. (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 253)

Moreover, the most precious gain secured by capital, and especially by cultural capital, "is the increased volume of *useful time* that is made possible through the various methods of appropriating other people's time" (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 258) by purchasing services and or making one's own time more productive and profitable by applying to it special knowledge and skills:

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[30] Bourdieu (1986) cautions against the judgment "of the choices of the habitus ... in terms of rational strategy and cynical calculation," for "the most sincerely disinterested acts may be those best corresponding to objective interest." He admits *sincere conversions* - for instance, "shifts from one genre, school, or speciality to another ... as capital conversions, the direction and moment of which (on which their success often depends) are determined by a 'sense of investment' which is the less likely to be seen as such the more skillful it is" (p. 257).

> It may take the form either of increased spare time, secured by reducing the time consumed in activities directly channeled toward producing the means of reproducing the existence of the domestic group, or of more intense use of the time so consumed, by recourse to other people's labor or to devices and methods which are available only to those who have spent time learning how to use them and which ... make it possible to save time. (This is in contrast to the cash savings of the poor, which are paid for in time - do-it-yourself, bargain hunting, etc.) None of this is true of mere economic capital; *it is possession of cultural capital that makes it possible to derive greater profit not only from labor-time, by securing a higher yield from the same time, but also from spare time, and so to increase both economic and cultural capital.* (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 258, italics added)

Bourdieu (1986) points out that, in our democratic era, "the more the official transmission of capital [has been] prevented or hindered, the more the effects of the clandestine circulation of capital in the form of cultural capital [has become] determinant in the reproduction of the social structure" (p. 254), specially through conversion into academic capital. Consequently, "as the educational qualification, invested with the specific force of the official, becomes the condition for legitimate access to a growing number of positions, particularly the dominant ones, the educational system tends increasingly to dispossess the domestic group of the monopoly of the transmission of power and privileges" (p. 254).[31] At the same time, the growth in objectified cultural capital available in the environment (which automatically increases its educative effect), combined with "the fact that embodied cultural capital is [also] constantly increasing," accounts for the fact that, "in each generation, the educational system can take more for granted" (pp. 255-256).

Nevertheless, Bourdieu (1986) stresses the relative power of the educational

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[31] As Lareau (1993) demonstrated the upper-middle classes compensate for this loss with active investments both in social capital and in specific curricular reinforcement activities and extra-curricular additions to cultural capital aimed at incrementing the acquisition of academic capital.

system in determining individual destinies - in terms of acquisition of academic capital (a diploma) convertible into economic and social capital (jobs and prestige) - insofar as "the direct transmission of economic capital remains one of the principal means of reproduction, and the effect of social capital ('a helping hand,' 'string-pulling,' the 'old boy network') tends to correct the effect of academic sanctions. Educational qualifications never function perfectly as currency. They are never entirely separable from their holders: their value rises in proportion to the value of the their bearer, especially in the least rigid areas of the social structure" (p. 258).

Symbolic violence

Education, for Bourdieu & Passeron (1977), is cultural reproduction: "the process through which a cultural arbitrary[32] is historically reproduced ... the equivalent, in the cultural order, of the transmission of genetic capital in the biological order" (p. 32). Based on this cultural view point, they develop the following theses: (1) "All *pedagogic action* is, objectively, symbolic violence insofar as it is the imposition of a cultural arbitrary by an arbitrary power" (p. 5). (2) The "pedagogic action necessarily implies, as a social condition of its exercise, *pedagogic authority* and the *relative autonomy* of the agency commissioned to exercise it" (pp. 11-12). (3) The pedagogic action necessitates a *pedagogic work* of formation of "a *habitus*, the product of internalization of the principles of a cultural arbitrary capable ... of

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[32] "Arbitrary" means based on *judgement*, whose reason is not necessarily true or legitimate, and whose consequent (particular) *choice* is not a necessary choice, but one among others (in principle) possible choices, a choice made possible in certain *conditions* by the act of a specific *power*. See also Note 5.

perpetuating [them] in practices" (p. 31). (4) The *institutionalized educational system* derives its specific characteristics from its task of self-reproduction (production and reproduction of its conditions of existence and maintenance), a task necessary for the realization of its essential function of cultural reproduction (inculcation and reproduction of "a cultural arbitrary which it does not produce"), a function which contributes to social reproduction (p. 54).

By *symbolic violence* Bourdieu & Passeron (1977) refer to the exercise of "power which manages to impose meanings and to impose them as legitimate by concealing the power relations which are the basis of its force, [and by adding] ... its own specific symbolic force to those power relations" (p. 4), therefore assuring their reproduction.[33] In this light, education - all *pedagogic action* (in any form, informal or institutionalized), or any relation of *pedagogic communication* - is "objectively, symbolic violence," as it consists of "the imposition and inculcation of a *cultural arbitrary* by an arbitrary mode of imposition and inculcation" (p. 6). Pedagogic action is *objectively* symbolic violence in two senses: first, because its arbitrary power is based on tangible power relations, i.e. the imposition and inculcation of a certain cultural arbitrary (among possible others) is based on concrete social conditions grounding the positions of the social groups or classes; second, because the delimitation (selection and exclusion) of certain meanings "re-produces (in both

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[33] The notion of symbolic violence is grounded on linked assumptions: first, that "any social formation ... [is] a system of power relations and sense relations between groups or classes" (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977, p. 5); second, that symbolic relations are, simultaneously, relatively autonomous from and relatively dependent on power relations; third, that symbolic forces or representations of legitimacy provide a specific (and specifically symbolic) contribution to the exercise and perpetuation of power.

senses) the arbitrary selection a group or class objectively makes in and through its cultural arbitrary" (p. 8). Thus, the cultural diversity that exists in a society is hierarchized according to the positions of power of the different groups, and that hierarchy is re-produced within institutionalized education through the privileged transmission of the dominant cultural arbitrary.

Within a system of more or less integrated, competing cultural arbitraries, and on the basis of specific power relations among the social groups, a dominant form of pedagogic action emerges as "the one which most fully, though always indirectly, corresponds to the objective interests (material, symbolic and ... pedagogic) of the dominant groups or classes, both by its mode of imposition [selection of methods and activities] and by its delimitation of what [selection of certain contents in detriment of others] and on whom [selection of apt individuals and exclusion of others] it imposes" (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977, p. 7). In this way, the dominant system of education (the school, nowadays, in contrast with popular, family or ethnic education) "tends to secure a monopoly of legitimate symbolic violence" (p. 6), in order to reproduce not only the dominant culture but the position of dominance of a particular cultural arbitrary (for instance, philosophy and classic languages and literature in the past, or mathematics, natural sciences and computer technology in the present), contributing thereby to perpetuate a particular structure of domination. Furthermore, the dominant pedagogic action and system of education mediates the interactions among the other (dominated) pedagogic actions and systems; as a result, "the system of pedagogic actions, insofar as it is subject to the effect of domination by the dominant pedagogic action, tends to reproduce, both in the dominant and in the dominated classes,

misrecognition of the truth of the legitimate culture as the dominant cultural arbitrary, whose reproduction contributes towards reproducing the power relations." (p. 31)

Education presupposes *pedagogic authority*, "i.e. a delegation of authority, which requires the pedagogic agency to reproduce the principles of the cultural arbitrary which a group or class imposes as worthy of reproduction both by its very existence and by the fact of delegating to an agency the authority needed in order to reproduce it" (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977, p. 31). Thus, pedagogic authority is "the basis of the sociological possibility of the pedagogic action," being "automatically conferred on every pedagogic transmitter by the traditionally and institutionally guaranteed position he occupies in a relation of pedagogic communication" (p. 21): accordingly, "the pedagogic transmitters are from the outset designated as fit to transmit that which they transmit, hence entitled to impose its reception and test its inculcation by means of socially approved or guaranteed sanctions" (p. 20); and "the pedagogic receivers are disposed from the outset to recognize the legitimacy of the information transmitted and the pedagogic authority of the pedagogic transmitters, hence to receive and internalize the message" (p. 21).[34] In spite of this, contradictorily, the agents objectively manifest, in their practice, misrecognition of the

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[34] "The concept of pedagogic authority clearly has no normative content ... since the pedagogic authority has precisely the effect of ensuring the social value of the pedagogic action regardless of the 'intrinsic' value of the agency exerting it, and whatever, for example, the degree of technical or charismatic qualification of the transmitter" (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977, p. 21). Moreover, because "the informational content of the message does not exhaust the content of the communication," and "because the sending of a message ... always transmits at least the affirmation of the value of the pedagogic action, the pedagogic authority which guarantees the communication always tends to eliminate the question of the informative efficiency of the communication" (p. 21).

truth of pedagogic action as violence by inevitably representing its arbitrariness as 'natural' and necessary - a misrecognition that, while being the condition for its exercise, implies objective recognition of its legitimate authority, thus "reinforcing the arbitrary power which establishes it and which it conceals" (p. 13). Ultimately, the psychological mechanism of delegation of authority tends to produce in those who undergo the pedagogic action misrecognition of the objective truth of their culture as a cultural arbitrary, i.e., *ethnocentrism*.[35]

However, "the delegation of the right of symbolic violence which establishes the pedagogic authority of a pedagogic agency is always a limited delegation" (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977, p. 27). The autonomy of pedagogic agencies is limited,

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[35] Authority "so strongly marks all aspects of the relation of pedagogic communication that this relationship is often experienced or conceived along the lines of the primordial relation of pedagogic communication, i.e. the relationship between parents and children, or more generally, between generations" (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977, p. 19). Moreover, the contradiction between the representation and practice of pedagogic authority is not solved by a *soft pedagogy*:

> The 'soft approach' [non-directive methods, participation, dialogue] may be the only effective way of exercising the power of symbolic violence in a determinate state of the power relations, and of variably tolerant dispositions towards the explicit, crude manifestation of arbitrariness.
> If some people are nowadays able to believe in the possibility of a pedagogic action without obligation or punishment, this is the effect of an ethnocentrism which induces them not to perceive as such the sanctions of the mode of imposition characteristic of our society. To overwhelm one's pupils with affection ... is to gain possession of that subtle instrument of repression, the withdrawal of affection, a pedagogical technique which is no less arbitrary than corporal punishment or disgrace. The objective truth of this type of pedagogic action is harder to perceive because, on the one hand, the techniques employed conceal the social significance of the pedagogic relation under the guise of a purely psychological relationship and, on the other hand, their place in the system of authority techniques making up the dominant mode of imposition helps to prevent agents formed by this mode of imposition from seeing their arbitrary character. (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977, pp. 17-18)

first of all, by "the social conditions for the exercise of a pedagogic action, i.e. cultural proximity between the cultural arbitrary imposed by that pedagogic action and the cultural arbitraries of the groups or classes subjected to it" (p. 25); insofar as symbolic actions can work only to the extent that they encounter and reinforce *predispositions and interests*, "any action of symbolic violence which succeeds in imposing itself ... objectively presupposes a [prior, virtual and tacit] delegation of authority" (p. 25) based on class-culture organic relations:

> The recognition a group or class objectively accords a pedagogic agency is always ... a function of the degree to which the market value and symbolic value of its members depend on their transformation and consecration by that agency's pedagogic action.... in modern societies the *middle classes*, and more precisely those middle class fractions whose ascension most directly depends on the School, differ from the working classes by an *academic docility* which is expressed in, among other things, their particular sensitivity to the symbolic effects of punishments or rewards and more precisely to the social-certification effect of academic qualifications. (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977, pp. 27-28, italics added)

And the market, of course, functions as an additional limitation:

> In any given social formation, the *sanctions*, material or symbolic, positive or negative, juridically guaranteed or not, through which pedagogic authority is expressed, and which ensure, strengthen and lastingly consecrate the effect of a pedagogic action, are more likely to be recognized as legitimate ... when they are applied to groups or classes for whom these sanctions are more likely to be confirmed by the sanctions of the market on which the economic and social value of the products of the different pedagogic actions is determined. (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977, p. 27, italics added)

In effect, "by unifying the market on which the value of the products of the different pedagogic actions is determined, bourgeois society has multiplied the opportunities for subjecting the products of the dominated pedagogic actions to the evaluative criteria of the legitimate culture [ensuring the likelihood that a dominated cultural arbitrary and the cultural attainments of individuals from the dominated

groups be devalued by the anonymous sanctions of the labour market, as well as by those of the cultural and academic markets], thereby affirming and confirming its dominance in the symbolic order" (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977, p. 28). For those many individuals who have been exposed to dominated pedagogic actions, and who "are destined to discover that the cultural arbitrary whose worth they have had to recognize in order to acquire it is worthless on an economic or symbolic market dominated by the cultural arbitrary of the dominant classes" (p. 29), what is left is blunt marginalization or the conflicts of acculturation into the dominant culture.

In sum, the success of any pedagogic action is a function of "the system of relations between the cultural arbitrary imposed by [the dominant] pedagogic action and the cultural arbitrary inculcated by the earliest phase of upbringing within the groups and classes from which those undergoing the pedagogic action originate" (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977, p. 30), implying various degrees of recognition of the pedagogic authority of the pedagogic agency, and of mastery of the code used in the pedagogic communication. Hence, the differential success of the dominant pedagogic action among the receivers is a function of:

> (1) the *pedagogic ethos* proper to a group or class, i.e. the system of dispositions towards that pedagogic action and the agency [school] exerting it, defined as the product of the internalization of (a) the value which the dominant pedagogic action confers by its sanctions on the products of the different family pedagogic actions and (b) the value which, by their objective sanctions, the different social markets confer on the products of the dominant pedagogic action according to the group or class from which they come; and (2) *cultural capital*, i.e. the cultural goods transmitted by the different family pedagogic actions, whose value qua cultural capital varies with the distance between the cultural arbitrary imposed by the dominant pedagogic action and the cultural arbitrary inculcated by the family pedagogic action within the different groups or classes. (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977, p. 30)

Education also requires a continual[36] and productive *pedagogic work*: "a process of inculcation which must last long enough to produce a durable training, i.e. a *habitus*, the product of internalization of the principles of a cultural arbitrary capable of perpetuating itself after the pedagogic action has ceased and thereby of perpetuating in practices the principles of the internalized arbitrary" (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977, p. 31). The productivity of the pedagogic work is measured by the degree to which the habitus is durable, transposable, i.e., "capable of generating practices conforming with the principles of the inculcated arbitrary in a greater number of different fields" (p. 33), and exhaustive, i.e., capable of completely reproducing those principles in the practices it generates. Hence, the accomplished form of the habitus depends on the degree of completion of the pedagogic work[37] considered necessary and sufficient - in terms of legitimate content, mode and length of inculcation - in order to produce the degree of cultural attainment and competence by which a group tends to recognize the successful individual - and, more than that, "the degree of legitimate competence in legitimate culture by which not only the dominant but also the dominated classes tend to recognize the 'cultivated man' and against which the products of the dominated pedagogic actions, i.e the different forms of the accomplished man as defined by the culture of the dominated groups of classes, come to be measured objectively" (p. 35).

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[36] The condition of continuous inculcation for lasting transformation is related to the inertia of the educational institution, "because it tends to reproduce, so far as its relative autonomy allows, the conditions in which the reproducers were produced, i.e. the conditions of its own reproduction" (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977, p. 32).

[37] In spite of this, "the social definition of excellence always tends to make reference to 'naturalness', i.e. to a modality of practice entailing a degree of accomplishment of pedagogic work capable of effacing awareness ... of all that accomplished practice owes to pedagogic work" (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977, p. 39).

As the object and effect of the pedagogic work, the concept of habitus - "the principle unifying and generating practices" (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977, p. 34) - connects objective and subjective structures, mediating the articulations and contradictions within and between representations and practices, both in the individual and social realms. With respect to the individual, the habitus is a system of dispositions: "it expresses, first, the *result of an organizing action*, with a meaning very close to that of words such as 'structure'; it can also denote a manner of being, a habitual state (especially of the body), and, in particular, a *predisposition*, tendency, *propensity* or *inclination*" (pp. 67-68); and, as "a system of schemes of perception, thought, appreciation and action" (p. 35), the habitus contains "self-discipline and self-censorship (the more unconscious to the extent that their principles have been internalized)" (p. 40). With respect to the social group and individual-group relations, the habitus grounds personal and social identities, thus contributing "towards producing and reproducing the intellectual and moral integration of the group or class on whose behalf it is carried on" (p. 35). In this way, pedagogic work becomes a profitable substitute for external repression and, particularly, physical coercion (a sanction precisely to the failures of internalization of a cultural arbitrary), insofar as it "tends to produce a permanent disposition to give, in every situation ... the right response (i.e. the one laid down by cultural arbitrariness, and no other)[38] to symbolic stimuli emanating from the agencies invested with the pedagogic authority which has

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[38] The 'right response' (in terms of discourse and manners) makes the difference between getting a ticket or a warning from the police for disrespecting a stop sign. This is just one trivial example, among numerous, of how an agent, in assessing behavior and dispensing (formal as well as informal) sanctions, discriminates among individuals based on the required ('normal') habitus.

made possible the pedagogic work responsible for the habitus" (p. 36).

The more it is accomplished, then, the more pedagogic work tends fully to produce "the objective conditions for misrecognition of cultural arbitrariness, i.e. the conditions for subjective experience of the cultural arbitrary as necessary" (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977, p. 37), and for concealment of "the objective truth of the habitus as the internalization of the principles of a cultural arbitrary" (p. 39), consolidating group or class (ethical and logical) *ethnocentrism*. Furthermore, because the function of pedagogic work is to keep order (the order of the prevalent power relations), "by inculcation or exclusion, it tends to impose recognition of the legitimacy of the dominant culture on the members of the dominated groups or classes, and to make them internalize, to a variable extent, disciplines and censorships which best serve the material and symbolic interests of the dominant groups or classes[39] when they take the form of self-discipline and self-censorship" (pp. 40-41). And, consonant with "the dominant ideology of the legitimate culture as the only authentic culture, i.e. as universal culture" (p. 40), it also tends to impose on the dominated groups "recognition of the illegitimacy of their own cultural arbitrary," for exclusion takes its "most symbolic force when it assumes the guise of self-exclusion" (pp. 41-42):

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[39] In short, according to Bourdieu & Passeron (1977), the history of modern education is the history of class cultural hegemony: "One of the least noticed effects of compulsory schooling is that it succeeds in obtaining from the dominated classes a recognition of legitimate knowledge and know-how (e.g. in law, medicine, technology, entertainment or art), entailing the devaluation of the knowledge and know-how they effectively command (e.g. customary law, home medicine, craft techniques, folk art and language ...) and so providing a market for material and especially symbolic products of which the means of production (not least, higher education) are virtually monopolized by the dominant classes (e.g. clinical diagnosis, legal advice, the culture industry, etc.)" (p.42).

> ... a dominant pedagogic action tends not so much to inculcate the information constituting the dominant culture (if only because pedagogic work has a lower specific productivity and a shorter duration when applied to groups or classes lower down the social scale) as to inculcate the fait accompli of the legitimacy of the dominant culture. It may do so by inducing those excluded from the ranks of the legitimate addressees (whether before formal education, as in most societies, or during it) to internalize the legitimacy of their exclusion; by making those it relegates to second-order teaching recognize the inferiority of this teaching and its audience; or by inculcating, through submission to academic disciplines and adherence to cultural hierarchies, a transposable, generalized disposition with regard to social disciplines and hierarchies. (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977, p. 41)

How does cultural reproduction, and individual-group inclusion and exclusion (as micro-processes which continually reproduce the social classes), operate along the process of individual and inter-institutional education? It operates by means of successive, distinct habitus (primary and secondary, involving practical and symbolic levels of mastery), which are produced within and through diverse forms of pedagogic work (more or less traditional, implicit or explicit, involving practical or formal transferability of the habitus), in the biographical and inter-generational orders, across various educational agencies and contexts, and within the system of cultural dominance.

Because pedagogic work is an *irreversible process*, the primary habitus produced during the earliest phase of upbringing becomes "the basis for the subsequent formation of any other habitus" (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977, p. 42), implying that the specific productivity of any secondary or subsequent pedagogic work is a function of the distance between the habitus it aims to inculcate and the habitus inculcated by primary or previous pedagogic work. From this perspective, any secondary pedagogic work, such as school work, may be situated between

maintenance or reinforcement (a mode aiming simply to confirm the primary habitus), and conversion (a mode aiming at the complete substitution of one habitus for another). On the one hand, the differential productivity of schooling fundamentally depends on early home education - "even and specially when the educational system denies this primacy in its ideology and practice"[40] - insofar as the practical dispositions acquired in everyday life learning, particularly through language acquisition, "more or less elaborated symbolically, depending on the group or class, predispose children unequally towards symbolic mastery of the operations implied" in the school curriculum (p. 43). But, on the other hand, it also depends on the extent to which the specific work of the school consolidates or denies (by deculturation and reculturation) the original habitus.

Because symbolic mastery (the explicitation of the principles at work in a practice, i.e. its theoretic codification) follows, logically and chronologically, the practical mastery of a practice, secondary mastery tends to profit from an early and close connection to practical mastery.[41] Along this line, any mode of inculcation

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[40] The policy of parental involvement, my object of study, apparently recognizes the primacy of home education, but of course within the limits of a particular cultural arbitrary. I will return to this point later.

[41] As a rule, *provided the condition of cultural continuity*, the success of the action of symbolic imposition depends on the degree to which pedagogic systematization meets the principles already held by the individual in a practical state - the 'internal fit' yield in understanding. Nevertheless, "contrary to what is suggested by certain psychogenetic theories which describe intelligence development as a universal process of unilinear transformation of sensorimotor mastery into symbolic mastery, the respective primary work of the different groups or classes produces primary systems of dispositions which differ not merely as different degrees of explicitness of the same practice but also as so many types of practical mastery unequally predisposing their bearers to acquire the particular type of symbolic mastery that is privileged by the dominant cultural arbitrary" (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977, pp.

producing a habitus can be situated between an implicit pedagogy (the unconscious inculcation of practical principles) and an explicit pedagogy (the methodical inculcation of articulated or formalized principles). While traditional modes of inculcation[42] rely mostly on direct, repeated expression (modeling) of "a habitus defined by practical transferability," secondary pedagogic work aimed at symbolic mastery is "objectively organized with a view to ensuring, by explicit inculcation of codified formal principles, the formal transferability of the habitus" (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977, p. 48). Thus, in principle, the productivity of schooling (or any secondary pedagogic work) depends on the consideration of "the degree to which the addressees of the pedagogic message possess the code of the message," and on the creation of "the social conditions for communication by methodically organizing exercises designed to ensure accelerated assimilation of the code of transmission and, therefore, accelerated inculcation of the [specific] habitus" (p. 45). However, the more *traditional* (ergo, conservative) is a mode of inculcation, the more it tends to be "objectively organized by reference to a limited audience of legitimate addressees ... equipped with the adequate [basic] habitus (i.e. the pedagogic ethos and cultural capital proper to the groups or classes whose cultural arbitrary it reproduces)" (p. 45).

In fact, the efficiency of modes of inculcation "cannot be defined

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49-50).

[42] In general, pedagogic work is considered the more traditional "to the extent that it is less clearly delimited as a specific, autonomous practice," and to the extent that it "is exerted by agencies whose functions are more comprehensive and more undifferentiated, i.e. the more completely it is reduced to a familiarizing process in which the master transmits unconsciously, through exemplary conduct, principles he has never mastered consciously, to a receiver who internalizes them unconsciously" (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977, p. 48).

independently of the content inculcated and the social functions which the pedagogic work in question fulfils in a determinate social formation" (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977, p. 47). While "implicit pedagogy is doubtless the most efficient way of transmitting traditional, undifferentiated, 'total' knowledge," as in the case of apprenticeship, and while it certainly becomes ineffectual when applied to agents lacking prior attainment, it also "can be very 'profitable' for the dominant classes [in the context of a system of dominant-dominated pedagogic actions and cultural arbitraries] ... by enabling the possessors of the prerequisite cultural capital to continue to monopolize that capital" (p. 47).

The implicitness and unspecificity of transmission is much more visible (by comparison) in the case of traditional societies, while less clear, but still actual, in modern schooling. The less delimited or autonomous is the pedagogic work of the school in relation to that of the family, the more schools can rely on an implicit pedagogy with respect to intellectual and social discipline, since the prerequisite work has been furthered at home (or, alternatively, in pre-school). Along this line, we can understand the evolution represented by the introduction of explicit behavioral and instructional (including homework) contracts in current public school practice as an effort to formally implement a specific habitus which was taken for granted in certain homogeneous middle-class cultural contexts. We can also understand a variety of curricular and instructional reforms as attempts to maximize pedagogical efficiency - though, as general prescriptions, blind to their own subjective and arbitrary elements, as well as to the differentiated social conditions and individual habitus upon which they act. And reforms may be seen, conversely - if not all, many, and if not in

rhetoric, in function - as movements creating new realms of implicitness in instructional contents and methods, as responses to other movements toward explicitness, introduced when the mastery of the 'rules of the game' by more individuals threatens or effectively diminishes the effect of the selective mechanisms of schooling related to its function of class reproduction via cultural reproduction.[43]

The important point here is the *specificity* of the pedagogic work of the school, i.e. its content-method, and its function-effect, in relation to different class-cultures. Let's recall that "the agents responsible for primary pedagogic work [home education] have themselves been very unequally prepared for symbolic mastery by secondary pedagogic work [their previous schooling] and are therefore very unequally capable of orienting primary pedagogic work towards the verbalization, formulation and conceptualization of practical mastery which are demanded by secondary pedagogic work" (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977, p. 49), i.e. their children's schooling. In effect, primary pedagogic work "rests more completely on practical transferability the more rigorously the material conditions of existence subject ... [a group] to the imperatives of practice, tending thereby to prevent the formation and development of the aptitude for symbolic mastery of practice" (p. 48); conversely, "primary pedagogic work prepares that much better for secondary pedagogic work based on explicit pedagogy when exerted within a group or class whose material conditions of existence allow

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[43] Will the substitution of portfolios for exams, for instance, yield more explicitness and fairness in learning and evaluation, from the perspective of class-culture inequalities? To what extent are portfolios just a distinct mechanism of enforcement of new intellectual attributes, related to a novel pedagogic work, and immune to cultural background, or are they a more efficient mechanism of selection of rarest attributes?

them to stand more completely aside from practice, in other words to 'neutralize' in imagination or reflection the vital urgencies which thrust a pragmatic disposition on the dominated classes" (p. 49). Therefore, "a practical mastery oriented towards the manipulation of things, with the correlative relation to words, is less favourable to theoretic mastery of the rules of literate verbalization [and classificatory conceptualization] than a practical mastery directed towards ... the primacy of word manipulation" (p. 50).

However, *in the context of a dominant cultural arbitrary subordinating practical mastery to symbolic mastery of practices, schooling* - "the dominant pedagogic work which uses a traditional mode of inculcation" (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977, p. 51) - *contradictorily fails to realize the very prerequisites of its specific productivity, tending to dispense with explicit*[44] *inculcation of verbal practical mastery*, "the more completely practical mastery of the principles giving symbolic mastery has already been inculcated in the legitimate addressees by the primary pedagogic work of the dominant groups or classes" (p. 49):

> It is precisely when its legitimate public is made up of individuals equipped by primary pedagogic work with a verbally-oriented practical mastery, that secondary pedagogic work which is mandated to inculcate above all the mastery of a language and of a relation to language can, paradoxically, content itself with an implicit pedagogy, especially as regards language, because it can count on a habitus containing, in practical form, the predisposition to use language in accordance with a literate relation to language... Conversely, in secondary pedagogic work, which has the declared function of inculcating

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[44] Explicitness, of course, has to be understood under a cross-cultural framework; it is not accomplished by mere verbal instructions (a syllabus, a detailed assignment), because a new habitus, particularly for a novice already socialized into another habitus, is not simply formed by telling what to do, suggesting how to do, or even modeling.

> practical mastery of manual techniques ... the mere fact of using theoretic discourse to make explicit the principles of techniques of which working class children have practical mastery is sufficient to cast the knacks and tricks of the trade into the illegitimacy of makeshift approximation, just as 'general education' reduces their language to jargon, slang or gibberish. That is one of one the most potent effects of the theoretic discourse which sets an unbridgeable gulf between the holder of the principles (e.g. the engineer) and the mere practitioner (e.g. the technician). (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977, p. 50)

Thus, *the differential productivity of schooling according to ethnic group and social class is produced by the very exercise of its pedagogic work* which at once delimits "its really possible addressees, excluding the different groups or classes more rapidly the more completely they lack the capital and ethos objectively presupposed by its mode of inculcation," and creates "misrecognition of the mechanisms of delimitation ... [bringing about] recognition of its actual addressees as the legitimate addressees[45] and of the length of the inculcation actually undergone by the different groups or classes as the legitimate length of inculcation" (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977, p. 51). In short, insofar as it does not fully produce "the conditions for its own productivity, [the school] can fulfil its eliminatory function merely by default" (p. 51), concealing social exclusion "under the overt function of selection" (p. 52) within the set of its legitimate addressees, "thereby imposing more subtly the legitimacy of its products and hierarchies" (p. 51).

Finally, the dominant *institutionalized educational system* (the school) combines, within its structure and functioning, the (external) function of cultural

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[45] As additional effects, the pedagogic work of the school, by its very exercise, legitimates the mode of possession of cultural capital by the dominant classes - "the cultivated relation to legitimate culture as a relation of familiarity" - and "presupposes, produces and inculcates ... the ideology of the 'gift' as a negation of the social conditions of the production of cultivated dispositions" (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977, p. 52).

reproduction to that of self-reproduction. It produces and reproduces "the conditions for pedagogic work capable of reproducing ... continuously, at the least expense and in regular batches, a habitus as homogeneous and durable as possible in as many as the legitimate addressees as possible (including the reproducers of the institution) ... [and] conforming as closely as possible to the principles of the cultural arbitrary which it is mandated to reproduce" (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977, pp. 56-57). In other words, "it produces and reproduces the necessary conditions for the exercise of its internal function of inculcating, which are at the same time the sufficient conditions for the fulfillment of its external function of reproducing the legitimate culture and for its correlative contribution towards reproducing the power relations" (p. 67). As a condition for that, it also simultaneously reproduces itself as an institution,[46] reproducing through time the institutional conditions for both the performance of its task and its own reproduction (including the production of its own agents), within the limits of its relative autonomy, i.e. within "the limits laid down by an institution mandated to reproduce a cultural arbitrary and not to decree it" (p. 57).

Institutionalization (meaning autonomization through delegation) implies a series of interrelated features. It employs "a permanent corps of specialized agents[47] equipped with the homogeneous training and standardized, standardizing instruments

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[46] According to Bourdieu & Passeron (1977), this tendency towards self-reproduction explains "the cultural backwardness of school culture" - the fact that "the educational system tends to reproduce the changes occurring in the cultural arbitrary that it is mandated to reproduce only after a time-lag commensurate with its relative autonomy" (p. 61).

[47] Specialists, nevertheless, imbued with the "ideology of disinterestedness" (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977, p. 66).

which are the precondition for the exercise of a specific, regulated process of pedagogic work" (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977, p. 57). It imposes homogeneity, orthodoxy, and routinization of the work, insofar as the institutional demands related to the reproduction of the conditions for the exercise and reproduction of the pedagogic work, along with "the tendencies inherent in a corps of agents placed in these institutional conditions" (p. 58), tend to subject information and training (the school message) to codification, standardization and systematization, "both dispensing and preventing the agents from performing heterogeneous or heterodox work" (p. 57).[48] It "monopolizes the production of the agents appointed to reproduce it, i.e. of the agents equipped with the durable training which enables them to perform school work tending to reproduce the same training in new reproducers" (p. 60). It establishes school authority, i.e. it provides the specific means of inhibiting and invalidating the possibility of the question of the legitimacy of the school action (its entitlement with respect to contents and methods of education),[49] by producing and

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[48] Whatever the habitus to be inculcated ("conformist or innovatory, conservative or revolutionary"), and whatever the field, "all school culture is necessarily standardized and ritualized, i.e. 'routinized' by and for the routine of the work of schooling, i.e. by and for exercises of repetition and reconstitution which must be sufficiently stereotyped to be repeated ad infinitum under the direction of coaches themselves as little irreplaceable as possible" (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977, pp. 58-59).

[49] Through school authority, "reproducing within the institution the delegation of authority from which the institution benefits, the educational system produces and reproduces the conditions necessary both for the exercise of an institutionalized pedagogic action and for the fulfillment of its external function of reproduction, since institutional legitimacy dispenses the agents of the institution from having endlessly to win and confirm their pedagogic authority" (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977, p. 63). However, "at moments of crisis when the tacit contract of delegation legitimating the educational system is threatened, the teachers ... are called upon to resolve, each on his own behalf, the questions which the institution tended to exclude by its very

reproducing, "by the means proper to the institution, the institutional conditions for misrecognition of the symbolic violence which it exerts, i.e. recognition of its legitimacy as a pedagogic institution" (p. 61).[50]

Possibilities and limits of educational change

Those of us who work in and for schooling - teachers, policymakers, and researchers, who have bought thus far into the system as to become its professionals - wish to make it work well *for all students*, according to the old strain. The crucial issue in educational policy and practice has been how to guarantee more and better learning (to increase school productivity), distributing formal education more evenly across differentiated social groups and individuals (equalizing outcomes), so that its material and symbolic benefits can be democratized. Yet, given the very limits of our own cultural arbitrary as successfully schooled people, and the fact that we are functionaries of the system, working within its logic, our individual actions are limited

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functioning. The objective truth of the teacher's job, i.e. the social and institutional conditions which make it possible (pedagogic authority), is never more clearly revealed then when the crisis of the institution makes the job difficult or impossible" (p. 62).

[50] The ultimate effect of institutionalization, which Bourdieu & Passeron (1977) call "dependence through independence," is the misrecognition, by those who exercise the school work and those who undergo it, of its dependence on the power relations making up the social formation in which it is carried on: "by the mere fact of existing and persisting as an institution, [the dominant educational system] implies the institutional conditions for misrecognition of the symbolic violence it exerts" insofar as "the institutional means available to it as a relatively autonomous institution monopolizing the legitimate use of symbolic violence are predisposed to serve additionally, hence under the guise of neutrality, the groups or classes whose cultural arbitrary it reproduces" (p. 67).

in range: as researchers and policymakers we tend to generalize partial or ideal situations, as basic assumptions and/or goals; as teachers we try to listen to our students (though their speech is constrained from the start by the curriculum and by our authority), and share with them our knowledge and experiences as learners and our commitments as educators (though our role embraces our own distinct interests), while trying to be fair in grading them. Moreover, beyond the amplitude of our efforts is the underlying issue of what knowledge and culture have constituted and should constitute formal education, as learning depends on the meaning and usefulness of the content prescribed.

According to Bourdieu & Passeron (1977), two solutions have been tried regarding the democratization of schooling: "the 'culture for the masses' programme of 'liberating' the dominated classes by giving them the means of appropriating legitimate culture as such, with all it owes to its functions of distinction and legitimation" (pp. 23-24); and "the populist project of decreeing the legitimacy of the cultural arbitrary of the dominated classes as constituted in and by the fact of its dominated position, canonizing it as 'popular culture'" (p. 24). However, as they say, both these solutions disregard the implications of the system of dominant-dominated cultural arbitraries, precisely what both "the legitimate culture and the dominated culture owe to the structure of their symbolic relations, i.e. to the structure of the relation of domination between the classes" (p. 23); and, ultimately, fluctuations in the value of the kinds of cultural capital are determined by the economic market.

The traditional solution comes down to making the school promise true by

realizing its proper pedagogic function: the transmission of valued academic knowledge consonant with the dominant cultural arbitrary, or the teaching and learning of the language of power, as Delpit (1988) puts it, which may function both as capital and as a means of self-fulfillment. It has been carried, all along the history of schooling, by devoted teachers, and translated into various compensatory education and effective schools programs. However, insofar as the ample accomplishment of the pedagogic function is logically seen as precisely counteracting the customary selective function of schooling,[51] the low or uneven productivity of the school cannot really be explained, within this model, except by blaming the teachers or the students. The alternative (still minor) solution has been the so-called multicultural curriculum, through which the dominant cultural arbitrary is apparently altered in order to fit other views and interpretations, which might be viewed as an attempt to unbalance the cultural relations of power by redefining cultural capital. Nevertheless, the addition of diverse cultural perspectives just creates a 'potpourri curriculum' without changing other aspects of the traditional structure of authority and work of the school. And, more complicatedly, within the tremendous horizontal differentiation of schooling, related to educational and social hierachization, it is not clear what the market value of alternative curricula can be.

In contemplating the hypothesis of democratization of education (i.e. legitimate culture), Bourdieu & Passeron (1977) interrogate whether a type of secondary pedagogic work "organized in accordance with the principles of an explicit pedagogy,

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[51] The emergence and increase of the psychosocial functions of schooling, for instance, have been perceived and justified in terms of helping the performance of the pedagogic function.

would not have the effect of erasing the boundary which traditional pedagogic work recognizes and confirms between the legitimate addressees and the rest" - whether a "perfectly rational pedagogic work ... taking nothing for granted at the outset, with the explicit goal of explicitly inculcating in all its pupils the practical principles of the symbolic mastery of practices which are inculcated by primary pedagogic action only within certain groups or classes ... would not correspond to the pedagogic interest of the dominated classes" (p. 53). In other words, if school effectively taught the language of power to all and especially those students particularly deprived of it, would its discriminatory function disappear, and would the so-called deprived students recognize the necessity and value of the dominant culture?

Their answer raises two problems. First, they point out the utopian character of educational policy aimed at democratization insofar as "the structure of power relations prohibits a dominant pedagogic action from resorting to a type of pedagogic work contrary to the interests of the dominant classes who delegate its pedagogic authority to it" (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977, pp. 53-54). Indeed, solutions like compensatory education or critical pedagogy (teaching explicitly and well the language and skills of power, and the workings of the system) have always been known and attempted in a small scale; and the very fact that they haven't been generally implemented, albeit technically and financially possible, provides the reason why they won't be easily and largely implemented. Second, they caution against the mistake of identifying the objective interests of the dominated classes with the individual interests of some of their members (who have advanced by mastering the language and skills of power), insofar as "the controlled mobility of a limited number of individuals can help

to perpetuate the structure of class relations" (p. 54).

If the public school appeared historically as an instrument of upward social mobility and class hegemony (the ascension of the bourgeoisie), how can it promote equality? Equalization of access under the imposition of one cultural arbitrary (and the consequent devaluation of the other cultural arbitraries) necessarily creates inequality of outcomes, as explained by the theory of symbolic violence (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977); from this perspective, we can even see curricular differentiation (tracking) as a naive attempt at democratization, skirting the cultural-knowledge issue. The compensatory education approach surely requires that the students who lack the valued cultural capital pay a much higher price to succeed in school by acculturation; however, the possibility of equalization would remain narrow insofar as, due to different starting-points and due to the property of accumulation, some individuals would always hold more cultural capital than others, and due to investment of other forms of social and economic capital and their combined influence, some individuals would still have more advantage than others. In short, within the dominant cultural arbitrary of capitalist schooling, equality is antithetic to meritocracy, which in turn sets the limits of upward social mobility within the educational system.

Furthermore, even if schools produced equality - equally enlightened and competent individuals, holders of equally high credentials - social and economic inequality wouldn't necessarily disappear as a consequence. For one reason, despite the common contrary belief, social and economic inequality is more a cause than an effect of educational outcomes. For another reason, educational attainment doesn't turn automatically into jobs and salaries: complex market mechanisms and the play of

social capital mediate between educational credentials, occupational positions, and socio-economic rewards. The relative autonomy of schooling in front of the socio-economic realm precisely implies that on the one hand school does not automatically reproduce (but rather converts) social inequalities, but on the other hand it cannot determine (but rather it does re-produce) social and economic relations.

3. Educational policy, equity, and the family

The end of the nineteenth century saw a peak in enthusiasm for education. At the end of another century, the information available about the doubtful accomplishments of an era of schooling in regard to social equalization offers no reason to be enthusiastic. Nor are there new educational promises in the air. To be sure, the current discourse on education is not about social justice and personal happiness but about economic competitiveness, school efficiency, and individual success. Within the framework of globalization, and consonant with the neoliberal surge, intense demands are posed: the social efficiency goal of schooling has been renewed through expanded attention to test scores (and international grade-performance comparisons), stress on student accountability, a new impetus at curricular centralization, school finance reforms with incentives for downsizing and cost optimization, a simultaneous emphasis on computers and 'the basics,' and the assignment to the family of the job of securing school accountability through the school choice movement.

Interestingly, we have seen in this last decade of the twentieth century a nostalgia for old forms and meanings of education, family and community. A most

startling point is the return to home or family education, either through grassroots initiatives, like the home schooling movement, or through the official recognition of "families as educators" by both the educational research and policy establishments.[52] While research has focused on family educational workings and parenting styles conducive (or not) to school success, and suggested how schools can help families in order that families help the schools to educate their children (Henderson & Berla, 1995), policy has been advancing a 'necessary' shift from the 'delegation model' to the 'partnership model' (Seeley, 1993) in individual-institution and, specifically, family-school relations.

So, the hopes now are not deposited on the school but, instead, on the family. And again, the voices in the research and policy communities dealing with the articulation of schools and families speak from the grounds of the traditional middle-class family, or the latest case of successful immigrant family (Southeast Asian now) who employed the 'right' attitudes and values.[53] In this context, Bourdieu and Passeron's theoretical model offers a much needed perspective[54] by connecting the

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[52] See, for instance, the American Educational Research Association "Families as Educators" Special Interest Group.

[53] Coleman's 1987 paper "Families and Schools" is a case in point, in that he proposes changes in school conceptions and practices in order to respond to recent changes in the middle class family, particularly women's rise in employment, and lauds the Asian family.

[54] It could be argued that this theoretical approach is too pessimistic and that, in allowing for no hope, it would discourage efforts toward equity in schooling. I counterargue that accounting for the tendency toward social reproduction, i.e., for the narrow range of possibility of social transformation, is indispensible for counteracting intelligently and effectively the inertia of traditional practices, as well as for reading the reproductivist aspects of novel practices. It is useful to consider two points: first, social reproduction is not bad as long as good things are reproduced; and, second,

processes of social reproduction (physical, emotional and cognitive) initiated in the home environment to the function of symbolic violence (as a strategy of social reproduction) carried by compulsory schooling, with its shameless processes of human selection based on family cultural capital. It allow us to understand precisely why and delimit under what sociocultural conditions families have been important for school success, and precisely why and under what pedagogical conditions schools have implemented social reproduction and reproduced social inequalities.

In recapitulation, schools implement social reproduction fundamentally through the reproduction of the dominant cultural arbitrary, that is, through the dissemination and conservation of a particular form of knowledge (and consequent condemnation of various knowledges to illegitimacy and oblivion), and secondarily through the reproduction of social hierarchies, that is, by sorting students according to their possession of the 'right' knowledge. By specifically building on family-class diverse cultures, the school action may vary from merely confirming social hierarchies by validating the 'right' habitus - in which case it combines a great reliance on the family, with an implicit pedagogy with a major accent on assessment - to providing effective opportunities for the acquisition of academic culture - in which case it realizes the specificity of its pedagogic work by developing an explicit pedagogy with a greater stress on teaching and learning. Of course, the greater the stress on selection, the tighter will be cultural imposition[55] and, consequently, the likeliness of

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individuals tend to be conservative when their own interests are at stake, pushing them (consciously or unconsciously) against the interests of others.

[55] I think that the religious fundamentalists scream about curricular-content matters because they know this.

inequity. Conversely, the meaning of educational opportunity (within the very frame of the dominant cultural arbitrary) depends on systematic teaching and appropriate support for *cultural translation* within a context of respect for diverse cultures. The important fact to retain is that the more efficient the educational system is in its traditional functions of complementing the family and selecting the best individuals, the more it tends to tightly reproduce the status quo, so that the stress on its social efficiency goal necessarily implies an intensification in the production of unequal outcomes.

Knowing what is known about the re-production of social inequality within schooling, a fascinating question at this point is: Why is the family now being called to exert a crucial educational role and an urgent contribution to successful schooling? What are, then, the good reasons why schools should abandon the traditional delegation model and enforce the so-called new partnership model? In order to explore this movement, and to close this analysis around the questions of fairness and viability of parental involvement as a policy, I take four lines of thought. First, concerning the family, I caution against the definition of the family as an educational institution and against educational policy defining home education as an aid to schooling. Second, I argue that while the meaning of the public school is currently at stake, the policy emphasis on the family as educator, implying formal family accountability, is not auspicious nor viable for many families, due to material and symbolic reasons. Third, I alert that, insofar as parenting functions as symbolic capital, and teachers expect a certain ostensibly supportive parental role, parental involvement creates a context in which teachers are likely to discriminate among

students based on their parents' performance. And, finally, I spell out some of the contradictions of the parental involvement model, and what a policy concerned with equity would pose in terms of school goals and family-school relations.

The family is not an educational institution

It is very curious that the family is being rhetorically redefined as an educational institution[56] at the very moment in which it is suffering a quite marked and costly transformation. Coleman (1987) points out that "families at all economic levels are becoming increasingly ill-equipped to provide the setting that schools are designed to complement and augment in preparing the next generation" (p. 32). Growth in single-parent[57] and two-earner households, and also in poverty of families with children due to "increasing distribution of income away from households that have children or other dependents" (p. 33), has paralleled the contraction of the welfare state. Though unemployment is said to be low right now, work conditions seem to have deteriorated for some occupations, with the expansion of jobs by-the-hour, under rotating shifts, and sweat shops (employing the new immigrant) which resemble the early times of industrialization. Even those who can survive decently feel constantly

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[56] I am not denying that families educate, but affirming that formal education or instruction is not (and never really was) the foremost or special function of families, still less when we take education for schooling. I believe that home-schooling, for material and cultural reasons, tends to remain an exception.

[57] According to Sanders (1995), "as of 1992, 10.1 million families in America were headed by a single parent, usually the mother. This works out to be about one-third of all families with children in this country, and represents a 300 percent increase since 1970. Demographers predict that by the turn of the century, half the children in this country will grow up in single-parent families (reported in *Chicago Tribune*, April 23, 1992)" (p. 186).

pressed by all the needs and obligations created by the organization of a consumerist society which dictates aspirations and life styles, and overall has made free time a rare good available only to the very rich. As a result, working parents do not dispose of quality time either for themselves or for their children. According to Sanders (1995) "the amount of time parents have to spend with their children has decreased about 40 percent since World War II. Between 1960 and 1986, the potential time with parents for white children dropped by ten hours a week, and by twelve hours for black children due to increases in mothers' employment, in fathers' increased working hours, and in the incidence of single-parent households" (p. 191).[58] Thus, the emphasis on parenting runs contradictorily to these trends.[59]

Within the macro-historical picture, the appeal of the current call on the family can be traced to its remote cultural origin in the 'school-as-an-extension-of-the-family' middle-class model - still actual, to a limited extent - which is historically (individually and institutionally) the model of successful schooling. Coleman (1987) describes the traditional family-school partnership in the following way: formal institutions of child rearing are structured to provide for "a certain class of inputs into

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[58] Sanders' (1995) reference is Victor Fuchs (1988): *Women's Quest for Economic Equality*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

[59] The call for parents-as-educators can be seen, at some level, as a reaction (a nostalgic yearning) against the changes in the traditional family structure (Doug Campbell, 1997, personal communication). But parenting is also one of the newly created needs and obligations, a consumerist good in which parents must invest time efficiently in caring for and relating to their children, as the activity has become more rationalized and specialized. A good indicator of this is the expressive number of popular (middle-class) magazines featuring the issue (see note 65). The contradiction is expressed in terms that more and better is demanded within actual - but unacknowledged - less resources.

the socialization process ... characterized as *opportunities*, *demands*, and *rewards*," while the family ("the child's closer, more intimate, and more persisting environment") is supposed to impart "a second class of inputs ... described as *attitudes*, *effort*, and *conception of self*" (p. 35).[60] There is more, however, to this second class of inputs than Coleman's choice of terms might suggest: the primary habitus, according to Bourdieu & Passeron (1977), really renders the basic psychological, and specifically cognitive structure, as well as cultural, and specifically linguistic structure, which, in conditions of cultural continuity, productively interact with the social, specifically pedagogic, stimuli of the school. And it is also crucial to note that the educational character of the family has basically lain in the full-time dedication of the mother, and that the typical home-maker, in this case, has been educated herself. In effect, the traditional (successful) family-school partnership has counted on "the best hidden and socially most determinant educational investment, namely, the domestic transmission of cultural capital" (Bourdieu, 1987, p. 243), based on the mother's time, embodied cultural capital, and available social capital.

Thus, the call on the family as educator is consonant with the pedagogic ethos of the schooled middle classes, and eventually with the upward mobility project of some low class families and social groups (including immigrant), in that it merely confirms their life style and/or aspirations. Insofar as the policy of parental involvement just consecrates the traditional practices of some families, these very families are just getting a formal insurance while keeping on helping their kids take

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[60] The notion of parental control of schooling can be understood exactly on these grounds.

advantage of educational opportunities. For other families, the policy might function as an incentive: it is likely that a few low class families will again benefit (as in the past) and attest the lack of interest and effort of the majority of losers, repeating the old strain. However, a majority of families cannot fit the partnership model, as they have not inherited and are not likely to produce (due to their concrete life conditions) the cultural and social forms of capital likely to work as currency in their exchanges with the school.

It is also curious, from a historical perspective, to find that the current emphasis on family educational responsibility runs counter the ideology of the superiority of public schooling over home and community education, which justified compulsory schooling, in terms of political purposes and socioeconomic viability, last century. In fact, consideration of family diversity, specially regarding social class, and meanings of schooling for different social groups, reveals the inaccuracy of the notion that modern schooling substituted and supplanted the family in education, under the new urban-industrial conditions of social reproduction. First, the school could have substituted only those families that were in a condition of offering literate education, which in turn didn't need the public school, having mostly preferred to rely on private arrangements.[61] Second, the modern school came to offer exactly what poor, peasant and urban, families lacked: lettered education and industrial discipline,

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[61] Schools - and the public school, in special - are dispensable for the reproduction and transmission of economic capital of the wealthy as discrete families, but of course not as a (dominant) class, due to the ideological function of schooling in sustaining the dominant culture. For the reproduction of cultural capital, specifically the sophisticated canons of the dominant cultural arbitrary, and also for the concentration of social capital, the wealthy have relied on exclusive private schools.

the path to socio-cultural and economic integration and perhaps, social mobility. However, a division of reproductive and educative work between family and school (functional differentiation) was concretely constructed: their roles and tasks in the care and instruction of children became specialized, moreover tending to be exclusive, albeit articulated and complementary.[62] A banal indicator is the fact that both teachers and parents perceive the specificity and exclusivity of their tasks and are eager to defend their prerogatives.[63]

Traditionally, but in various degrees, schools and teachers have seen the role of families and parents as one of preparing for (specially in pre-school and elementary school years), supporting, and reinforcing academic work on a daily basis, and the more so as when students present difficulties. Besides home backing, teachers and principals also expect parents to participate in a variety of school social activities, sports, fund-raising, and some limited level of decision-making in school governance. Some families and parents, specifically middle-class, academically oriented, and occasionally those from lower class and minority groups struggling for social mobility, have assumed such in-home and/or in-school supportive roles. The positive

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[62] This exclusivity is based on separate spaces and times of school and family lives, and on distinct practices, to say the least. It is interesting to note that teaching degrees were traditionally valued for marriage and motherhood (Carvalho, 1989); however, being a parent or mother, i.e. having experience in raising children, was never a sufficient qualification for a teaching job: despite the persistent low status of child teaching, teaching is a work defined by formal knowledge and specific institutional location (school, classroom).

[63] Regarding parents, one example is the current "parental and family rights" movement. Teachers, in turn, despite contrary rhetoric, do not welcome parental interference in the classroom, as some researchers have pointed out (Dornbusch & Ritter, 1988; Biklen, 1995).

participation of parents within the framework described above - positive in the sense of not creating conflicts, but rather helping to solve problems according to the school's orientation - has reinforced the model of parental involvement expected by teachers and now promoted by educational policy.

However, when schools and teachers expect parental involvement both in school and homework, they don't consider the cases of single parents, working mothers, ethnic and language minority families, low-educated, handicapped, and chronically-ill parents, those with a great number of children, and in situations of poverty - all who have time constraints and limited skills and resources, and who add up to the majority of parents of public schools. It is reasonable that parents in these difficult life situations, feeling that they already make great sacrifices in order to feed, keep healthy, and bring their children to school, expect the school to provide for precisely that which they cannot afford at home or with their own resources, and at minimum cost for them. It doesn't seem reasonable nor efficient,[64] on the other hand, to expect schools and teachers to help these kinds of parents in adding academic work to their ordeal, creating moreover an extra function for the school (social assistance and adult education) and an extra burden for teachers (social worker and parent educator).

Since the material, cultural, and personal conditions for the family to perform an educational role influential on school success are not evenly available, how can one

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[64] Unless the ultimate (hidden) function is to blame parents, deflecting the focus from the nature of the pedagogic work carried by the school. By suggesting this, I am not proposing a simplistic explanation, but rather recalling the blaming game (teachers have been unfairly blamed for 'poor' educational outcomes, and have also unfairly blamed families and parents), symptomatic of a complex situation.

make sense of the subliminal (and, at times, quite explicit) charge at parental accountability within the formalization of the family-school partnership? While within the dominant cultural arbitrary of schooling the typical partnership in which parents support by all means the school curriculum makes total sense and is not perceived as an imposition (since there is identity and continuity of values and practices among middle-class parents and education professionals), this is certainly not the case for the majority of lower class and cultural minority parents. Nevertheless, insofar as the educational workings of the family are subordinated to the school (where home education is confirmed or denied), by framing the family as an educational institution - not quite in its own right, but designated with the obligation of providing the basic inputs for the development of the school curriculum - educational policy can, in fact, not only legitimately fail those students whose parents don't comply with their educational obligation to their children, but rightfully dictate family education. This contradiction has already generated reactions of some families (the home-schoolers, for instance, who are attempting to do education in their own right and by their own means),[65] but is not likely to be easily worked out by the many families who lack the resources, the time, and the voice to intervene politically in the realm of public education.

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[65] The religious right, in turn, is pushing for curricular, and even bigger systemic change, since changing family (religious) education in order to align it to the ideological (scientific) frame of the school is simply unacceptable for them. See, for instance, Luksik & Hoffecker (1995).

The purposes and meanings of the public school

The public school first appeared as a solution for the intellectual education of a small collectivity, resembling what is called a private school today. The meaning public, as we came to understand it, is connected to the advent of the state compulsory school, which represented a greater collectivity and supposed a common knowledge, a special purpose, and a unique context of experience, which could not be accomplished by any other form of education or social institution, as purported by the ideology of modern democratic schooling. So, modern education is precisely epitomized by the public, secular school, open to all citizens, whose mission, while intellectual, is social, and while political, is collective-bound.

On the one hand, and in contrast with the fact that schooling became its predominant mode, the very idea that public education is a joint responsibility of State, family, and community (through organized groups) presupposes diversification and specialization, differentiated powers and responsibilities, within a framework of convergent purposes, that is, a conception of public interest. Historically, as the work community declined, the new 'social contract' of education and social reproduction split personal and common, affective and cognitive aspects between the nuclear family and the school: psychosocial and individual-moral development remained primarily as the camp of the family, while the specific task of the school was defined as intellectual and collective-moral development. On the other hand, within this 'social contract,' public education has been assigned two purposes: democratic construction

(citizenship education) and social efficiency[66] (labour training), the second being subordinated to the first, at least rhetorically.[67] Fundamentally, democratic construction presupposes not only formal equality of educational opportunity (so that individuals can have equal chances of developing their skills and competing for positions of power in order to serve the collectivity), but a common experience and knowledge, which result in a minimum set of shared values and social solidarity.

However, as it evolved, schooling offered diverse experiences and embodied distinct meanings for different social classes, groups, and individuals, depending basically on their relation to literate culture and on the place they occupied - and could come to occupy, depending on the movements of the market - in the relations of production.[68] While wealthy families never needed the public school, the middle classes have been quite successful in privatizing it, i.e. in shaping the educational service offered by their neighborhood school, through active involvement and subtle pressures to get a tailored education for their children, as Lareau (1991) demonstrated.

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[66] I borrow this term from Labaree (1997). A certain breed of sociologic and economic theories has assigned education a social mobility purpose. That education has exerted an upward mobility function in some cases, for some groups and individuals, under special and restricted conditions, is certain, but a theory that generalizes such a function, suggesting a social equalization function, is certainly disputable. The raise of credentials for job placement, in the context of increased levels of educational attainment, has annulled the upward mobility effect; it seems that education has been much more instrumental for horizontal mobility nowadays.

[67] Individual development, as a goal, is also, necessarily, subordinated to social purposes; and, as a process, is inextricably connected to a socio-cultural framework (Leontiev, 1978).

[68] This suggests that the social efficiency purpose came to be dominant. And, to a certain extent, schooling has appeared to corporations and business people as an interesting institution serving technological development and enabling rationalization and increment of production.

For working class individuals the public school represented a kind of education quite distinct from their home background, and the only opportunity of access to formal education and, eventually, white-collar jobs, whereas for the underclass it didn't mean any hope. As a result, academic knowledge (represented by a credential), which is a condition for social opportunity in the present mode of social reproduction, has not been accessible to all, and has been disproportionately denied the lower classes. From a cultural perspective - in the conditions of imposition of a particular cultural arbitrary upon all, of traditional cultural wars, and of unstableness of academic knowledge - it seems fair to say that the common knowledge necessary for democratic construction and solidarity has been hardly developed and precariously realized.

Diverse school experiences and outcomes related to distinct social class cultures originated two models of family-school relations: the partnership model of the middle classes, and the delegation model of the lower classes, tempered by various degrees of resistance to the school culture. Notwithstanding, the current policy rationale on the necessity and benefit of parental involvement, based on the 'school-as-an-extension-of-the-family' model, carries a typical middle class bias, in that it assumes the intrinsic value of education for self-accomplishment, and/or the ideology of education for upward social mobility, counting on the fiction that all parents value academic education, desire school success, believe it is conducive to social and economic affluence, *and* are able to invest in it.

Meanings of education and schooling are produced by concrete life conditions and school experiences. Parents' expectations and investments toward their children's schooling, and particularly their contributions to learning, depend on various

intertwined factors: generally, on material and cultural resources (the later being dependent on the former to a greater extent), on their social class framework (work and life style), on the extent in which they have bought into the promises of the liberal ideology (individualism, competition, and pursuit of advantage), and on some sort of more or less conscious calculation of costs and benefits, considering all of the other life needs, circumstances and challenges; specifically, on their own habitus and school experience, i.e. on the extent to which they have been successfully schooled and acquainted with erudite culture themselves; and, last but not least, on children's (individually differentiated) school performance which, being a source of gratification or frustration for parents, interacts with the above general and specific factors. On a very practical level, granted that they share the dominant cultural arbitrary, parents' involvement in education requires, at least, free time and money to enjoy and introduce children into literate culture: time, for instance, to be with children after work and all the other tasks of daily life reproduction; money, for instance, to pay for a babysitter in order to attend a school meeting, to buy a ready meal instead of cooking in order to help with homework, etc.. On the symbolic level, the meanings parents assign to school knowledge, experiences, and credentials are related in complex ways to family history, current life situation, and aspirations. Yet, specific engagement in instruction depends not only on parents' own academic background and mastery of subject matters, but on their keeping up with successive curricular reforms, and thus on a special interest in schooling.

Traditionally, middle-class families have taken advantage of educational opportunities: independently from school explicit policy, their parents are known for

getting actively involved in school and promoting academic culture at home. Their motivations are various,[69] but basically they strive to stimulate their children to learn the school curriculum and succeed, assuring them of the value of education and individual effort, bolstering their self-esteem and compensating for frustrations. They may participate in school activities as a way to show their children how much they value education and, thus, to reinforce expectations of school success. They may show up in school as a kind of insurance regarding future needs, thus increasing the chances that their kids will profit from positive discrimination being related to concerned parents, or as a strategy to influence specific school policies and practices for their advantage. They may join extracurricular activities which offer opportunities to socialize and meet friends for their own leisure purposes, as in the case of sports and arts. They may follow the academic curriculum at school (by volunteering in the classroom) and/or at home, either because they value it and try to reinforce it, or object to it and try to modify it, or else because of their students' special needs. They

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[69] I was reminded by Steven Weiland (1997) of the main motivation of parents in getting involved in schooling: love for their children. This is an implicit point for me. Much can be said about love, its various forms of expression and constraint, but one point should be explicit here: that love is also culturally arbitrary. Along this line, it has been said that some parents love their children better than others, and also how parents should love their children (a part of effective parenting). The problem with a policy aiming at enhancing parental involvement in schooling is precisely that it appeals to parental love. The current discourse that "all parents care about their children" aims at counteracting the widespread belief, related to school failure, that certain parents (low class, ethnic minority) do not care about their children's education; and, indeed, the challenge posed to policy-practice has been how to capitalize on parental interest (love) in their children's academic success. The interesting cultural point here is that parental love is associated with being able to promote one's child school success, which is seen as a condition for future economic security. Another motivation of some parents is love of school and particular academic subjects.

may engage more or less in homework according to students' peculiarities, such as talent, difficulty, or dependency, or because they want to compensate for curricular weaknesses independently, at home.

While a variety of forms of family-school partnership have worked for the middle classes, poor and working class families have had to delegate schooling to the State, the school, and the teacher, for complex material and cultural reasons. Beyond material constraints, the association between education and personal success is not part of their concrete experience or a promise of their cultural arbitrary, and they lack the very educational prerequisites to get involved in schooling. Insofar as those parents were not educated when they should have been, it is all the more unfair to expect them to invest in their own education (return to school or attend parenting workshops) in order to educate their children, when their life circumstances are very different and harder than those of the middle and upper classes.[70] Along this line, it is inappropriate and unjust to call lower class parents passive, and it seems untenable to expect their participation to increase on the basis of a policy call and teacher leadership, as pretended by Epstein (1991). Insofar as conditions of life and meanings of education are doomed to persist differentiated for the various social groups, school's reliance on the family is generally implausible.

In this context of dissimilar sociocultural experiences, and knowledge that school serves certain individuals and families better than others, the current stress on

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[70] When one thinks of the burdens of child rearing today in the urban, socially isolated, nuclear family context, and of all the scientific and consumerist demands on parenting, the no-children or one-child options of many in the middle and upper classes come as no surprise.

the educative role of the family, narrowly defined in terms of accountability in relation to school goals, represents a sharp and alarming shift. It is sensible to expect that any families under adverse circumstances, including middle-class, will have their children's opportunities restricted, from the beginning, by a policy and instructional practice requiring more parental involvement in school, and specific academic forms of work at home. At this moment, it seems that the ideology of the social purposes of education is being 'adjusted,' with an increased emphasis on social efficiency (Labaree, 1997), expressed by the 'need' to train new work skills, produce improved outcomes, and raise test scores; neoliberal politics is attacking state bureaucracy and shrinking its social services, in favor of private, supposedly more efficient, small scale, initiatives (Chubb & Moe, 1990). Within the rhetoric of new standards for education and production, and a better educated workforce for international economic competition, in order to maintain or boost the domestic quality of life as well as the leading political role of this nation in the world scenario, the blaming game of who is responsible for the present social crisis (poverty, unemployment, drug consuming, violence, alienation, customarily treated not as economic but as educational problems) seems to be shifting from the school to the family. More visible reforms like 'school choice' and less visible ones like 'more homework' have passed the burden onto the family, ignoring the concrete impact that the crisis has already had on the majority of families. The very fact that families are the most vulnerable to such crisis is taken for granted.

It seems that an attempt at establishing a novel educational mode is at work,

with the redefinition of the very meaning of public education.[71] The traditional model of public school, in which the family delegated education to the state but still retained autonomy in home education, is being pressed to be substituted by a model in which the State delegates education to the family or organized groups - while it still controls the standards, i.e. determines the curriculum and administers the tests, just like Coleman's (1967) 'open schools.' Though that traditional model had been subverted by middle-class school control, it is important to reclaim its most important aspect: the commitment to equal treatment of students, including compensatory approaches (positive discrimination) and the goal to equalize basic outcomes.

In contrast, the model pressed to be generalized now seems to be that of the private school, which has survived, on a small scale, all along the expansion of the public school system, or that of the privatized public school, the kind in which families shop for a tailored education. And, indeed, partnerships between school and family are only possible where there exists enough consensus over purposes, meanings, values, contents, and methods of instruction, and specially over the particular roles of teachers and parents within the school-family educational contract. This is more likely to occur in the context of private schools, where the school

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[71] To complicate matters, the very concept and role of the American state in public and private life is a confused issue in its own, bearing upon the destinies of families and the public school. On the one hand, the idea that the state has had and should have a small role in individual and social life, i.e. that social problems should be solved privately, is part of the cultural arbitrary of privileged groups who have had their own interests identified with the state's: as long as the state apparatus has served them well, they do not want to share those resources with other groups. On the other hand, some groups are suspicious of the state interest, either because they don't believe in the common interest, or haven't had their interests attended on; the religious right for instance, has charged the American state with totalitarianism in the struggle over the school curriculum.

functions as an extension of the family, and/or where the exchange of money for service is quite direct and, by the way, where parents see and treat teachers as subordinates.[72]

The private school model also might accommodate cultural diversity better, insofar as it divides the greater community into small groups sharing common particular interests, but it eradicates the space of commonality represented by the unitarian public school, the only space available for the production and reproduction of democratic (communitarian) values and practices on a daily close fight basis. Considering certain features of American society, like the past (recent) history of school racial segregation, and the urban geography of class and ethnic segregation, this model might as well bring about re-segregation on class, race, and ethnic lines.

It is redundant to say that the current policy redefinitions of the meaning of the public school, the purpose of family education, and the role of parents in schooling, are not auspicious for many, underprivileged families. Yet, in recognizing the limits of families as educators, it is important to understand how relations between families and schools were constructed, and why families need schools, in spite of their defects. Under the present conditions of social reproduction, though schooling has distinct meanings for different social groups, schools have a tangible meaning and an essential role, place, and time in the organization of daily life, beyond the use value of education outcomes and the exchange value of school credentials. The majority of families and parents, specially working class and poor minority, depend on the public

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[72] This has also been noted in the case of upper middle-class parents relating to public schools (Connell et al., 1982; Lareau, 1993).

school for the care, occupation, and education of children, and cannot substitute it (reversing history), or create a private alternative.[73] Indeed, public education doesn't need to be compulsory anymore: as a central apparatus of social reproduction, schools became indispensable, for they keep children and youth while parents work, even if they fail to accomplish their claimed social purposes and specific academic, civic, and work training functions. This is, of course, a problematic point, insofar as the expansion of the psychosocial function, in order to compensate for family weaknesses, has come in detriment of the academic function, which is precisely what most families, by definition, cannot provide.

Parenting as symbolic capital

In this era of formalization of education and systematic study and regulation of human experience, certain trivial and informal kinds of knowledge and skills have been refurbished as special training, packed as courses and books, and sold under the rubric of continual and life-long education, expanding the educational market so to fit new usable knowledges on how-to-do, how-to-succeed, and even how-to-enjoy things. This movement is not restricted to labour-market adjustments but has penetrated private life, fixing expectations and behaviors, blurring distinctions between leisure and study, subjecting personal expression and enrichment to assessment and normalization, thanks to the popularization of psychology and the great expansion of

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[73] Home-schoolers are exceptional, for their movement encounters specific economic and intellectual barriers in terms of available home-educators. To the extent that various families join limited resources (like individual time and intellectual skills), they might as well operate a private (communitarian) school.

its professional market. Among such new 'teachable' knowledges is *parenting*, which from an informal art of raising children turned into a science, with standardized and expert-prescribed contents and techniques.

Indeed, psychology has continually re-defined positive and negative parenting and has considerably influenced family life style, specially middle class well-informed, 'up-to-date' patterns of child rearing.[74] Schools, in turn, have furthered and reinforced new demands for the education of children, and for the re-education of parents for the role of educating their own children, insofar as a certain parenting style is perceived as influential on school achievement. Thus, beyond providing for physical care, affective expression, and moral direction, parenting has assumed a very instrumental sense, in that it is supposed to generate specific qualities and competencies, fit to social opportunities and exchangeable for social rewards: it has become a specialized form of affective relationship explicitly required to be effective in the psychosocial development and, increasingly, in the cognitive development of children.

Parenting has both implicit and explicit dimensions which function as symbolic capital in current family-school exchanges. The implicit dimension is evident in the following typical family scene: the student comes home from school and the parent (usually mother) is eager to know how was the school day and what is the homework;

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[74] One can find at Schuler Books nine popular magazines specialized on parenting, ranging from traditional to alternative approaches, and covering a variety of tastes and situations: *Child*, *Parenting*, *Family Life*, *Visitation* (the source for non-traditional families), *Mothering* (the magazine of natural family living), *Family Fun*, *Exceptional Parent* (the magazine for families and professionals), *Working Mother*, and *Parents*.

next, the parent reads the homework, stimulates the student to do it and, if necessary, coaches him or her. In this way, cultural capital (in the form of a specific academic disposition) is developed. The explicit dimension, equivalent to social capital, is played in the school site by participation in various activities, which demonstrate that the parent is involved in his child's education and supportive of the school's agenda, and create the likelihood of profit in the form of a favorable disposition, on the part of teachers and principals, toward a particular student.

The centrality of the intellectual project within the definition and practice of middle class parenting is explained by Bourdieu (1977) in the context of cultural and social reproduction: "those sections which are richest in cultural capital are more inclined to invest in their children's education at the same time as in cultural practices liable to maintain and increase their specific rarity" (p. 502), thus integrating the investments placed in the academic career of their children into the system of strategies of its own (class) reproduction. Furthermore, "the support accorded by a category to academic sanctions and hierarchies depends not only on the rank the school system grants to it in its hierarchies but also on the extent to which its interests are linked to the school system or, in other words, on the extent to which its commercial value and its social position depend (in the past as in the future) on academic approval" (p. 504).

Thus, consonant with current definitions of good parenting, middle class parents have played a quite visible, showy role in their children's education, and consistently intervened in schooling, as academic success is part of their life style. Moreover, in their exchanges with the school they have relied not only on their own

cultural capital, but on social capital as well:

> Those who possess the most prestigious qualifications also have at their disposal an inherited capital of relationships and skills which enable them to obtain such qualifications; this capital is made up of such things as the practice of the games and sports of high society or the manners and taste resulting from good breeding, which, in certain careers (...), constitute the condition, if not the principal factor, of success. The habitus inculcated by upper class families gives rise to practices which (...) are extremely profitable to the extent that they make possible the acquisition of the maximum yield of academic qualifications whenever recruitment or advancement is based upon cooptation or on such diffuse and total criteria as 'the right presentation,' 'general culture,' etc. (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 506)

Lareau's (1993) empirical findings depict the efforts of upper middle-class, professional families in constructing their children's school success. She argues that "social class (independent of ability) does affect schooling. Teachers ask for parent involvement, social class shapes the resources which parents have at their disposal to comply with teachers' requests for assistance" (p. 2). Hence, teaching (the form of pedagogic work carried by the school) is articulated with a particular (productive) parenting model. The way schools are conceived and organized, teachers not only 'need' parental commitment to academic activities and encourage parents' engagement with homework, but make decisions concerning students based on evaluations - or rather bets, involving stereotypes and prejudices - about their parents.

On the side of the family, social class provides differentiated resources needed to fit the current model of schooling - the family-school partnership in which the family is supposed to fulfill an auxiliary, but rather basic, academic function. Those resources, basically economic, as already noted, are concentrated on the time, cultural, and social capital of the mother. In fact, as acknowledged by David (1980), home-school relations are broadly and specifically built into gender differentiated

parenting roles.[75] Lareau (1993) also verified empirically that, though gender neutral, parenting really means mostly *mothering*: "parent involvement remains primarily mother involvement in education while fathers, particularly in upper middle class homes, have an important symbolic role" (p. 95); while "contemporary mothers appear to face a more varied, complex, and labor-intensive set of tasks in promoting their children's academic progress than in previous eras," fathers exert a leadership role in important educational decisions and inter-institutional pursuits, such as formal complaints to school (pp. 90-95). This "pattern of maternal activity and paternal passivity" (p. 88) reflects differentiated gender roles within the family, where women play reproductive roles complementary to men's central role as economic providers, which is especially true for the upper middle-class, where mothering may constitute women's sole or principal career. Therefore, the model of parenting envisioned by parental involvement policies, characterized by a strong intellectual accent, is typical of the schooled middle class, which counts on mothers' intensive and extensive dedication to overseeing their children's schooling, and bringing home activities in alignment with the school curriculum (Fine, 1993; Lareau, 1993). As an invisible and devalued female work, mothering is just not acknowledged as the core of parental involvement.

On the side of the school, it seems correct to state, parodying Lareau (1993), that *social class (and parental ability) affects schooling the more teachers ask for*

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[75] David (1980) pertinently points out that, in the absence of collective or state responsibility, mothers are usually the sole responsible for children during pre-school years (prior to the age of compulsory schooling), before and after school hours daily, and during school breaks and vacations, which do not coincide with the length of the working day and working year.

parent involvement in preparing for, complementing, and reinforcing instruction. Insofar as teachers' success depends on effective parenting, it also seems reasonable to state that teachers will depend all the more on parental commitment to school success the more they are pressured to raise outcomes and the less they actually dispose of time and efficient pedagogic resources to promote learning independent of parental support. It is fair to assume that - as a rule, special compensatory programs being the exception - schools and teachers are organized to count on parental academic support, as the current formalization of 'parental involvement' into a policy attests. Consequently, a policy attempting to mobilize parental academic support is doomed to consecrate family education alignment to school standards (what makes no difference to and actually benefits certain groups) and certain parents' efforts to increment their own children's school experience (what has typically happened within the middle and upper classes).

Eventually, the mystique of good parenting may be used as an asset in the struggle for school success also by lower class parents, as suggested by Lareau's (1993) rich data. The following events, which occurred in a working class school with low levels and few kinds of parental involvement (as compared to an upper middle class school), illustrate the cling between parents' performance and institutional discrimination imbedded in the structure and culture of the school and actualized in teachers' practices, particularly in their expectations and judgements about effective parenting and potential student success.

A first grade (female) teacher was impressed by the parents - particularly the father - of a (male) student and concluded (also based on other performance data) that

"Johnny's parents had worked with him at home, reading to him, teaching him new words, and giving him educational *advantages*" (Lareau, 1993, p. 141). Then, "despite her conviction that Johnny was not a gifted student and her knowledge that he was only slightly above the class average, Mrs. Thompson recommended that he be selected for the school enrichment program;" however, she "did not recommend that children with similar, or even slightly superior, academic records be admitted to the program" (p. 142). Lareau (1993) suggests that "Johnny's parents may have influenced her decision ... [and that] his parents' behavior raised her expectations" (p. 142).

A second grade (female) teacher "believed strongly that children's home environments influenced their classroom performance" (Lareau, 1993, p. 142). She heard rumors about a (female) student's mother who had frequent parties at home and 'neglected' her child, and concluded that "because of her home situation, Anne-Marie did not have as positive an attitude toward school as children whose parents were more conventional" (p. 142). As a result, and despite the fact that this student had a top performance and "greater reading fluency when reading aloud than most of her peers, Mrs. Sampson did not focus on her reading skills until the end of the year, when she looked at the standardized test scores" (p. 143). According to Lareau's (1993) analysis, "it is possible, even likely, that Mrs. Sampson's negative assessment of Anne-Marie's home life clouded her view of the child's classroom performance ... until challenged by test scores. With other children ... [especially a Vietnamese boy and a sheriff's daughter] Mrs. Sampson appeared to expect good performance and was on the lookout for evidence of academic promise" (p.143).

Thus, while in the lower class school Lareau (1993) discovered that "children's schooling - particularly their access to special programs - could be shaped more by teachers' perceptions of the parents' role in education than by the children's performance in the classroom," at the upper middle-class school she found "no signs ... of teachers - on their own initiative - altering a child's school program based on their assessment of the students' parents' values" (p. 143).

The counterpart of parental involvement is teacher positive discrimination, non-involvement resulting in negative discrimination. As Lareau (1993) states, while parents' actions "appeared to influence teachers' assessment of children's abilities and their potential for achievement" (p. 141), in turn "when teachers believed that parents valued education and were heavily involved in children's schooling, they took actions which they did not take for children whose parents were less active in schooling" (p. 140). This is understandable in terms that the logic of the school and its agents is also a logic of investment and profit, minimization of time and effort (and frustration), and maximization of success and gains; hence, automatic and unconscious reading of signs of cultural, social, and economic capital orient decisions regarding the capitalization on the apparent habitus within interpersonal relations.

Quite surprisingly, however, Lareau (1993) denies the occurrence of institutional discrimination, for teachers did not "make different requests of parents or, even in subtle ways, encourage upper-middle-class parents to be involved more than working-class parents" (p. 104).[76] The way she poses the issue is already revealing of

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[76] Nevertheless, Lareau (1993) observed that "the tone, breadth, and quality" (p. 105) of teacher-parent interactions differed between the working-class and upper-middle class schools: more stilted in the former and more relaxed in the latter, a

a particular arbitrary stance: that parental involvement is positive, then all parents should be equally encouraged to get involved, which leaves the choice - merit or fault - to them. By limiting potential discrimination to a discrete moment (teachers' first move), she misses its dynamic (as if all was left to parents' initiative), as well as the prior point that the conditions for (further) discrimination are already embedded in the very request of parental involvement.

Policy prospects

As education involves the workings of family and school, amid a multitude of other powerful social influences, educational policy can be conceived precisely as a framework connecting their interactions in favor of public goals. However, as schooling is not equal to education, it is important to recognize that educational policy carries fundamentally the politics of schooling, which nonetheless has served differently the politics of education of diverse families. In the past, while school policy didn't deal directly and explicitly with family education, parent-teacher-principal interactions were left to random individual initiative within traditional local politics, which worked well for certain groups and individuals. What is new now, and needs to be acknowledged, is that state policy is not only expanding its scope of

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feature not attributable to teachers' treatment. She also noted that the working class school had three formal programs of parental involvement (a Read-at-Home Program, a parent education workshop, and a class on parenting for single parents), and that the teachers there "were more vigorous ... in recruiting parents to work with their children at home" (p. 106); in contrast, the upper-middle-class school had a very active parents' club, which sponsored fund-raising activities and a classroom volunteer program (giving parents opportunities to learn about instructional activities, their children's performance within the group, and teachers' performance, as well).

action by formalizing those interactions and by specifying the educational contribution of the family toward schooling, but is also regulating family-school relations according to one particular model: the middle-class pattern of parental involvement.

So, this new movement articulates family policy with school policy on behalf of children, and seemingly under a framework of social efficiency. It is very complicated and full of contradictions. While it is generally expected that public policy should deal with the school, and not interfere with the private realm of family education, a policy like parental involvement in schooling tends to raise immediate agreement and even enthusiasm. It sounds correct because it draws on parents' natural obligation, good because it aims at benefiting children, desirable because it will increase democratic participation and raise school achievement. Moreover, it echoes the middle-class cultural tradition, specifically the belief that families, i.e. parents, influence school policy. Nevertheless, besides specific conditions and dispositions of parents to participate, such a policy presupposes perhaps what it aims at building: cultural continuity and identity of purposes between all families and school, a doubtful prerequisite in times of acute cultural diversity and contention (Hunter, 1991; Berliner, 1997).

A basic contradictory aspect refers to the family-school division of educational work. If it is consensual that both families and schools educate, the intersections and boundaries of their roles have not been stable or thoroughly clear. On the one hand, suspending the fact that schooling builds on a particular family-class culture (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977), according to the traditional delegation model teachers shouldn't expect from parents more than physical and emotional care, so that children could

come to school prepared to learn the school's special knowledge. Apparently, the "crisis of the family" (stressed parents, working mothers, divorce, burdened single parents, lack of quantity and quality time with children) has reduced its role in physical, emotional, social, and moral discipline, requiring schools, in turn, to extend their traditional role in academic and civic instruction in order to encompass various bio-psycho-social aspects. In this context, precisely, it is inconceivable to attribute the family a role in academic education. On the other hand, suspending the latent conflict between parents and teachers (Waller, 1965), it seems reasonable to count on parents and to expect them to be the teachers' best allies in schooling: parents desire the best for their children and would be willing to help teachers' efforts in various ways. But this supposes a few conditions: that the parents dispose of time, interest, and know-how in order to help, that they are familiar with the school culture and value the school curriculum, and that they submit to teachers' authority and lead. Granted these conditions, parents' work for schooling, with moral and emotional obligation as an incentive, would have the advantage of bearing no direct costs for the school. And, in case parents needed to be taught how to help, it would have the additional advantage of creating special projects, new grants, and specialized jobs in the school and academy.

A related contradictory aspect pertains to teacher authority. In the delegation model, family authority and school authority are separate, teacher authority being enacted over the student in the limits of the classroom, and not being constantly mediated by the parent. In the partnership model, on the contrary, teachers may both exert authority over the parents, as the latter mediate between schoolwork and

homework, and resent parental interference in their professional camp. Another cost for teachers may derive from the new obligation to consult, coordinate, and evaluate parents' homework. Moreover, a teacher-parent partnership may invite two peculiar situations: one in which teacher and parent dispute instructional choices, or compete for influence over the child, and another in which they become accomplices in pressuring the child. Of course there can be happy cases in which teacher-parent-child get along well; but there can be also unlucky relationships having to last for a whole school year! So, while sometimes students might benefit from a teacher-parent alliance, they can also benefit from difference between adults' approaches. The contradiction for teachers is that they need and like parents' interest, support, and appreciation, but they are better off with the delegation model.

Why do teachers *need* parental involvement? I firmly believe that when teachers have good work conditions, and students learn satisfactorily, they do not need to engage ordinarily with parents. Teachers have needed parental backing when they feel impotent and frustrated. And they have typically blamed the family for student failure because they are also subject to blame from principals and parents, and moreover because they lack the practical and intellectual means to develop an effective social, institutional, and pedagogic critique, due to the very function and conditions of their work. For the essential contradiction of teachers' work is that they are supposed to help students learn and, at the same time, to assess them negatively and fail them, in the name of meritocracy, or with the purpose of helping them further. Parents, in turn, don't need to get involved in schooling as long as all is going well, and they normally prefer to trust teachers and leave the job to them. For one thing, there are

also gains in maintaining a distance from school and its demands, as parent-child relations can be more relaxing and enjoyable if they don't spin around school subjects, homework, quizzes, and grades.

Another potential source of tensions may derive from parental conceptions of education and perceptions of schooling. From the perspective of the family, parental involvement in education and in schooling are, indeed, two different things, which might fit or crash. As long as there is agreement over the content and quality of education offered by schools, i.e. parental tacit support, and satisfactory student outcomes, i.e. convergence of individual achievement and institutional efficiency, all is well; conversely, if learning is perceived as deficient, either in individual or general terms, or if it conflicts with family values, then there is a situation of crisis. Albeit the continual rhetoric of crisis might be, to a great extent, fabricated, as Berliner & Biddle (1995) argue, there is disagreement over the content of schooling in U.S. society, and discontent over its quantitative and/or qualitative outcomes among various groups, either conservative or progressive. In such cases, participation in school may ensue from parents' initiative, either individually in attempting to get a tailored education for a particular child, or collectively organized around a specific change agenda, as for instance the current movement against outcome-based education (Luksik & Hoffecker, 1995); or else parents may try to compensate for schools' lacks by private means, or even radically withdraw from public education, as exemplified by the home schooling movement.

Therefore, the main contradiction of parental involvement in schooling as a policy is that, albeit wrapped as grass-roots, it is really top-down - but, of course, no

contradiction is likely to be perceived by those who or are on top or share into its logic (the cultural arbitrary where it is nested). As it basically depends on consensus over purposes, meanings, and contents of schooling, and on coincidence between parents' educational conceptions and possibilities, and school goals and practices, ultimately this policy bears upon the hierarchical relation between school knowledge and family diverse cultures, with the equity implications already suggested.

Alternatively, what would a policy concerned with equity pose in terms of school purposes and family-school relations? In order to answer this question it is important to retrieve two fundamental points: the democratic ideal of education, and the social function of schooling.

Recalling Bourdieu & Passeron's (1977) theoretical contribution, the educational system fulfills relatively stable social functions: it plays a key role in cultural and social reproduction, by inflating or deflating students' initial cultural capital acquired from family and class socialization, and converting it (or not) into more or less valued credentials. The individual path to profitable exchanges and school success depends on 'familiarity' with the school's specific knowledge, language, and standards of evaluation, and reflects the distance or affinity between home and class culture (informal education) and academic culture (the formal school curriculum). Thus, the production of educational failure is intrinsic to the functioning of an educational system that encompasses individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds, but implicitly adopts one cultural framework. Consequently, policies which leave these particular reproductive mechanisms untouched necessarily promote educational and social inequality by reinforcing the existing structure of the distribution of cultural

capital among the social classes.

Moreover, a policy that misrecognizes the fact that both material and cultural resources are pre-conditions for successful alignment to the educational mode of the dominant culture, that is, that omits the fact that a certain initial cultural capital (produced, transmitted, and inherited within particular social conditions) is required to invest in and benefit from the school mode, and explicitly demands family alignment to the school, is strangely assigning the family not only entire responsibility for student success, but also a (political and improper) role in minimizing educational and social inequalities, inequalities which the family does not produce or reproduce. Thus, it seems obvious that a policy that prescribes the educative role of families in relation to school goals is likely to create more inequity, as schools (which have properly a political role) organize their processes counting on the implicit and explicit support of families.

Social equality and individual self-realization are ideals and aspirations. The fact that they haven't come true doesn't diminish their power in orienting human pursuits and inspiring the educational agenda. The limited powers of both families and school in promoting them have to be acknowledged, so that alternatives can be devised.

Once the political-structural limits of schooling, in particular, are acknowledged, the issue of realizing its specific symbolic power remains: reproduction *still* allows for a range of choices (and ideological disputes) in terms of knowledge and practices. Bourdieu & Passeron's (1977) framework shows that, as the school constitutes a symbolic market in itself - in that it mediates between preceding

individual and family inequality and broader, parallel, and subsequent (in terms of the individual life course) economic and symbolic structures - it has some degree of autonomy to influence the processes and outcomes of its own production (the space of production in re-production). As it constitutes a setting of symbolic exchanges and conflicts, the school has also, *ideally*, to conciliate between the dissemination of a common culture (the dominant cultural arbitrary, in any case) and respect for diverse individuals and cultures, through - as much as possible - democratic processes.[77] Consequently, educational policies and practices represent a range of choices in reducing or augmenting the dependence of students' opportunities upon their social origins, in breaking or fastening the *automatic* conversion of family and class material and cultural differences into school success or failure. In thinking over the possibilities of *conversion of symbolic capital*, in the terrain of cultural diversity, precisely resides the fecundity of pedagogy.

Along this line, an alternative policy framework for family-school relations, aiming at producing a more equalizing effect, should initially frame the relations between these distinct institutions as nonessential and accessory, that is, entirely optional, recognizing family educational practices as diverse and autonomous, while clearly demarcating the specificity of the pedagogic work (purposes and knowledge) of the school. Because the crucial issue of family-school interactions is cultural, referring to the reproduction of a cultural arbitrary, and implying the demarcation of the knowledge to be imposed upon all and assessed in the context of schooling, from

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[77] Socio-interactionist instructional methods, following a Vygostyan approach, provide for good a example.

the perspective of the family the problem can be defined as to what extent school offers a valuable knowledge and succeeds in imparting it, while simultaneously allowing for the co-existence of diverse cultures and knowledges in the family and community realms.

In contrast, the education encompassed by schooling is distinctively political and fundamentally distinct from - and not necessarily continuous with - the education provided by diverse families. Along this line, a project of educational equity must initially recognize and respect families' differentiated resources and choices, and clearly delimit the school's educative mission in terms of imparting a common and special knowledge within its own time, space and resources, while simultaneously compensating for cultural differentials and, therefore, assessing only what it explicitly and systematically offers. In other words, instead of counting on the educational workings of the family, the school should work ways to precisely discount family educational input from its educational output by investing in effective pedagogic processes, consequently liberating families from any form of educational accountability defined by school policy and practice.[78]

It is useful to recall here Bourdieu & Passeron's (1977) point that the efficiency of modes of inculcation, i.e. an effective pedagogy, "cannot be defined independently from the content inculcated and the social functions which the

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[78] I was asked provocatively whether the *solution* should be, then, to *prohibit parental involvement*. Of course not, for the same reason parental involvement should not be mandated. Parental involvement is good, what is bad is grading children on the basis of their parents' availability to help with school work. Parental involvement in schooling in the home is a matter of private choice and possibility; parental participation in the school and classroom should be steered at benefiting all students and the school community.

pedagogic work in question fulfills in a determinate social formation" (p. 47). In this light, as pointed out by Gagnon (1995), the role of a core curriculum and universal standards is crucial for equality: only by defining "the basics" of public education, as a clear intellectual project can its proper pedagogic role be strengthened. And, indeed, from the very point of view of the dominant cultural arbitrary, democratization both presupposes and follows from knowledge. Thus, insofar as the *differential productivity of schooling according to ethnic group and social class is produced by the very exercise of its pedagogic work*, which excludes those who lack the capital and ethos objectively presupposed by its mode of inculcation, the school then must *produce as much as possible the conditions for its own productivity*, that is, invest in effective teaching-learning methods, without relying in pre-conditions produced elsewhere.

Finally, without a critical view of the function of the educational system in reproducing social inequality, through its implicit partnership with one kind of family, and through the very exercise of its specific forms of pedagogic work, it is not possible to see the false promise of parental involvement as a policy and generalizable practice. For one thing, the strategy of reaching the family in order to capitalize on family (differentiated) resources as a way to simultaneously reduce state investments in education, enhance student achievement and school productivity, and better educate all children seems rather tortuous. The practical forms and effects of this mandated partnership may be to create more complications for both schools and families, and to amplify educational inequity, in spite of good intentions. Therefore, since it is quite doubtful that educational policy can exert a more equalizing effect by focusing on the

family, it should definitely retire from the family realm and re-focus on the learning environment and purposes of the school.

Chapter 4

RESEARCH AND POLICY: CRITIQUE OF THE GROUNDS AND PROMISES OF PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

Educational research, policy, and instruction are specific complex practices in their own right, related to distinct purposes and interests, albeit sharing, in principle, a common purpose and ground. Their interrelations are even a more complicated issue. On the one hand, in our complex social and educational systems, the gaps among the practices of researching, policymaking, and teaching result from distinct spaces, times, and people involved, presenting a problem of communication and coordination, from the outset. One important specific difficulty refers exactly to differences of perspective (derived from distinct contexts of social production and personal commitments) and struggles of interests among professional groups. On the other hand, a general hierarchical model links their distinct realms: research is the realm of production of trustworthy knowledge and authoritative discourses; policy is the realm of articulation and dissemination of discourses as well as planning of effective actions; and practice is the realm of implementation of informed action. It follows that knowledge should inform plans and action. How should - or could - research knowledge inform policy and practice remains a problematic question.[1] Yet, a

[1] Other important related questions are whether available research offers sufficient 'conclusions' which may be considered an appropriate basis for policymaking (Ben-Peretz, 1989), and why research does not *directly* influence or found policymaking or practice (Cohen & Garet, 1975).

fundamental question is: what kind of research and knowledge can best inform policy and practice?

Setting aside doubts as to whether research can really provide comprehensive pictures and solutions for problems, whether its product (knowledge) is in any case useful as a guide for practice, and whether its pace could keep up with the urgencies of practice,[2] one thing that can be said is that the research discourse usually confers authority to policy and practice and, thus, is used with ideological and rhetorical purposes in order to build consensus and urge action. And, indeed, the research enterprise survives and struggles to expand by selling the very idea of a fundamental necessity of sound scientific knowledge for solving or illuminating educational problems, and guiding action.

In this context, it is tempting to see policy as exerting a mediation role between researched problems and well-grounded solutions, i.e. possible effective actions. In this sense policy would be seen as informed decision prescribing the best course of action, while research would be the best source of information, conferring a scientific seal onto it. However, there are competing sources of information (and dispersed knowledge) and pressure (interests) for policy decisions, besides so called scientific knowledge. It is also tempting to see research as an independent effort, ignoring the fact that researchers' choices in selecting and defining researchable problems are also influenced by educational policies (and political courses of interest)

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[2] The dynamics of both social reality and research practice (the knowledge production race) create successive shifts and constantly redefine problems, though basic problems remain. In turn, policy and practice bear their own dynamics, demanding political choice and prompt action, and cannot wait for the 'right' knowledge.

designed elsewhere, as well as - and principally - by long lasting cultural traditions and ideologies. Finally, it is also tempting to see knowledge produced by research as 'new evidence,' forgetting the basic role of theories - more or less conscious, explicit, or sophisticated - which inform and propel any research, policy and practice, and connect past experiences and future visions.

With these considerations in mind, in this chapter I examine research grounding parental involvement. In order to make this task viable, I restrict my sources to Henderson & Berla's (1995) report[3] *The Family is Critical to Student Achievement* - an annotated bibliography of 66 titles, ranging from 1969 to 1993, and including research reports, reviews, articles, and books, classified in three groups: programs and interventions, family processes, and school policies. Because Henderson & Berla (1995) focus on family empowerment, student achievement, and effective schooling as a result of parental involvement, they offer a particularly conclusive reading of this research: "to those who ask whether involving parents will really make a difference, we can safely say that the case is closed" (p. x). My reading, however, will focus on unpacking the articulation of research and policy rationales, inquiring on how the importance of family for school success has been constructed or corroborated by both research and policy.

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[3] This report is the third on the role of parental involvement in improving student achievement, published by the National Committee for Citizens in Education (NCCE), whose mission - parent and disadvantaged student advocacy - is defined as "putting the public back in the public schools" (Henderson and Berla, 1995, p. x).

1. Parental involvement as a research problem

Parental involvement emerged as a variable in the evaluation research on compensatory education programs, which were designed with a parental education component. Insofar as evaluation is a regular component of program implementation, it is obvious, in this case, that policy propelled research and, moreover, that both bear an utilitarian character and accent. According to Henderson and Berla (1995), "by 1987 ... the subject had come into its own as a special topic of research.... Now, in 1994, the field has become a growth industry" (p ix). Epstein (1996) so expresses the present research agenda grounded on the concurrent implementation of partnership programs:

> We have moved from the question, Are families important for student success in school? to *If* families are important for children's development and school success, *how* can schools help all families conduct the activities that will benefit their children? Researchers and educators have common questions, such as: What do we need to know and do to help all children succeed in school and to enable their families to help them do so? How can schools communicate with families and community groups to enable more families (indeed all of them) to guide their children on positive paths from birth through high school? How can these communications be family friendly, feasible for schools, and acceptable to students? What are the effects of alternative designs and implementation processes of practices of partnership? (Epstein, 1996, p. 213)

Following Henderson & Berla's (1995) two decade research display, I examine next the different research focuses on the role of the family in schooling.

Parental involvement within compensatory programs

The first group of 33 studies - evaluation of early intervention, mostly preschool (16 studies) and elementary school (14 studies) compensatory programs -

poses parental involvement as a factor of student achievement, basically correlating increased parental involvement with "significant gains" in academic achievement (Thompson, 1993). The particular quest is to demonstrate the relationship between parental involvement specifically furthered by parent education - 'parents as teachers of young children' (Goodson & Hess, 1975)[4] - and improvement in disadvantaged students' IQ and other academic performance tests (Mowry, 1972; Radin, 1972; Stearns & Peterson, et. al., 1973; Guinagh & Gordon, 1976; Leler, 1987). This rationale is further expanded by various studies in order to include positive, significant, measurable benefits not only for children, but also for families, and even for schools as institutions serving the community (Gordon, 1979).

The designs of this set of evaluations are traditional experimental (typically two different treatment-groups for kind and amount of parental participation, and one control group) and longitudinal studies. The findings are presented as almost invariably positive, as for instance: Head Start centers with high levels of parental involvement in both decision-making and learning roles consistently had children who performed higher on verbal intelligence, academic achievement, self-concept, and behavior in classrooms and at home (Mowry, 1972); early stimulation via parent education produced significant immediate and long-term gains in IQ scores and school performance (Guinagh & Gordon, 1976), as well as positive changes in the teaching behavior of parents (Goodson & Hess, 1975); children whose parents spent the most time participating in program or school activities scored highest on reasoning, verbal

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[4] Few studies refer explicitly to mothers. See, for instance, Radin (1972), and Bronfenbrenner (1974).

concepts and school-related skills (Irvine, 1979); involving parents as tutors and trainers was associated with improved IQ scores (Stearns & Peterson, et. al., 1973), and with improved performance in reading and math in early elementary school (Olmsted & Rubin, 1982).

However, as pointed out by Lazar & Darlington (1978), parental involvement cannot be easily isolated and measured as a variable, though it is part of a cluster of factors considered necessary for program effectiveness. More recently, this line of studies received a comprehensive methodological critique. After reviewing the design of 193 such program studies, according to rigorous standards of reliability and validity, White, Taylor & Moss (1992) concluded that "claims that parental involvement in early intervention leads to benefits ... are without foundation and should be disregarded until such time as defensible research is available to support such a position" (p. 118). Their arguments are well grounded:

> In summary, we found no evidence of larger effect sizes for intervention versus no-intervention studies which involved parents versus similar studies which did not involve parents. Admittedly, the potential for confounding variables to obscure true relationships in a data set of this nature is substantial. Furthermore, as shown by the data reported ... most of these studies have focused primarily or even exclusively on using parents as intervenors instead of involving them in other ways. Thus, it would be inappropriate to conclude, based on this data, that parent involvement in early intervention is not beneficial. Just as important, however, is the fact that no information exists in this admittedly indirect type of evidence to argue that parent involvement in early intervention will lead to any of the benefits that are often claimed. (White, Taylor & Moss, 1992. p. 109)

Of course the role of parents in student achievement has always been known from direct experience by teachers, and by those individuals who benefited from their parents' academic support, in spite of research. Accordingly, intervention programs

not only strongly underscore the role of parents in efforts to raise disadvantaged children's achievement,[5] extending it in order to encompass activities as tutors, classroom volunteers, paraprofessionals, adult learners, adult educators, and decision-makers (Stearns and Peterson, et. al., 1973; Gordon, 1979), but actually forego explanation (beyond common-sense, or classical research on indicators of educational attainment) to illuminate the correlation between parental involvement (and forms of involvement) and student achievement, or to account for the imperative of parental involvement as the definitive or most appropriate measure for improving achievement.

Explanatory research is still meager. Stearns & Peterson (1973) explain the relation between parent education and student achievement in preschool in terms of a cycle of success-reinforcement involving child motivation, skill, learning and performance, and parent self-image, competence and confidence. Bronfenbrenner (1974) stresses the importance of the home component in preschool programs for disadvantaged children, as parent intervention would act as a "fixative" of school influences. Goodson & Hess (1975) attribute the success of preschool-parent education programs to an increase in parents' awareness of their influence on their child's behavior, and systematic focus on parent-child verbal interaction. Becher (1984) highlights several key family "process variables" related to student achievement in elementary school: parents' high expectations for children, frequent interactions

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[5] For instance, "the extent of parental involvement is a critical variable to the benefits derived by children from their Head Start experience" (Mowry, 1972); or "long-term IQ gains can be achieved by early intervention only when the parent-child relationship is properly treated" (Bronfenbrenner, 1974). The rationale is simple: the more comprehensive and long-lasting the parent involvement, the more effective it is likely to be (Gordon, 1979).

with them, modeling of learning and achievement, and actions as "teachers" of their children, using complex language and problem-solving strategies, and reinforcing what they learn in school.

Finally, Becher's (1984) conclusion in a "review of research and principles of successful practice" is illustrative of the research-policy partnership in this area: "extensive, substantial, and convincing evidence suggests that parents play a crucial role in both the home and school environments with respect to facilitating the development of intelligence, achievement, and competence in their children" (p. 39); it follows that programs that encourage parents to engage in educational activities with their children are likely to be effective in improving the cognitive development of children.

Eventually, what is left as grounds for policy is just plain rhetorical appeal, as for instance in Beane's (1990) report on a program sponsored by the National Urban Coalition, called *Say Yes to a Youngster's Future*: "While many school improvement projects can be implemented without a parent or family component, programs that aim to make a substantial impact on the long-term participation and performance of under-represented children of color in mathematics and science *must* generate home and community support" (p. 361, italics added). Thus, the policy interpretation of this research is that if "programs designed with extensive parental involvement can boost low income students' achievement to levels expected for middle-class students" (Henderson & Berla, 1995, p. 7), then parental involvement (and training) is a solution to inequity. The viability - and even desirability - of generalizing such programs remains unexamined. And, ironically, this kind of research and related

policy is blind to the fact that compensatory programs with a stress on parent involvement end up demanding a great deal from parents in order to "compensate" for what parents didn't offer in the first place.

Family background influence on student achievement

The second group of 29 studies, involving both quantitative and qualitative approaches, pursues the relationship between parental involvement and student achievement from the perspective of the family, focusing on the influence of family background, processes, and interactions with the school on children's development, grades, test scores, high school graduation rates, and enrollment in higher education.

Essentially, "directly or indirectly all the studies address the extent to which family socio-economic status (SES)[6] determines the quality of student performance" (Henderson & Berla, 1995, p. 7). Interestingly, Henderson & Berla's (1995) reading of some of those studies,[7] although recognizing the irrefutably positive correlation between family SES and student achievement, not only stresses the association between family practices and student achievement, but also suggests that "family practices can have an effect independent of SES." Hence, "parent encouragement at home and participation in school activities are the key factors related to children's achievement, more significant than either student ability or SES" (p. 8).

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[6] Eagle (1989), for instance, considered the following indicators of SES: mother's education, father's education, family income, father's occupational status, and number of major material possessions.

[7] See Sattes (1985), Ziegler (1987), Eagle (1989), Milne (1989), Kellaghan et al., (1993).

In attempting to deny or counteract the power of SES, this research agenda cannot produce but an ambiguous rationale - yet, again, assigning the compensatory effort to the parents - as expressed in conclusions such as:

> While parent affluence and education level are consistently related to their children's educational achievement (that is, students from high-SES families tend to do better than students from low-SES families when both groups of parents are highly involved), "parents of any social class can contribute to their children's postsecondary educational attainment by monitoring educational progress during high school." (Eagle, 1989, in Henderson & Berla, 1995, p. 60)[8]

> In spite of the confusing evidence on the disadvantages of children of single-parents and working-mothers, "what is important is the ability of the parent(s) to provide proeducational resources for their children - be they financial, material, or experiential." (Milne, 1989, in Henderson & Berla, 1995, p. 92)[9] High-SES students tend to do better because their mothers are more educated and employ better management skills in steering their school careers, since they are more familiar with the system, having negotiated it successfully for themselves. Yet, "whether children's options for post-secondary education remain open depends not on the socio-economic status of their family, but on how well their parents can help manage their progress through school" (Baker & Stevenson, 1986, in Henderson & Berla, 1995, p. 26). Moreover, "if they become actively involved in school activities, mothers with less formal education can have as much positive impact as do highly educated mothers." (Stevenson & Baker, 1987, in Henderson & Berla, 1995, p. 130)[10]

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[8] Eagle (1989) analyzed the data-base of the 1980 High School and Beyond and 1986 follow-up surveys, conducted by the National Center for Educational Statistics, focusing on family characteristics most associated with student enrollment in post-secondary education and attainment of a college degree across SES. She found that the most significant family background characteristic related to achievement was parent involvement during high school, defined as frequency of talking to teachers, planning for post-high school activities, and monitoring of school work.

[9] Milne (1989) reviewed literature on the impact of family structure, specifically number of parents and mother work outside the home, on children's school achievement.

[10] Baker & Stevenson (1986), and also Stevenson & Baker (1987), similarly to Lareau (1993), show how high-SES parents influence their children's performance through active involvement in school activities, and particularly how involvement in the school site mediates the effect of mothers' education on students' performance.

This research represents an attempt to establish the relative autonomy of educational and cultural factors (the role of parents' effort) in front of socio-economic conjunctures.[11] However, the implicit theory of culture informing such a rationale apparently relies on a material-symbolic dichotomy, obscuring the relationship between SES (family material conditions) and home culture (parents' beliefs, values, skills, and investments in education). As a result, the very fact that education interventions address an already distinct - social class and/or ethnic group - culture (continually constructed within the interaction of particular material and symbolic factors) seems to be overlooked, leading to an exaggerated belief in the power of school policy to change home culture where it is perceived as deficient, and to the current call for action in terms that schools must support families develop the cultural conditions required for school success. This rationale omitts the fact that schools are the specific site where learning outcomes are produced, as if student success simply depended on the will of the parents.

Along this line, Sattes (1985), for instance, conceives family practices (reading to children, guiding TV watching, and providing stimulating experiences) as variables subject to change, which can be positively shaped by involvement with schools. Cochran & Henderson (1986) suggest that "the school can be a powerful force for

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[11] Henderson & Berla (1995) put it in this way: "In fact, the most accurate predictor of a student's achievement in school is not income or social status, but the extent to which that student's family is able to: create a home environment that encourages learning; express high (but not unrealistic) expectations for their children's achievement and future careers; become involved in their children's education at school and in the community" (p. 1).

building parent capacity and thereby buffer the negative consequences of low-income" (Henderson & Berla, 1995, p. 46). Ziegler (1987) offers the following opinion:

> The gap in school achievement between working-class and middle-class children is more effectively explained by differing patterns of child-parent and parent-school interaction than it is by characteristics of socio-economic status (SES). School personnel can intervene positively and effectively to show parents how to help their children be successful. The attitudes and behavior of parents who have felt powerless and excluded *can* be changed. Aggressive outreach techniques may be necessary to establish communication with ethnic, racial, and language-minority families. (In Henderson & Berla, 1995, p. 151)

And, more recently, Kellaghan et al. (1993) have reiterated the issue in this way:

> The socio-economic level or cultural background of a home *need not* determine how well a child does at school. Parents from a variety of cultural backgrounds and with different levels of education, income or occupational status can and do provide stimulating home environments that support and encourage the learning of their children. It is what parents do in the home rather than their status that is important. (Kellaghan et al., 1993, p. 145).

Families as learning environments

The studies focusing specifically on families as learning environments basically compare parenting (precisely mothering) styles, strategies for teaching children at home, and expectations for academic performance (Clark, 1983; Scott-Jones, 1984, 1987; Dornbusch et al., 1987) associated with high-achieving students with those associated with low-achieving students. Their implicit premise is that families must provide the dispositions (Bourdieu and Passeron's *habitus*) toward school learning and success.

Rumberger et al. (1990), for instance, examined how family processes influenced high school students' achievement and dropout behavior, finding that dropouts are more likely to have parents less involved in their education, involvement

being defined as monitoring and helping with homework, attending school conferences and functions, and providing a supportive learning environment at home. In contrast, high achievers, across grade levels and social groups, have been identified with the following home characteristics: daily routines for study, sleep, household chores, and limited TV watching for children[12]; parent modeling of the values of learning, self-discipline, and hard work, through conversations and shared activities, such as visits to the library[13]; parent expression of high but realistic expectations for children achievement, and encouragement and reinforcement of school progress[14]; reading, writing, and discussions among family members[15]; and use of community resources.[16] Thus, Kellaghan et al. (1993) conclude that "the home environment is a most powerful factor in determining level of school achievement, interest in school learning, and the number of years of schooling" (pp. 144-145).

However, though there exist exemplary low-income family environments which

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[12] See, for instance, Benson et al. (1980); Walberg et al. (1980); Clark (1983); Walberg (1984); Eagle (1989); Clark (1990); and Kellaghan et al. (1993).

[13] See, for instance, Dornbusch et al. (1987); Steinberg et al. (1989); Rumburger et al. (1990); Snow et al. (1991); Caplan et al. (1992); and Clark (1993).

[14] See, for instance, Scott-Jones (1984); Baker & Stevenson (1986); Schiamberg & Chun (1986); Fehrmann et al. (1987); Stevenson & Baker (1987); Ziegler (1987); Eagle (1989); Melnick & Fiene (1990); Snow et al. (1991); Mitrsomwang & Hawley (1992); Dauber & Epstein (1993); Kellaghan et al. (1993); and Reynolds et al. (1993).

[15] See, for instance, Tizard et al. (1982); Becher (1984); Scott-Jones (1987); Ziegler (1987); Epstein (1991); Snow et al. (1991); and Kellaghan et al. (1993).

[16] See, for instance, Benson et al. (1980); Beane (1990); Clark (1990); Nettles (1991); and Chavkin (1993).

have produced successful students (Clark, 1983),[17] the parenting style associated with successful school performance is also associated with higher levels of income and education (Benson et al., 1980; Eagle, 1989). There is also evidence that while particular forms of parent-child interactions and parent involvement at school may reduce the achievement deficit of low-SES children in elementary school, they *do not* overcome their disadvantages compared with their upper-SES peers (Benson et al., 1980). Moreover, as Steinberg et al. (1989) stress, it is not possible to establish that positive (authoritative) parenting practices cause or even precede outcomes such as higher grades, more self-reliance, less psychological distress, and less delinquent activity.

If one interrogates the implications of this line of research on family processes, two interrelated aspects arise. One refers to the model of family environment and parenting style related to school success, and to the danger of judging negatively other kinds of environment and style. It doesn't require too much knowledge to recognize that model as typically middle-class, nor does it require much imagination to identify it with the Puritan ethos. The second aspect bears upon the endeavor to improve family environments and make them more educationally productive, as suggested by the following titles: "Families as Educators: Time Use Contributions to School Achievement" (Benson et al., 1980); and "Families as Partners in Educational Productivity" (Walberg, 1984).

Clark (1990), for instance, estimating that students spend 70 per cent of their

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[17] Clark's (1983) in-depth case studies of poor Black families' successful and unsuccessful senior high school students highlight different family contexts and parenting styles.

waking hours (surely an overestimation) outside of school, discovered that high achieving students typically spend about 20 hours a week engaged in "constructive learning activity" after school - practically 4 hours each school day, while they do only 2 to 3 hours of chores a week, implying an available adult who does everything else for them. Because Clark presumably finds the learning time in school insufficient (quite surprisingly, since the school day is 7 hours), or ineffective (since school learning time, according to his estimate, may vary from 7.5 hours a week in poorly organized classrooms to 17.5 hours in the best settings), he passes the responsibility for learning on to the family.

In a similar guise, Kellaghan et al. (1993), figuring that from birth (?) to age 18, children spend only about 13 percent of their waking hours in school (!), stress the importance of home processes: "*how time and space are organized and used, how parents and children interact and spend time together, and the values that govern the family's choice of things to do*" (In Henderson & Berla, 1995, p. 77). Consequently, they propose a framework for home intervention and parent education based on five home-process variables: *family work habits* based on a regular routine and *priority to schoolwork*; academic guidance, support and encouragement of schoolwork; stimulation and opportunities to explore and discuss ideas and events; language environment for development of correct and effective use of language; academic aspirations and expectations for children, and knowledge of their school experiences.[18]

Thus, while this line of research does not contribute to changes in the quality of school and classroom instruction, its main political implication might well be to

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[18] Walberg's (1984) "curriculum of the home" represents a similar framework.

impose one model of family and parenting, eliminating family cultural diversity in exchange for a mere promise of school success, and straining parents and children for school productivity reasons. Oddly, the emphasis on productivity has generated a popular strategy, quite generalized in school practice: the formal contract. Gillum (1977), for instance, refers to parents' performance contracts to improve reading skills of low-income elementary school children, with specific tasks, vouchers, and stipends for parents. Walberg et al. (1980) mentions a contract signed by superintendent, principal, teacher, parent and elementary student, stipulating parents' tasks: to provide a special place in the home for study; to encourage the child daily through discussions; to attend to student's progress and compliment him/her on gains; to cooperate with the teacher appropriately.

And, finally, this focus on parents as a resource requires a new role of teachers: "leadership in organizing, evaluating, and continually building their parent involvement practices" (Epstein, 1991, p. 274), i.e. in attempting to turn all parents into that middle-class model of parent who helps routinely with homework. Nevertheless, teacher leadership is likely to encounter cultural and educational limits in parental resources. In her study, Epstein (1991)[19] found that "teacher leadership in parent involvement in learning activities at home positively and significantly influences change in reading achievement" (p. 266); however, she did not find a similar relationship for math achievement, suggesting that teachers may need to give more

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[19] Epstein (1991) studied, through multiple regression analysis, the relative effects of student and family background (sex, race, parent education, Fall test scores), teacher quality and leadership in parent involvement, parent reactions (rating of requests and quality of homework), and student effort (quality of homework completed), comparing Spring and Fall scores.

help to parents so that they understand how to assist, guide and monitor their children's math homework. This suggests that teacher leadership is likely to resonate and corroborate cultural and educational factors already present in the home and *natural* in adult-child interaction, for instance capitalizing on reading for children as a substitute for traditional story-telling. Insofar as the school curriculum and learning models include contents and forms of construction and expression which are not natural in many home contexts, hence the need of parent education is further corroborated.

Class and cultural mismatch

A few studies of family-school interactions focus on class and cultural mismatch, referring to differences between values and ways of learning promoted at home and those promoted at school. Comparing White middle and working class families' interactions with schools, Lareau (1993) found that the former not only have time, money, and cultural resources to participate in schooling, but their education also facilitates interactions with teachers. Middle-class culture and social networks concur to what Wong Fillmore (1990) calls a "seamless splice" between home and school; working class culture stresses "separation between home and school, reducing opportunities for collaboration and lowering teachers' expectations for children" (Henderson & Berla, 1995, p. 10).

In addition, ethnic and language diversity play an important part in family-school relations, accounting for the mismatch between the type of socialization, child rearing and skill development natural in certain cultural groups and the background

(home preparation) children need to prosper in mainstream American public schools (Wong Fillmore, 1990). In fact, the research reviewed by Wong Fillmore (1990) shows that mainstream White and Chinese-American are successful in school because the middle-class values and models of learning promoted in their homes are compatible with school requirements; in the cases of working-class Black and White, and Mexican-Americans a mismatch occurs between the preparation provided by the home and that which is expected by the school.

The cultural mismatch view and the knowledge about cultural diversity have moved educational interventions away from the cultural deprivation disabling approach in the direction of learning about and valuing the skills, strengths and values of ethnic minority children and their families (Goldenburg, 1987).[20] In the opposite direction of the conventional quick acculturation expectation, Cummins (1986), for instance, claims that school failure does not occur in the case of minority groups (such as Jews and Asian-Americans) who are not alienated from their own cultural values, do not perceive themselves as inferior to the dominant group, and thus remain positively oriented toward both their own and the dominant culture. Along the same line, Wong Fillmore (1990) asserts that the more anchored children are in their primary culture, the greater their chances to adjust successfully to new environments, consequently suggesting programs that build on children's home experiences, while providing opportunities to acquire some of the experiences, strategies and outlooks expected in school.

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[20] Unfortunately, there is real danger that, at the level of policy and practice, knowledge of distinct cultures be transformed into stereotypes, and Asians, for instance, be set as a model for Hispanic children.

Moreover, the policy suggestions of this line of studies allow for different possibilities in addressing the family. According to Kellaghan et al. (1993), research studies suggest two ways of dealing with home-school discontinuities: increasing the overlap between home and school, and helping children learn how to apply cognitive and social skills learned at home to school activities and tasks. Henderson & Berla (1995) generically pose the need for collaboration between family and school in order "to help children adjust to the world of school, bridging the gap between the culture at home and the mainstream American school (p. 11), a need in great part derived from the very cultural (ethnic and class) condition of the teacher in front of his/her (more or less diverse) students, as well as from the language of instruction and patterns of classroom interaction. And yet, there is surely a difference between collaboration so that the teacher can learn about his/her students' cultural backgrounds in order to inform instructional choices that can help bridge the gaps, and in order to intervene effectively in the classroom, and collaboration for inducing the parents to recreate the home environment - read more, enforce homework, control TV watching - in order to compensate (with their own limited resources) for cultural differences, and help the students advance.

The latter stance seems to carry significant ambiguity in attempting to merge family empowerment, individual competitiveness, and school productivity. Goldenburg (1987), for instance, acknowledging that "parents represent a vast potential resource in the effort to improve achievement among minority children" (p. 176), suggests that schools must find ways to capitalize on parents' motivation and actions to help improve their children's achievement. And Henderson & Berla (1995)

propose that schools encourage and support low-income families in adopting the 'getting ahead' position with their children.[21]

Family politics and school policy

Studies of family-school interaction, encompassing family politics and school policy are still incipient. According to Stevenson & Baker (1987), research on the relations between families and schools has tended to focus on how parents influence student achievement through a supportive learning environment at home. Involvement in school activities (like the PTA and attending parent-teacher conferences), and its impact on achievement, has received less attention.

Snow et al. (1991), studying home and school influences on literacy achievement of low-income children, pointed at formal parent-school involvement (active PTA participation, attending school activities, and serving as volunteer) as the single variable most positively connected to literacy skills. They hypothesized three reasons for the effectiveness of formal involvement: parents obtain information about the school so that they can better prepare their children; they demonstrate to children that school is important; they influence teachers positively about their children's potential, raising teachers' expectations and willingness to offer extra help. Besides

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[21] They cite a work by Doug Powell according to which there are two types of working class families: "In 'getting by' families, their way of life seemed preferable to the competitive game of rising higher, and children were encouraged to finish high school but not to attend college. In 'getting ahead' families, parents stressed high marks, paid attention to what was happening at school, and suggested options for post-secondary education and future occupation." Doug Powell (1992). Literature Review. Department of Child Development and Family Studies, Purdue University. In Henderson & Berla, 1995, p. 11.

gains on reading achievement tests, parent-teacher contacts improved family-school communication, quality of schoolwork, and teacher assessment of the family. In a classic ethnographic piece Lareau (1993) confirmed the role of family politics at the elementary level, depicting upper-middle class parents interventions in instruction, and active mediations in the school site.

At the high school level, Baker & Stevenson (1986), Stevenson & Baker (1987), and Eagle (1989) also focused on the role of parents in managing their children's school careers. The idea of the impact of parents on the learning environment of the school had already been pursued by McDill et al. (1969), who defined parent involvement in high school as a climate source variable correlated with students' achievement and educational aspirations, and mediating the impact of the high school environment on the achievement measures and college plans, even when controlling for ability and family educational background.

Among the few studies focusing on family-school interactions and school policy, the most comprehensive was done by Phillips, Smith & Witted (1985), who studied variations in parental involvement among 22 school districts in metropolitan Milwaukee area, covering school policies, parent organizations, attitudes of teachers, principals, and parents about parental involvement, and whether parental involvement affected school performance. The most interesting findings confirmed the social class characteristic of parent involvement: parents of children attending high performing schools were much more active than those of children in poorer schools; and parent organizations had much more active members in the suburbs than in the city, and mostly dedicated their efforts to fund raising and communications. Other findings

confirmed the student-age characteristic of parent involvement: it was higher in the elementary level and also seen as more positive by elementary teachers (as compared to teachers in the other levels). Another very interesting finding referred to teacher authority and school governance: principals felt more positive about parental involvement than teachers, and were willing to promote it in all areas except in school policy and personnel.[22]

However, the traditional class contour of parental involvement has been challenged, among others, by Dauber & Epstein (1993), who surveyed low-income parents of inner-city elementary and middle schools on attitudes about schools, practices at home, perceptions of school involvement practices, and preferences for actions and programs. Although they found parents with more education, and parents of better students, to be more involved both at home and at school, they also found that "the strongest and most consistent predictors of parent involvement at school and at home are the specific school programs and teacher practices that encourage and guide parent involvement" (p. 61). And, interestingly, while they also found that parents of elementary school children were more involved than those of middle school, they attributed this fact simply to teachers' efforts. Moreover, contrary to teachers' assertion that parents were not involved and did not seem willing to become more involved, the researchers concluded that parents want to learn more about the school curriculum and want teachers to advise them on how to help their children at

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[22] Wagenaar (1977) had who found that public elementary schools that were more open to parents and the community had higher levels of student achievement and community support, and, moreover, that community group support, fund raising, attendance to school meetings and functions were more significantly related to achievement than citizen participation in school policy decisions.

home, the policy implication being that schools should develop "more comprehensive programs of parent involvement to help more families become knowledgeable partners in their children's education" (p. 69).

One doubt about Dauber & Epstein's (1993) conclusions derives from the limited adequacy of surveys as instruments to ascertain perceptions, attitudes, preferences, and practices, especially of low class (low-educated) individuals. Moreover, what parent is going to declare that he or she is not involved or willing to become more involved in his/her child's education? Asked by school people, parents are very likely to confirm that they want to learn more about the school curriculum and want teachers to advise them on how to help their children at home. It would also be plainly inappropriate to conclude that all inner-city low-income parents are asking for partnership programs with the schools.

Finally, it is interesting to stress that the rationale of research with a focus on the impact of parents (either formally or informally) on schools as learning environments, or on the opportunities their children will seize in the school, reflects a basic belief in the limits of schools as learning environments, and in the partiality of opportunities they offer. The implicit conception of the role of school seems to be closer, in this case, to the market place, where individuals freely compete and succeed on the basis of initiative and skill, than to a safeguarded realm where individuals freely grow on the basis of a fair distribution of opportunities, including compensatory and affirmative-action mechanisms.

Future agenda

The current and future research agenda on family-school relations may be illustrated by the mission statement of the Families as Educators Special Interest Group of the American Educational Research Association, created in 1982: "to promote the study and dissemination of information on *family social processes* and *home-school relationships* that support children's education and development" (Families as Educators, 1996, p. 1). Recognizing the major role of the family in schooling, one particular area of interest is defined as "the internal dynamics and external supports and strains on demographically different families" (p. 2). The suggested topics reflect familiar tenets, according to the itinerary described above: "(1) *how social processes, purposes, and educational resources in different kinds of families affect the education and development of children*; (2) *how social institutions and social policies can support families in their roles as educators*; (3) how parents can use *parent education* and other community resources to improve their skills in educating their children; and (4) how the school achievement of children and youth can be supported through *stronger relationships between home and school*" (p. 2, italics added). It is all about family education for school achievement.

2) Parental involvement as a policy solution

How are the need and benefit of parental involvement posed in research and policy discourse? Since it is conceived as a natural practice, or a cultural role (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997), and its importance and efficacy are validated by research, parental involvement can be rhetorically constructed as both the problem and

the solution for increasing school productivity, and especially the academic performance of minority groups.

Yet, as indicated above, neither was it (nor is it) possible for research to establish that parental involvement is a cause of high achievement, nor to rule out a possible association between high achievement and less parental involvement, nor to attribute the low achievement of certain groups or individuals, in any case, solely or principally to the role of their parents. In effect, parental involvement pertains to the successful model of schooling of the middle-classes, based on cultural continuity between home and school, as well as on concrete school practices which require (implicitly or explicitly) family academic input. In other words, both as a research problem and a policy solution, parental involvement constitutes a particular paradigm of school-family relations, within which research evidence fits an implicit theory.

The model of school success based on parental support is offered to other families and social groups (which obviously do not share into it), with the aim of promoting both family empowerment and student achievement. In addition, in view of the differences in the quality of schooling that is offered to low-income groups, parental involvement is also depicted as the key for promoting effective schooling. In sum, the formula goes like this: *more parental involvement at home equates better school performance and longer attendance; and more parental involvement at school results in better schools.*

Rationale

Parental involvement (as a policy and expected practice) is based on a (mostly implicit) theory of family-school relations according to which families and schools are overlapping rather than separate spheres of influence (Ziegler, 1987). Or, as Lareau (1987) puts is: "The definition of the ideal family-school relationship ... [is] a partnership in which family life and school life are integrated" (p. 76). However, the realization of the promise of a productive family-school educational partnership, depends on (also implicit) requirements, ultimately uniformity and harmony in terms of values, contents, and forms of experiences between the two institutions, a case restricted to middle-class families.

If, as McDill et al. (1969) maintain, "school and home environments which are mutually reinforcing are likely to achieve greater academic growth of students than those lacking such consistency" (p. 29), it follows that educational policy and practice must promote such consistency, where it is found lacking, by addressing the family and increasing the forms of parental involvement in schooling. Henderson & Berla (1995), for instance, based on the general conclusion (within a set of program evaluations) that "student achievement increased directly with the duration and intensity of parental involvement" (p. 6), argue in this way: "the form of parental involvement does not seem to be critical as long as it is reasonably well-planned, comprehensive [that is, involving a variety of roles] and long-lasting;" hence the role of policymakers and educators is to offer "the supports families need from schools and community sources to guide their children successfully through the system" (p. ix). The partnership rationale, then, can be summarized as *schools helping families in*

order that families help the schools to educate their children, subtly implying that families need support from schools, but do take the lead in their children's education.

Models of school-family relations

Swap (1993) offers a useful typology of home-school relations, which illustrates different possibilities. The most common type, the *protective model*, establishes strict separation between parents and educators with the aim of reducing conflict. It corresponds to the delegation model according to which parents hold school staff accountable for educational processes and outcomes and educators accept this responsibility. The second type, called *school-to-home transmission model*, adopts one-way school-home communications, with the goal of enlisting parents in supporting school goals. Its premise is that, insofar as student achievement benefits from common expectations and values between family and school, the school should inform the values and practices that contribute to success, and the parents should provide for them in the home. According to the third type, the *curriculum enrichment model*, parents and educators work together to enrich the curriculum, incorporating parents' expertise, in an effort to reflect students' cultural backgrounds, and bridge home and school. In the new *partnership model,* parents not only work alongside teachers on the common mission of helping all children to learn, but become involved in all aspects of school life, at student, classroom, school, and district levels. Ultimately, this model requires school restructuring, with a trade-in between parents' support of the school, and the school's provision of health, education, and social services for families. Swap also suggests gradual paths to partnerships, from teacher

or team initiatives to comprehensive school programs.

Such models of school-family relations can be viewed dynamically and in various combined ways. While the *school-to-home transmission model* can be considered an authoritarian development of the original *protective model* based on institutional functional differentiation, the *curriculum enrichment model* can be seen as a critical and more democratic development of the same *protective model*, as it precisely addresses cultural conflict in the curricular terrain. The *partnership model*, in turn, while resembling an ideal communitarian-school model, can very well incorporate, in more or less disguised form, the traits of the *school-to-home transmission model*, as the correlation of power between school and families tends normally to lean toward the school side. The fact that most schools *paradoxically*, in Swap's (1993) account, "do not have comprehensive parent involvement programs" - "given the widespread recognition that parent involvement in schools is important, that it is unequivocally related to improvements in children's achievement, and that improvement in children's achievement is urgently needed" (p. 12) - might tell of a need of separation and mutual protection against latent (old or new) conflicts within family-school relations. The hypothesis which has been discarded by those who sell the partnership model is that separation of responsibilities might provide for a better power balance in school-family relations.

Promises of the partnership model

The great promise of the partnership model is the implementation of a more productive family-school relation, resulting in family empowerment, school

effectiveness, and success for all students. Research-based benefits are variously described: improved academic performance, attendance, motivation, self-concept, and positive behavior (Sattes, 1985); positive and preventive school-home communications, formal parent organizations and informal social networks, and strong home educational role (supposedly desirable) in complementing and reinforcing what is taught at school (Cochran & Henderson, 1986); increase in teacher responsiveness to particular children and in the available help for students in the classroom and school site, prevention of problems, and, ultimately, transformation (implicitly positive) of the school culture (Ziegler, 1987); improved academic performance of students and positive school perceptions of parents (Melnick & Fiene, 1990); high expectations for teachers and high support of teachers by parents, and, consequently, elevated teacher morale, as well as higher teacher opinions of parents and expectations for their children (Henderson & Berla, 1995).

Yet, an optimistic promise of the family-school partnership is to recover democratic values and practices by "allowing parents and citizens to participate in the governing of public institutions and to have the deciding voice in how children are to be educated" (Henderson & Berla, 1995, p. 19).

Requirements and implications

Roles and tasks of school staff and parents are depicted in various studies suggesting the conditions for partnerships: formal, written policies, containing direction and guidance for parents, and "clear and high expectations that parent involvement is a key to improved schools"; commitment from administrators, and

training for teachers "in planning and evaluating the parent program"; a variety of options for parents, and parent training in order "to learn the skills and knowledge to be good partners" (Sattes, 1985, in Henderson & Berla, pp. 112-113); parental awareness of school demands, children performance, and when and how to use their influence (Baker & Stevenson, 1986); regular communication between teachers and parents, so that the latter reinforce schoolwork (Ziegler, 1987).

Contradictorily, partnerships require simultaneously horizontal relations between teachers and parents, and parent re-education, placing parents in the position of less knowledgeable ones. Ziegler (1987), among others, explicitly acknowledges that effective parent involvement programs require parent training. Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler (1997) stress that policy efforts to involve parents should focus on enhancing "parental role construction and efficacy for involvement in their children's schooling" (p. 35). Kellaghan et al. (1993), on the other hand, assert that the empowerment model is based on the premise that "the roles of parent and teacher are *equal* and complementary, sharing the same purpose and characterized by mutual respect, information sharing, and decision making" (p. 92, italics added) - as if parenting and teaching did not concern distinct institutions, or imply different roles and relationships with the student. Surprisingly, the fact that teaching is a job - involving both the power to grade students' learning, and the possibility of being fired for inadequate performance - is too easily overlooked.

This contradiction, of course, is not likely to be perceived wherever exists affinity (of social class and culture) between teachers and parents, in which case parents do not need re-education, and teachers are not likely to feel threatened. It is

obvious, then, that parent education is designed for lower-class culturally diverse parents, and it remains to be seen whether egalitarian relations can be developed between parents and professionals in such a context.

But the redefinition of parental roles in terms of a school-family partnership also requires the redefinition of the school mission, which, in principle, is not to educate parents. From the school perspective, this is a problematic aspect, which is insidiously carried about by a policy which attributes an educational mission to families and a pedagogic role to parents, even if (and precisely because) these are subordinated to the school agenda.

An example

In 1982, the Michigan State Board of Education issued *a position statement and resource guide on Involvement of Parents and Other Citizens in the Educational System*, recommending parental involvement in "*communicating* about schools, *training* to assist in school programs, and *marketing* the many positive aspects about school programs" (Superintendent's Foreword). Recognizing "the value of active participation of citizenry in helping schools attain the educational goals identified by state and local communities," the "severe declines in resources" and "budget constraints," and survey results on the positive contribution of parents and other community members' involvement in schools, the document calls upon their "services, interests, and commitment ... to assist wherever practicable in all aspects of the school program" (pp. 1-2).

Communicating with all parties is considered "the basic tenet for effective

meaningful change," in order to ensure "support and understanding;" *training* is required for effective help and also communication of expectations; *marketing*, explicitly following the business model, is portrayed as the way to "build a positive school image" (a "successful cost-effective, student-oriented and responsive image"), to gather "strong community support for school programs, passing millage elections, and in contributing to a quality school atmosphere" (Michigan State Board of Education, 1982, pp. 2-3). Within this framework, and based on the idea that parents are "simply waiting to be asked" (p. 4), parental roles are depicted as: *resource linkers*, assisting teachers in curriculum enrichment; *classroom volunteers*, facilitating teaching "by keeping records, correcting papers, duplicating materials, giving directions to students, assisting with homework and arranging the classroom setting" (p. 3); *home instructors*, by helping their children become better learners; *decision advisors*, sharing responsibility for decisions; *future-orientators*, becoming involved in school programs that deal with (*unspecified*) controversial issues - related to changes in technology, family structure, environmental relations, moral and ethics - to ensure public support for them; *educational monitors* in board and advisory meetings, and regular school activities; and *community organizers*, informing about schools and recruiting people to help in the schools (pp. 3-4).

The roles of parents are further depicted in detail:

At student level:
. assist students with learning activities.
. reward students academic achievements.
. listen to student's feelings and experiences.
. follow through on recommended support activities.
At classroom level:
. participate in parent/teacher conferences.

. assist with planned program and activities.
. volunteer to drive on field trips.
. volunteer to contribute personal skills/experiences.
At building level:
. provide questions to enhance learning.
. assist with solving building level problems.
. volunteer to help with lunch-room, playground, or total building activities.
. react to policies and directives.
(Michigan State Board of Education, 1982, p. 9)

This policy guide on parental participation covers both traditional practices and a variety of options, illustrating areas and trends reflected in the literature above. It is typically comprehensive, and simultaneously specific - for instance, in stating the roles of parents at student and classroom levels - and vague - for instance, in stating the more critical-intellectual roles of parents in governance.

Moreover, it suggests implicit functions of the call for parental participation in schooling. The suggested objectives for district planning, for instance, although basically repeating what is stated by the general the framework, adds, specifically, the following: "to provide parents and other citizens with an awareness of the impact of technological trends on the future educational process and curriculum" (Michigan State Board of Education, 1982, p. 5), implying economic, specifically market expansion, goals. I am referring generally to the fact that these technological trends have created patterns of individualized consuming, and specifically to the fact that the use of computers in schools creates the need for each student to have his own PC, in order to do his/her homework. The strategies for district planning, on the other hand, besides school staff training, and inclusion of parents or citizens in committees, call for surveys (to assess community and school staff perceptions and attitudes), skill banks and resource centers, and training on community service (Michigan Board of

Education, 1982, pp. 6-8), suggesting the need to build community cohesion around the socio-educational project, and reaffirming the important political-cultural function of schools.

Chapter 5

SCHOOLWORK AS HOMEWORK:

DISCUSSION OF SCHOOL AND FAMILY PERSPECTIVES

Homework may be considered an educational need, a segment of instruction and of the school curriculum, and a policy. It has been long known as an instructional strategy. Traditionally, it has been used as drill and review (application and evaluation exercises), and as preparation (through readings, observation) for class explanations and discussions. Its content has mostly derived from the school curriculum, and occasionally it has been conceived as more free and creative exercises, focusing on students personal experiences, like writing journals and developing projects, under the rubric of curriculum enrichment activities. It has also been conceived as a strategy linking school contents and social life, focusing eventually on the home or (more broadly) social curricula, including family and community activities, television programs. On the psychosocial and moral aspects, homework has been justified in terms of building independence and responsibility, through the development of study habits and punctuality. Finally, as a policy measure, it has been considered a panacea for raising student achievement and generally improving the quality of schooling.

Once acknowledged as a need and a legitimate strategy of instructional and educational policy, homework appears as an instructional area constantly in need of elaboration and assessment, employing teachers, policymakers and researchers. Thus,

explicit homework policies are enforced; instructional packs must contain homework sections; textbooks must provide homework suggestions or home-problem-solving sections; content, form, and purpose of homework must undergo revision and assessment. Homework also appears as a problem of motivation and compliance: some students resist or procrastinate, some parents omit or neglect. It arises as a problem that cannot be easily solved by means of school resources.

As an integral part of instruction, homework affects its planning and implementation, particularly the conceptualization and time frame of school, home, and community activities. It affects the lives of students outside school and their family routines. Thus, the homework issue, either defined as a learning problem or solution, is inseparable from the issue of the relationship between families and schools and their common educational purposes and responsibilities. This relationship has been addressed by recent policies of *parental involvement*. However, it is pertinent to question the notion of homework as an educational need, in the first place, by asking who expresses and defines how it should be fulfilled.

There are various interesting aspects of the policy-practice of homework related to instructional conceptions and forms, and the work of teachers. There are also less visible but extremely important aspects of homework related to the evolution of educational practices of families and schools, and the redefinition of boundaries and functions of the private and public realms of social life. Thus, the predominant conception and practice of homework as schoolwork transferred to the home might tell that schools are not doing their specific job, i.e., providing children (enough) formal education. In might also constitute a defensive strategy of school accountability. But,

generally, it offers a pertinent illustration of public policies regulating private life, specifically the education of the family by the school via dissemination of certain contents and explicit (and implicit) prescription of practices and values. This is most visible when homework becomes a strategy of mainstreaming minority, immigrant, and/or working class families.

In order to develop my argument, I offer a brief historic and research overview, a current school policy example, and a discussion of conceptions and implications of homework for learning and evaluation, teacher work, family life, and school achievement. Finally, I stress the role of homework in connecting school and family in various - sometimes conflicting - ways, and propose that instruction be conceived independently from family input, which has basically taken the form of homework. Acknowledgement of differences between home and school knowledges and practices and distance between school and family may provide more focus on classroom processes and school resources in developing the academic curriculum. At the same time, it may allow for the conservation of diverse family and social group cultures and may be less harmful for children and parents, in the end.

Historic

When child learning occurred in the realms of family, community, and economic production, before the advent of the common compulsory school, homework was some kind of practical, productive work done at home. And even after schooling began, in rural communities and early urban industrial settings school could not send work home, taking students away from real work and, thus, affecting families'

survival needs.

Throughout this century, the very use of the term *homework as schoolwork sent home* suggests that academic learning hasn't remained quite confined to school. However, home learning aligned to the school curriculum is not a general or natural practice of the family, but part of the life style of the schooled social classes. This assumes a problematic character in face of the ideal of democratic education, according to which the school constitutes the social space where all students, provided equal opportunities, share a common educational experience and are evaluated in terms of a specific (common) curriculum, despite diverse family and social class background cultures. From this point of view, homework will affect variably school performance, since home conditions are not controlled by the school.

In effect, the importance of homework has been disputed in U. S. education throughout this century (Gill & Schlossman, 1995). Homework has been recurrently advanced or retracted as a matter of educational discourse and policy, not only as a result of debates over pedagogical conceptions, but also as a result of family pressures (Sedlak, 1995). Its amount and form, for instance, have been formally regulated by school policy, whenever it is devised as a strategy to raise academic standards or perceived as interfering with family life and individual students' social activities.

The Progressives, who emphasized interest versus will (Prawatt, 1995), didn't support homework policies associated with *traditional methods*. According to Gill & Schlossman (1995), "in the decades before World War II, many school districts (including Los Angeles) abolished homework, ostensibly in order to discourage rote learning in the classroom and encourage more creative use of non-school hours by

children and families." At that time research attempted to prove that homework did not help school achievement. "Reformers denounced homework, first of all, as a threat to children's health. The Ladies' Home Journal carried on a lengthy crusade, offering its readers sordid tales from parents, teachers and doctors about the alleged harms (including death) caused by overworking children" (Gill & Schlossman, 1995).

However, pro-homework positions succeeded in the educational debate and policy in the fifties, with the general dissatisfaction and attacks on progressive education, the renewed stress on academic rigor, and the urge to surpass the Soviet Union in the context of the cold-war. Hence, homework joined the efforts to enhance academic excellence.

During the sixties, the belief in the relevance of homework was boosted by comparative and cross-culture literature (either comparing high and low achievers in the context of effective versus ineffective schools, or different ethnic groups) and stimulated a series of policy efforts in the line of compensatory education, under the banner of equity. Low achievers were found to be poor, one-parent, inner-city kids, members of ethnic minorities such as Mexican-Americans, obviously economically disadvantaged and *culturally unprepared* to take advantage of social resources. High achievers originated from middle and upper class stable families and also from certain ethnic groups as Asian-Americans, who had incorporated formal education as part of their life style or as a means of social mobility. Thus, low achievers and their families became the target of policies aimed at improving their home learning environments and family culture.

Nevertheless, according to Gill & Schlossman (1995), the anti-homework

tradition appeared to shape policy and practice during the seventies: "By the mid-1970s, American high schools assigned far less homework than they had fifteen years earlier; hardly anyone complained."

More recently, in the eighties, pro-homework views were once more reinforced with the publication of "A Nation at Risk" by the National Commission on Excellence in Education (1983), which credited the U.S. political, economical and moral downfall again to a *soft pedagogy* (Gill & Schlossman, 1995). Since then, homework for all students has been highlighted amidst a series of reform projects aiming at academic excellence (Chubb & Moe, 1990). Cross-country academic comparisons in the context of international competition have also pointed at the importance of family environment and homework practices, as Japanese, Chinese and Taiwanese students were found to perform better in standardized tests and do more hours of homework per week than American students (Stevenson & Stigler, 1992). Though research is not conclusive about the value of homework (and will never be, in the sense that a single variable cannot account alone for higher test scores), common sense and urgency to surpass competitors seem to suggest that more homework is not a strategy to be discarded in any case.

Accordingly, the educational rhetoric of the nineties, following the privatization wave, has strongly stressed family empowerment and school choice, from the radical solution of home schooling to increased parental participation in school reform. Yet, parental participation appears mostly restricted to the homework issue. Nation wide official guidelines have stressed regular homework as a strategy to improve academic performance (Office of Educational Research and Improvement,

1992), extending educational policy from school to the home, as suggestions of monitoring homework, enhancing reading, and limiting TV viewing clearly transfer learning accountability to the parental sphere, as I discuss in continuation.

Recent research

The positive impact of homework on academic achievement has not been empirically established. Research has pointed out its smaller direct effect on achievement, as compared to powerful direct effects of intellectual ability and academic coursework, in the case of high school students (Keith & Cool, 1992). Overall, there is not substantial or sufficient research to support a relationship between high achievement, time spent on homework, kinds of homework, and tutoring styles, across grades, curricular goals, levels of student ability, and individual and group characteristics.

An analysis of 418 recent (1992-3/95) ERIC titles and abstracts related to homework reveals that learning disabilities is one of the areas that has deserved the most attention from research and instructional programs. Other significant areas are task conceptual relevance related to instructional planning and assessment, and the use and assessment of computer instructional programs as homework aids. Compensatory education approaches related to parental involvement are significantly present in early nineties research and policy on homework. Fostered by a demand for *homework productivity*, research has focused on motivational and valuational aspects related to students and families. International comparative perspectives are also (though scarcely) represented.

In the analysis of the literature on *teacher-parent partnership* programs homework appears as a key issue to enhance school success. Parents, in general, are subject to various forms of informal appeals to value their children's education and monitor homework. But they have been also the targets of specific formal programs, usually implemented through their local elementary schools, designed to teach them *good parenting* skills, which include stimulating their children's school achievement and tutoring homework. Such school-based programs send the clear message that it is parents' homework to monitor their children's school progress.

Finally, it is also worth noting the literature on policy efforts to provide alternatives to parental tutoring. School initiatives have taken the form of *homework hotlines,* after school assistance through telephone, and *on-site supervision*, a daily guided *in-school homework* practice, which curiously keeps the designation (Locke, 1991). Community support to homework includes public library homework centers, and other forms of *community homework centers* for at-risk students, assigned the function of substituting for home assistance, which is suggestive of the limits of many families in providing for that obligation.

School policy

There has been a tendency to provide for formal and comprehensive homework policies, defining its rationale, school expectations, and parents' obligations, as exemplified below:

> Definition:
> Homework refers to an assignment to be completed *outside of school hours preferably at home*. These assignments keep parents informed and involved in

their child's learning.

Policy:
Well chosen, clearly communicated homework is an *integral part of the instructional process*. Challenging and relevant homework will be provided. Homework assignments will *review, reinforce or extend classroom learning* by providing practice and application of knowledge gained; *teach students responsibility* and organizational skills; promote wise and orderly *use of time*; and *provide opportunities for enrichment activities*.
... School teachers will include homework appropriate for the students and their educational needs. Teachers will consider assignments of other teachers, *individual differences in students*, and other factors that may affect *the home as an extension of the classroom*.
Consequences for not completing homework will be handled by individual teachers. Teachers may *detain a student(s) to complete homework after school* on Monday, Wednesday or Thursday unless notified by the parent/guardian that the student(s) is not to be detained on any of those specific days. Also, if after-school homework completion is a consequence, for example, the students will know about it in advance and, therefore, they will be held responsible for informing their parents about their after-school work. The late bus will be available for these students on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays. (East Lansing Educational Foundation, 1996, p. 14, italics added)

One interesting consequence of this type of policy approach, likely indeed to create judicial battles, is to hold parents formally accountable for non homework completion. Recently, The Detroit News (October 2, 1996) featured a related issue in these terms: "School district to make detention a family affair." The district policy in question requires parents to attend Saturday morning detention and do homework with their insubordinate kids.[1]

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[1] The purpose in this case is to hold parents accountable for classroom misconduct. Legal measures to hold parents accountable and "help them identify unwanted behavior patterns in their kids before they become bigger problems," range from attending lectures on "how to better raise their children," to juvenile court hearings for students, and the arrest of the parents (conviction meaning 90 days in jail and a $500 fine), in case detention is refused and truancy thus established. (The Detroit News, October 2, 1996, on-line)

Instructional and social relevance

As an instructional strategy, homework extends learning, connects precedent and subsequent class work, and intends to stimulate independent study habits. It represents an important resource which can potentially benefit all students. Yet, it is noteworthy that, while it is supposed to take place in the home, its content and form are designed at school, and its function is helping students learn the school curriculum in order to succeed in school.

The ample belief in the relevance of homework for academic achievement is expressed through various conceptions and practices related to distinct curricular goals. One conception is simply that if one increases study time, effort will build quality learning. Low ability students, in particular, need more hours of work to catch up with expected standards. The quality and design of tasks also can enhance specific skills. Another conception seeks broad experiential enrichment by attempting to integrate diverse aspects of family and community cultures to the school curriculum, or to connect and apply academic contents to everyday life.

Why is homework necessary? One plausible reason is the simple and obvious acknowledgement that school time is not enough to accomplish curricular goals. Another answer, which confirms the previous, is that time spent on homework increases total learning time (of the school curriculum). However, the general institutionalization and acceptance of homework also suggests that schoolwork is viewed as a desirable occupation for children in the home and/or as a means of enabling children to compete and raise their performance in school and in future life. Along this line, it seems reasonable to consider that the school curriculum is positively

valued, at least by those families and students who adhere to homework practices.

Generally, the meaning and value of homework are related to broad conceptions of education, valid and useful social knowledge, purposes of schools, and roles of families. Compulsory schooling involves an implicit *social contract* between families and the State, i.e., a division of labor in the common task of educating children. The traditional division of educational work between school and family has posited intellectual development and the teaching of subject matter as the main function of the former, while socialization and the formation of dispositions and values are prerequisites basically developed in the home, though schools have also increasingly performed psychosocial roles, in place of the parents. For some families the conditions of the contract (or partnership) may be viable and satisfactory, whereas for others they may be not.

Students' failure in completing homework and parents' unresponsiveness to school expectations may express that for some students and parents the terms of the contract may be seen as unattainable or unfair. When this is the case, it is patent that the basic related factors are economical and cultural: parents' (and high school students') work loads and conflicting schedules, and values related to education and school. As educational needs and values conflict with other basic needs and values, families are unable to participate in the partnership. Interestingly, policy efforts have focused on cultural approaches, such as involving (re-educating) parents, and practical approaches, such as providing extended day and Saturday enrichment programs, while maintaining homework. The whole instructional conception which includes homework hasn't been subject to a radical questioning, from a more inclusive outlook that

accounts for disadvantaged families and students' own perspectives, for instance.

Problems of low achievement and homework resistance do not affect all students. Nevertheless, homework is a *general policy*, based on the assumption that all children will profit from more schoolwork done at home. Apparently, the targets of a homework compensatory policy would be low achievers, but those students precisely lack the motivation, parental support and other resources necessary to commit and benefit from it. The general prescription of homework, then, needs to be considered at the core of a certain curricular conception, which in turn needs to be considered within a broader framework of educational values and social practices.

Articulation of homework and classwork

Within a strictly technical framework, conceiving instruction with or without homework affects classwork - and, of course, different conceptions of homework affect it differently. This is because the teacher has to figure ways to integrate homework and classwork, give specific homework feedback, and establish the relation of homework to evaluation within the learning process.

Within the traditional teaching-learning process, homework fits into the final of a series of instructional steps, according to Herbart's pedagogical model, based on the inductive empirical method: (1) preparation, i.e., review of background knowledge; (2) presentation of new knowledge to be assimilated; (3) assimilation by comparison of the old and new knowledges; (4) generalization, i.e., identification of corresponding cases which may integrate the same class of phenomena; and (5) application. The three first steps fit the moment of observation,which is followed by

generalization and confirmation (Saviani, 1984). In this model, homework represents the opportunity to test one's own learning through new examples, that is, to apply the new knowledge and confirm assimilation. Application exercises provide opportunity to independently test knowledge and evaluate one's own performance.

The traditional practice of homework as knowledge application, learning confirmation, student self-evaluation, and instructional evaluation and re-planning by the teacher meant that everyday students would hand homework to be individually reviewed by the teacher out of class. The teacher could identify types and range of difficulties, and evaluate individual and collective performance. This used to be the way when I went through elementary school in the sixties in Brazil.

Recent transformations in the modes of teaching, related to the *technicization* and *intensification* (Apple, 1985) of work practices, have changed the form of homework evaluation. Common procedures now are: teacher reviews homework orally in class and students make self-corrections; pairs of students exchange and check each other's homework; groups discuss homework 'findings.' But teachers don't have time to check individual homework sheets, and often collect them for bureaucratic control purposes since grading is often on completion and not correctness. Teachers now seem often to spend more time planning instruction and reporting evaluation, while the process of evaluation becomes reduced mainly to the moment and space of the class. As a result, both in the U.S. and in Brazil, I have presently found the typical fifty minute class in which the teacher reviews past homework, briefly presents a new piece of content (or demonstrates a procedure, or rather assigns a reading), hands new homework, explains and 'discusses' instructions

and 'motivates' the students to do it at home. Thus, *homework may occupy the whole class*.

There are, of course, alternatives to routine application-homework. In fact, the conception and practice of homework is likely to vary across student age/grade, and content/task nature and purpose. In my own past experience as a student, for instance, from middle school on, homework was mostly *study on your own*. Within the inquiry method currently adopted by certain constructivist approaches, homework may be designed to fit the moments of observation and generalization in the model above described. It can be conceived as an aid to various novel procedures, such as cooperative learning (Foyle, 1990), or as open *special projects* to be conceptualized and articulated by students, individually or collectively, or else as inter-disciplinary projects carefully designed by a group of teachers. In such instances homework provides occasion for non-routinized practices, involving extra resources and energies of both teachers and students, and frequently of parents as well (Carger & Ayers, 1995).

The link of homework to evaluation is another significant point. In the traditional instructional model described above, homework was evaluated for instructional purposes and individual feedback, but not graded. Grading was attained by exams, usually culminating the process. Exams appeared as decisive moments - intimidating rites of passage. Apparently to minimize the threat of exams, perhaps as a measure of effort intending to countervail plain momentary performance, homework started being graded. Currently, in the local American schools attended by my children, the typical grade composition is: 40% homework, 40% tests, and 20%

projects.

But grading homework creates its own difficulties. Here is an example. In December 1996 I received the following "Interim Report of Student Progress" from my 10th grade son's Math teacher: "Valentin has stopped doing his daily work with any regularity. His test scores have been excellent (96%), but his homework (lack of it) will lower his grade." I asked Valentin why he had not been doing his homework, and he answered: "What for if I already know it?" Of course, I pointed at the grade lowering consequence, and insisted that he had to do the things he didn't like as much as those that he liked, but he ended up with a D in Math, his favorite subject, and I ended up with no arguments to press him.

A possible implication of grading homework is to equalize measures of outcomes of students who do homework and perform low in tests and others who don't do homework and perform high in tests, though it is expected that doing homework will generally enhance test performance. Even if homework grading intends to reward effort versus ability, nonetheless what is being assessed is actually 'family support,' which is dependent on economical and cultural conditions. Thus, assessing the process of learning and not the outcome is complicated when that process occurs at home, away from the teacher. Within a constructivist practice, some teachers have attempted to use a scoring rubric to assess students' abilities to communicate *attempts* at solving homework problems, for instance. This is just one example of 'solution' which obviously creates new instructional problems.

Teachers

The first obvious way in which homework affects teachers refers to the variety of possibilities in planning instruction as related to diverse conceptions of homework. Articulating additional work developed out of the class requires that teachers design and make explicit some sort of integration. This means more planning and an increase in the complexity of teachers' tasks.

One interesting practical consequence is that designing more instructional activities in the format of creative homework and closely evaluating it, means homework (overwork) for teachers. Otherwise, teachers may rely on routine homework like textbook exercises, chapter outlines, and quick classroom check up. The point is that increasing time and extending the spaces of learning also increases teachers' work in planning and evaluation, and teachers have to find ways to cope with and simplify it.

But homework also affects teacher work in another, indirect, profound way. Homework has been seen as a "natural means of home-school collaboration (Olympia et al., 1994), but parents and teachers have also been considered "natural enemies" (Waller, 1965). The literature on teacher-parent relationships is replete with references to silent or overt conflicts, especially in contexts of social class, ethnic and cultural diversity, where apparent lack of support for homework may be common. Even in middle-class homogeneous contexts, precisely the kind in which parents do collaborate, there are tensions between teachers and "pushy, professional parents"; furthermore, teachers especially resent mothers' interference in the classroom as a "challenge to their professional identity" (Biklen, 1995, pp.131-139). Generally,

parental involvement in schools involves issues of power, authority and control over curricular goals, instructional methods and assessment, resources, decisions and accountability (Fine, 1993).

There are two related points which might illustrate the strategic and dangerous role of homework within the complicated school-family educational partnership. Because schoolwork is sent home and requires some kind of parental work, parents become at the same time subordinated to school dictates and empowered to charge teachers and schools from the role of collaborators and, somehow, insiders. Parents become the targets of specific meetings, training, contracts, guides, manuals, and packs, specially designed to make the home-school connection and to teach them certain instructional tasks (Gallagher, 1994; Mafnas et al. 1993; Orman, 1993; Association of American Publishers, 1989), a way in which teachers come to share some pedagogical knowledge with non-professionals. On the one hand, parents are pressed to learn pedagogy according to the school's curricular agenda; on the other hand, teachers - though *telling parents what to do - lose* some of their exclusive expertise and, thus, are disempowered.

As families provide resources and learning opportunities, school operating costs would be likely to decrease, but teachers' gains seem doubtful. Because schoolwork is sent home, and the family is assigned pedagogical responsibilities and specific instructional tasks, parents become explicitly accountable for the school achievement of their children and, consequently, teachers become less accountable as they formally share obligations and accountability with families. Students' failure, then, may be more authoritatively attributed to negligent families and lack of homework. But issues

of accountability between school and family regarding learning outcomes certainly reflect on teacher professional status in complex ways. According to Rieck (1994), a *more realistic* way of assessing high school teachers' performance is to adopt an 'adjusted failure rate' encompassing student-caused failures, namely absence and incomplete homework. Again, teachers are liberated from an onus, but lose latitude regarding their specific power, that is, the power to teach effectively and prevent students' failure.

Parents

I would like to illustrate diverse expectations about schooling and homework from a different cultural perspective. In Brazil, students attend school for half day - a period of four hours, at the most. (Due to economic reasons, schools offer at least two daily periods, in an effort to maximize physical resources.) At least for middle and upper class students, it is routine to spend the other half of the day doing schoolwork at home, as well as attending a variety of extra-curricular courses. Their families can hire private tutors when they do not count on a dedicated (unemployed) full-time mother. Unfortunately, students from poor and working class families are often expected to fit the tutored homework routine model. This has been associated with the school failure of those students who don't have conditions for learning in the home. There, it is obvious that because school learning is insufficient in terms of time and deficient in terms of quality, children are discriminated on the basis of their family and home conditions.

Educators and parents would like to have a 'full-time school' in Brazil, with

eight hours of daily attendance and good quality education. Common sense suggests that, then, homework will not need to be assigned. It is expected that all parents will welcome that day as liberating for themselves and their children. And so will teachers, who will have better conditions of work (by disposing of more time with students) and won't depend on family resources. Within this logic, it is interesting to note that alternative (Progressive) private schools in Brazil compete for middle-class clientele on the basis of not demanding homework. The argument in favor of the higher quality education they offer is that students effectively learn during the school period. (Of course those schools are very aware that they count on a rich cultural and academic home curriculum, due to their selected and restricted clientele.)

Here in the U. S., presently, in a quite different movement, parents are expected to make enthusiastic efforts to help children with homework assignment. As Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler (1997), suggest this is part of the very cultural definition of the parental role (though they leave social class differences out of their analysis). On the other hand, educational policy rhetoric stresses a correlation between student achievement (especially in mathematics and science), individual competitiveness (better jobs), and international competitiveness (U.S. political-economical leadership in the world) (Ingham Intermediate School District, 1995; Arbanas, 1994). Schools offer 'parent-child-homework workshops,' packets of curriculum materials carry 'family homework activities,' and teachers require parents' signatures on homework, even at high school level.

Within such an ambiguous rhetoric, the distinction between work and leisure is frequently blurred and homework becomes leisure. At the same time, the role that

parents and family resources actually play in learning in the home are not clearly acknowledged. According to the U.S. Secretary of Education research-based advice, "Effective homework assignments do not just supplement the classroom lesson; they also *teach students to be independent learners*. Homework gives students experience in following directions, making judgements and comparisons, raising additional questions for study, and developing responsibility and self-discipline" (What Works, 1987, p.53, italics mine). To be sure, it is not the *assignment* that gives students all those benefits, but the *experience* of accomplishing the assignments, in the home environment, assisted by the parents. In this sense, homework is not the instruction/answer sheet students bring home, but the actual work and learning that take place at home. Thus, if effective homework means learning all that which is stated above in the home, then indeed the home is accountable for its benefits.

In fact, policy has focused on both areas: directly on homework conception, and indirectly on parental implementation. A recent national survey on homework policies (T=267) revealed that 91% of U.S. school districts inform parents about homework policies and regulations, 58% specify roles that parents are expected to assume in the homework process, and 35.2% have a specific policy including frequency and amount of assignments and home-school communication mechanisms (Roderique et al., 1994). The worrisome fact is that the present pro-homework movement, according to Bowditch (1993), has been enforcing a division of labor between teachers and families in which "teachers have been charged primarily, either implicitly or explicitly, with the limited tasks of *presenting information* and *covering material*; families, which most often means mothers, have been assigned the tasks of

motivating students and providing the time, space, and extracurricular attention or assistance to ensure that *learning* takes place" (p.178). That's exactly what I have learned in recent years as a parent relating to local U.S. public schools, both from attending parents' meetings, in which teachers quite explicitly inform school expectations regarding parents and students, and through the *contracts* sent home specifically for parents' information and *signatures*.

Since the purposes and conditions of implementation of homework policies depend on the home (external) conditions, it is imperative to consider the parents' perspective. How can parents get involved and actually monitor homework? The first condition is obviously to have free time; another condition is to know how, which includes knowing content and pedagogy. But another basic condition is will and liking. Very few parents hold all the three.

Creating learning opportunities in the home, according to school prescriptions, demands time from the parent in order to organize and continually adapt the home environment to fit school demands. Parents know what it means to 'help' interpret and review homework, to arrange and attend after school and weekend group-homework meetings, to provide (in time or at late notice) for materials not found around the house, among other forms of support. Though families basically exist for children, they have their own needs, obligations, and policies, including children's house chores, sleep time, and family activities (not family math!), with which school homework interferes.

Regarding the second condition it is reasonable to question whether parents should be taught to monitor homework. Shouldn't this 'extra' investment in

homework workshops be applied to teachers and schools, instead? Every parent who glances at homework knows that he or she cannot simply draw on his/her own knowledge and previous school experience: contents and methods of instruction have changed and keep changing, and different schools, subject-matters, methods, and teachers impose various, distinct formats. Moreover, tutoring homework implies deciphering instructions and expectations which were posed by a teacher with whom the parent is not in contact on an everyday basis. In order to fill this gap, some schools have implemented a 'homework assistance telephone service,' to which parents and/or students can resort, one more curious example of investment in homework!

Every parent also knows that a very small part of the school curriculum actually served him/her throughout life. Thus, regarding the third condition, is it reasonable to expect parents to choose to invest their free time in learning school again? It is pertinent to consider here the curricular attempt to link school knowledge and everyday knowledge. As an illustration of school expectations of parental involvement, Michigan "Programs for Educational Opportunity" (1995) offer "Family Math" and "Family Science" workshops aiming at "helping parents and children learn about mathematics and science together," using "materials and situations that are commonly found around the house." Through this ingenious strategy homes become classrooms, parents become themselves at the same time teachers and students, and child education merges with adult education. And, it is stated, it's supposed to be *fun*!

In sum, homework can be conceived as activities that students can perform independently, or as 'home-learning activities' intentionally involving parents, and the

official rhetoric encompasses both possibilities. In the first case, parents well know that independence is a long, gradual process and that most students cannot perform without help. In the last case, parental involvement carries an undisguised moral appeal, since it addresses all parents, not only those of students who present specific difficulties or disadvantages. In both cases, homework not only has a cost for families, but also subordinates family to school.

Yet, there is another point to be considered: if the family is "America's smallest school" (Barton & Coley, 1992), in most cases who is central to the family and to children's lives is the mother. As school has counted on female teachers as cheap work-force in the past, all kinds of housework and child care - including homework - have also depended, and still depend presently, on free, donated women's work, adding moreover onto the burden of those women who work outside the house. Hence a feminist claim against homework.

As Bowditch (1993) argues, it is obvious that "the rhetoric of parental involvement ... assumes, legitimates, and seeks to enforce a particular normative model of the family - a model ... that has become decreasingly representative of American families across socioeconomic classes" (p.179), as the numbers of single-parent families and working mothers have been significantly expanding. Thus, it is critical to acknowledge that through the homework policy "schools make heavy demands on the organization of family life and the practices of mothers, which given recent changes in family structure, may no longer be reasonable" (Bowditch, 1993, p. 178).

The perverse effect, as Bowditch (1993) points out, is that by "teaching

families their 'basic obligations' to provide the appropriate home environment for learning," school policy creates the conditions for "blaming families for their inadequacies and then retreating from the responsibility to teach the children of those families" (p. 179). This is a clear threat exactly to the children of low-income and minority families.

Equity and accountability

Homework is the key issue, in my view, within the effective home-school partnership. Its purpose is to promote more and better learning, through "home-based reinforcement of school behavior" programs, such as parent tutoring (Fullan, 1991). In this sense it both acknowledges and draws upon the home environment as an important factor of school achievement, according to a general assumption that "the closest the parent is to the education of the child, the greater the impact on child development and educational achievement" (Fullan, 1991, p. 227). Thus, it is potentially a very political issue in which it attributes the responsibility of school success or failure to kids and their families (McCaslin & Good, 1992).

I have suggested along the way that homework relates to notions of family and school educative purposes, curriculum, instruction, school accountability, and equity. Those and other aspects of education are very (theoretically and practically) intricate, and the issue of homework constitutes a window into the complexities and broad social implications of educational policy-practice.

As an illustration, I consider a recent claim at "abolishing homework" posed by school board member Garrett Redmond, from Half Moon Bay, California (Gill &

Schlossman, 1995). His arguments were that homework (a) "threatened family life, depriving children of quality time with their parents"; and (b) "was unfair because many children lacked the computers, encyclopedias and quiet places enjoyed by more fortunate students." Gill & Schlossman (1995) counter-argued stating that "homework is parent's eyes and ears": it is the "primary, often the sole communication link that informs parents about the school's academic mission," opening "an otherwise closed window to the school's intellectual agenda." Furthermore, it "compels teachers to let parents see what they are doing in the classroom and how well they are doing their job."

Redmond seems to express both the point of view of the parents who have time and material resources to invest in homework but have other preferences about family life style, and that of the parents who lack those resources. His first concern is about quality of family interaction, since homework usurps the space and time of domestic education, of family relations mediated by other purposes, contents and values, and of leisure. His second concern is about equity, since homework is part of the measure of student success or failure in school and further social life.

Gill & Schlossman's (1995) arguments seem to address the political necessity of evaluating a public service, that is, the content and quality of the education that is being offered youngsters, including teacher accountability. As part of the 'educational contract' between family and school, the family should supervise and intervene in the educational process, besides participating (often in indirect ways) in the very definition of educational policy. However, the evaluation of public education is surely more than a family concern, transcending individual families' interests. This is the complex

terrain of democratic practice and public life. There is one point, though, that remains open: the mode through which such an evaluation should and could be best performed. Who is entitled and effectively able to perform it? Each individual, direct consumer? Or should that task be carried out by an institutional mediator?

The contend over the harms and benefits of homework invite other questions related to institutional functions and roles of schools/teachers and families/parents. Should subject matter learning be temporally and spatially confined to school or should it have a place at home? My own view, as a mother and as a teacher, is that subject matter instruction (the transmission of a historically constructed body of disciplinary knowledge) is the *specific* function of school, the professional role of teachers, while domestic education, including physical, affective, and moral aspects, is *mainly* the function of the family. However, this distinction is considerably blurred in current educational policy, practice, and discourse. It is very interesting to notice how often teachers complain about the educative omission of parents regarding problems of student discipline in the school site, and how extensively schools offer drug prevention programs for youngsters, and parenting skills workshops for parents, as if families were not performing their basic educative function. At the same time in which school extends its function in psychosocial development, encompassing previous familial functions, families have been pressed to do the intellectual training of the students through the homework policy. It is a curious exchange.

Are parents entitled to closely assist intellectual development? This is, in my account, a specialized practice, precisely a profession. Are teachers capable of assisting psychosocial and moral development of numerous and diverse students?

Within the present school organization that is an impossible task. Moreover, families and schools are distinct social institutions. If families could do the job of schools (though some claim they can), we wouldn't need schools. But schools cannot solve or even minimize the so-called 'crisis of the family.' So, considering their concrete limitations, when schools invest more in psychosocial goals, they end up investing less in their specific academic goals. Conversely, when parents are compelled to invest time in the intellectual training of their children, they obviously have less time to take care of their other educational needs.

Of course learning in general and subject matter learning in particular are not confined to school. But the school, as a specialized institution, should focus on the learning that occurs within its boundaries and assess solely the learning constructed within classroom practices, for this is already an enormous task. Those who would advocate the legitimacy and desirability of subject matter learning in the home would have to assume that all homes hold the conditions to perform this function. Since most of them don't, the equity goal of education is radically undermined.

When Gill & Schlossman (1995) suggest that families should be the guardians of the content and quality of the schooling provided their children, they present the view of educational researchers, who are qualified to assess school practices. In contrast, most parents cannot perform such a role for the same basic reasons they cannot assist homework: lack of specialized knowledge (and lack of time to learn how) to evaluate instruction. The issue of democratic participation - confused within the rhetoric of consumer choice - is a thorny one. It is currently at stake in both the parental involvement and school choice policies, which stress freedom and

opportunity, promising direct consumer control, school accountability, and recovery of the quality of the public school. However, insofar as parental participation and choice basically require free time and expertise in order to evaluate school performance, differentiation in the quality of schooling is likely to persist, as a result of differentiation in the conditions and possibilities that parents hold.

The possibility that parents evaluate teachers' performance is also a delicate issue. In front of parents, teachers are experts and hold the competent discourse, which may be used to silence less educated parents. In turn, teachers often feel pressured and threatened by certain (too involved) parents' suspicion and demands. Only when family and school clearly share the same 'mission,' teacher-parent relationships may flow conveniently, and that is the ideal but not the rule. Antagonism between teachers and parents may emerge based on mutual prejudices, but may be masked because there is a child (and a job) at stake. Though research indicates that parents are willing to get involved with children's schoolwork and would welcome specific guidance from teachers (What Works, 1987), I doubt such findings on the basis that parents, when inquired directly, would obviously almost always confirm school expectations, general ideas about good parenting, and moral obligations related to their children's success in school.

The re-articulation of home and school

Homework appears as a camp of expression of multiple goals related to academic achievement, character development, and even *family cohesion* (Gill & Schlossman, 1995). Current redefinitions of homework include focus on "a positive

social interaction with parents with gradually increasing independent responsibilities" (Speaker, 1990). Especially at the elementary level, "interactive homework *helps* parents and children come together on activities they *enjoy*" (Epstein, 1994). School Districts have developed explicit homework guidelines regulating amount, length, and kind of homework assignments, number of week nights, and grading practices (Rose, 1994). A number of parent guides to helping with homework in different disciplines have been recently published (Gallagher, 1994). Homework kits are defined as "*leisure* time activities" (Ward, 1993). Teachers send homework contracts to be signed by the parent (Mafnas, 1993), require daily parental feedback on students' journals (Wisdom, 1993), send questionnaires related to specific homework assignments to be answered by the parent. This movement toward 'helping families enjoy learning together' seems related to current redefinitions of *teaching as helping* and *learning as fun*, as well as to redefinitions of the scope and functions of schooling, extending its reach in order to encompass domestic education and cultural life.

Based on the above evidence of homework regulation and of formalization of the family-school partnership, my view is that, by sending schoolwork home, school is regulating family life, an interesting case of extending its 'disciplinary power' (Foucault, 1977) to children's homes and to parenting activities. Only within this framework can the TV versus homework polemic, for instance, persistently hold the attention of school educators.

School is a mediator-agency between the individual and the family, on one side, and socio-economic structures, formal (dominant) culture, and public life, on the

other. Homework, academic learning, family, and school cannot be considered apart from the power relations that shape social life. In the present case, it is difficult to convince that families and students really have power in shaping educational policies, such as homework and the content and direction of instruction. In fact, the practice of developing schoolwork in the home and influencing school policy was historically restricted to the middle-classes, and evaluation of instructional policies and reforms have not counted on general family input, though educational policy depends on 'social consent' as a condition for successful implementation.

I assume that education is a complex enterprise, which should never be entirely encompassed and directed by the school. School provides a specific kind of education, and should be relatively autonomous regarding its specific educative task. The family offers a distinct educative realm and should 'recover' its role in education, which of course depends primarily on improved material conditions. In social life and individual development it is desirable that distinct educative realms, communities, and groups provide for diversity and contrast. Contrary to the idea of a school-family formally regulated partnership, I claim that *gaps*, such as those between school and family, may represent much needed spaces of freedom and creativity in social life.

Rethinking the impact of homework on school achievement

My argumentation admits that homework does have an impact on achievement. As an institutionalized policy implying direct grading and increased learning time to be assessed also by other instruments, homework may generate positive or disastrous results. The issue is not simply that homework intends to help raise learning and

achievement - it is that if a student doesn't succeed in homework per se, his/her chances of succeeding in school are already undermined.

Furthermore, homework is not likely to help at risk students, because it requires the same favorable social conditions those students basically need to succeed in school, anyhow. As a learning intensification strategy held at the expense of the family, it depends on the family's conditions and thus, in some cases, may enhance the chances of failure it intends to reduce. As a compensatory policy for schools' insufficiencies, it may as well magnify the problem. This is possible because it affects the instructional practices carried in the classroom, the proper place where learning the school curriculum should be intensified.

As an instrument linking family and school toward certain common (but restricted) educational goals, homework imposes the academic curriculum on family life and, by using family time and resources, subordinates family to school. Furthermore, as a particular expression of educational policy, homework subjects the educational values of the family to the purposes of school achievement, as well as to the prevailing concepts of individual and social success, and national triumph.

Rethinking the impact of homework on family life

Whenever I read or heard claims on the desirability of homework and the natural obligation of parents to be homework helpers, I thought to myself that homework acolytes either didn't have children, or were not parents of many children, or of children who did not enjoy homework, or they had their children a long time ago before certain curricular reforms, or they were men who counted on a dedicated

full-time wife-mother, or they were teachers who also enjoyed teaching at home, or they were super-parents, whom I didn't envy. Thus, it was with satisfaction that I recently found Corno's (1996) recognition that *homework is a complicated thing*, and Natriello's (1997) *hoist on the petard of homework*, a researcher's penitence on the homework prescription. Natriello found out for himself about the "incredible homework burden," the family evenings "lost to homework," all of this intensified by "challenging" homework assignments provided by a "serious" teacher (pp. 572-573). As an enthusiast of constructivist approaches and higher-order learning, and in a two parent-two children family situation, thus he assesses the homework-parent fit:

> The assignments seem to be a good mix of tasks that vary across subject areas and from routine review to creative exploration. Both kinds of assignments pose challenges to parents. The routine tasks sometimes carry directions that are difficult for two parents with only advanced graduate degrees to understand, and we are forced to rely on our children, who seem to have better intuition about how to read such directions.... More creative homework tasks are a mixed blessing on the receiving end.... they require one to be well rested, a special condition of mind not often available to working parents.... At my house the fancy carriage of constructivism turns into the pumpkin of didactism sometime between 8:30 and 9:00 pm. (Natriello, 1997, p. 573)

It is all the more important to observe that his lament and loss - not "to spend the remainder of the school year in quiet evenings of contemplation, sherry, and poetry" (Natriello, 1997, p. 574) - do not correspond to the picture of family life of most working parents, though his time constraints and difficulties in helping his children with homework are certainly a point in common among parents of all social classes and circumstances.

Epilogue

PERVERSE EFFECTS OF PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT: EXTENDING SYMBOLIC VIOLENCE TO THE FAMILY AND WEAKENING THE EGALITARIAN IDEAL OF PUBLIC EDUCATION

In this dissertation I inquire about parental involvement in schooling, and particularly in academic learning, as a model for family-school relations and as a strategy to enhance and equalize educational outcomes. Knowing (from my own experience in a distinct social context) about the various problematic aspects of both parental involvement and separation from school - which seem unequivocally related to social class culture and concrete meanings of schooling, the general social selective function of the educational system, the objective and subjective conditions of families, parents, and students, and the interactions between family needs and the quality of school services, within specific and changing social arrangements - I seek to understand the historical origins and cultural meanings of this policy, the ways in which it has been sustained by recent research and policy discourses and by the specific instructional practice of homework, and especially what effects it might produce in the context of U.S. education.

A historical view of the construction of public schooling reveals an original project both distinct from family education and akin to democratic ideals. Notwithstanding, schooling has played a specific part in the reproduction of social

hierarchies within socio-economic-cultural change, by grossly converting family, ethnic, gender, and class conditions into unequal individual educational achievement. In this process, a history of successful schooling and social rewards (for instance, upward mobility) was constructed, including ideologies like meritocracy and practices (politics) like parental involvement.

Accordingly, the call for parental involvement in education appeals to powerful cultural meanings and typical sentiments and values related to family strength, cohesion, and obligation, but also to individual initiative and search for advantage, exemplified by current phrases such as *constructing the school career*, *obtaining a tailored education*, and *negotiating the school system* in order to get the best opportunities for one's child. Evidently, in constructing the role of the school as one of offering opportunities that individuals (students and their families) may use for their own advancement, this policy is blind to both the external social function and internal workings of the educational system within the process of reproduction of social inequality, as well as to the limits of the logic of educational opportunity. And it produces, inevitably, negative effects: students shortcomings can be attributed to lack of parental involvement; family apathy in front of the school's implicit and explicit demands can be addressed as cultural deficit; and the meaning of education can be constructed in terms of individual responsibility and family choice, omitting social responsibility.

The fact that schools have limited power to transform social conditions, and have not succeeded in fostering a common (and high) level of individual development or in equalizing basic educational outcomes, does not mean that schools' relative

power (which has been used to re-produce social hierarchies in new ways) should not be preferably and persistently directed toward the purpose of democratic-equality. Unfortunately, at this moment, the sway of the neo-liberal political agenda is placing accountability fully on the individual, blaming disadvantaged groups as a result. In educational policy, the formalization of parental involvement - along with other reforms like school choice, and the instructional stress on autonomous and more accountable learners - represents just one aspect of the current retraction of public responsibility, supposedly on behalf of individual, family, and community empowerment. In this way, the current policy rhetoric clearly admits that schools have no power, or that their power is subordinate to the family:

> The *effective* functioning of schools has depended on the *effective* functioning of the family and community. What makes some ghetto schools function poorly is that the communities and families they serve are weak, lacking the social capital that would reinforce the school's goals. (Coleman, 1991, p. 13, italics added)

The fact that family input has come to be formally recognized as an essential condition for school effectiveness reveals the betrayal of the democratic project of public education: a school devised to be effective independently from, and precisely in order to counterbalance, unequal social conditions which harm individuals and hinder their development.

The (direct or indirect) role of the family in student achievement is indisputable: by preparing children to adapt and succeed in school by developing literate, school-like practices at home and further backing the school curriculum (conveying and incrementing cultural capital), and by participating in school events

and developing close connections with school staff in order to exert influence on behalf of their children (investing social capital), middle and upper class parents mediate their children's school performance. The selective function of school is also undeniable: its curriculum counts on a certain family cultural background and continual support, and its practices build on daily home, specific academic, workings. The fact that teachers expect more from students who have involved parents (because those students are more likely to respond and corroborate their efforts) tells about the importance of symbolic exchanges in the production of school outcomes. And it also tells of where and with whom resides the ultimate power of re-production within schooling: in the school's cultural (i.e., arbitrary) standards, and with the teachers.

Thus, the family-school partnership means that families invest their cultural and social capital, while schools capitalize on specific forms of capital, sanctioning their conversion into academic capital, i.e., grades and credentials. Accurately, there can be no partnership in the case of those families who do not possess the required symbolic capital. At the same time, those families and groups who can seize the opportunity to participate in school governance, might use it in detriment to the interests of those less powerful. Hence, the degree of success of this policy - in terms of benefiting all students, or those most in need - tends to be limited from the outset. However, while it is very likely that family-school relations will just remain as they are, with low levels of parental involvement, schools will have a lever to tighten their selective function, discriminating between students of positively involved and non-involved parents. Effects on the development of instruction are also conceivable, the most obvious being the likely scenario in which teachers' efforts at communicating

with parents and helping them enhance their parenting efficacy will drain energy away from the classroom process.

From the perspective of the family, the immediate implication of more parental involvement is a demand for time, and also for specific social and intellectual skills. In this way, the so-called opportunity to participate is likely to be perceived as an extra burden by precisely those parents who have not been involved. Moreover, the mandate on particular kinds of involvement basically restricts families' choices regarding private life, supposedly in the name of benefiting their children, hence imposing a strong moral sanction.

One interesting question related to the formalization of parental involvement is whether by making explicit the (previously implicit) contribution of the family to school achievement this policy would really create opportunity and, consequently, increment family input precisely where it is found lacking. Notwithstanding, it is very doubtful that a formal incentive drawing basically on individual (parental) motivation and effort can create the conditions to overcome objective and subjective impediments present in the family and broader social contexts, as well as in parent-school relations, so that all families become educationally productive in the terms defined by the school. And it is also implausible that schools should carry a massive effort at parent re-education toward this goal.

A question remains: why the current stress on family educational accountability? One possible answer addresses the limits of schools in promoting both education and social equalization. In this case, shared accountability helps spare schools and teachers the recurrent rhetoric of blame for the social crisis, while

simultaneously diverting attention from the school problematic. Along this line, the need for parental involvement can be read contradictorily as both acknowledgement of the weakness of school, and the set up of a new scapegoat.

Considering that parental re-education is a necessary requirement of parental involvement, another answer bears upon the very cultural project of schooling within the social order - its central role in the reproduction of the dominant cultural arbitrary and social hierarchies, in Bourdieu and Passeron's terms, or its role in building and maintaining the cultural hegemony of the dominant classes, in Antonio Gramsci's terms - via the reinforcement of meritocracy (and its related values and practices, such as individual effort, and student assessment), and via the dissemination of up-to-date knowledges and technologies. In this sense, parental involvement legitimatizes the whole project and practices of schooling, as well as the cultural practices furthered through schooling (for instance, the current use of computers), and thus can be seen as a consensus building strategy within adult continual education.

And, indeed, parental involvement and, particularly, its segment of parent education, have been announced as a timely strategy to help minorities who "suffer disproportionately from inadequate education, unemployment, and other social and economic handicaps" (Chavkin, 1993, p. 1),[1] at a moment in which growth in immigration and minority population are amply acknowledged and feared as threats to

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[1] Chavkin (1993) cites the 1988 report *One-third of a nation: A Report of the Commission on Minority Participation in Education and American Life* issued by the American Council on Education and Education Commission of the States, Washington, DC: "The report predicts that the alarming disparities in the educational achievement of minorities will lead to a compromised quality of life and a lower standard of living not just for the minority population but also for the majority population" (p. 2).

the domestic economy, the social order, and the national security - hence as a strategy (beyond the helping motive) to secure the cultural and linguistic hegemony and promote social efficiency, as it happened a century ago.

Yet, the intensification of the cultural hegemony and ideological consensus-building role of schooling by calling on parental involvement, in this case, is bound to stir a host of contradictions. Whereas successful family-school partnerships depend on convergence of views on purposes and contents of education, it is notable that the call for parental involvement has not been coupled with a call to discuss public education, the academic curriculum, and its practices. Moreover, partnerships also depend on agreement over teaching and parenting roles and rights, another polemic arena (Education Week, on line). And, finally, they require trust and respect between teachers and parents, based not only on common values and goals, but on actual student learning and satisfactory formal outcomes (grades!), which makes it unlikely that precisely those parents of 'at-risk' students will become involved, in spite of happy exceptions.

In this context, the most important political-practical implication of understanding the meaning of education as symbolic violence and the articulation of school and family in social reproduction is the strengthening of the democratic role of the public school, while simultaneously restraining the reach of policy onto private life. On the one hand, symbolic violence or cultural imposition may be tolerable, to some degree, if confined to the public realm, as long as the private sphere bears freedom. On the other hand, schools can only contradict the reproduction of social inequality by extending their pedagogic autonomy in order to produce a common and

meaningful experience, *precisely through kinds of teaching and learning unavailable at home*, and effective and fair outcomes, in the terms that make students and families happy. This requires, fundamentally, commitment to public education, the recovery of democratic ideals, and the specific development of a pedagogy that does not require family input.

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