

DOSSIER

The sociology of family-school relationships: social reconfigurations and new analytical and methodological perspectives

Family participation in educational management: the place of *parent-teachers*

Participação das famílias na gestão educacional: o lugar dos pais-professores

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ABSTRACT

The article analyzes the interactions between parents and guardians participating in a public action proposed by family representatives in an Education Municipal Council (CME), which intended to increase this segment's participation in education democratic management. The theoretical framework encompassed sociological research on family-school relationships and ethnographic studies on participation processes. The study followed the action through the participant observation of CME sessions, in the events organized during public action, and during the Education Municipal Conference, the application of 130 questionnaires, four in-depth interviews, and countless informal conversations with managers and parents participating in the process. Although there is strong pressure for cooperation supported by the discourse of family-school partnership, parents have different views of education, values, attitudes, and interests. In this article, we specifically address a tension in the relationship between regular parents and parents who are also public school professionals (i.e., *parent-teachers*). This tension, conditioned by differences in class, race, gender, cultural, and professional capital, is related to differences in organizational position, visions, interests, and priorities. Furthermore, it is connected to the identity ambiguities of being both a parent and an education professional, as well as the status of the parents' movement in that context. This analysis can contribute to understanding better the ambiguities and challenges involved in family-school partnership proposals and parental participation in educational system management.

Keywords: Family-School Relationship. Parent-Teachers. Participation. Educational Management. Education Municipal Council.

RESUMO

O artigo analisa as interações entre mães, pais e responsáveis participantes de uma ação pública, proposta por representantes de famílias no Conselho Municipal de Educação (CME) de Belo Horizonte. A ação pública, que tinha a intenção de incrementar a participação desse segmento na gestão democrática da educação no

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município, foi objeto de uma pesquisa que incluiu: observação participante nas sessões do CME, nos eventos organizados durante a ação pública, na Conferência Municipal de Educação; aplicação de questionários; realização de entrevistas e inúmeras conversas informais com gestores e responsáveis que participaram do processo. O referencial teórico abarcou pesquisas sociológicas sobre relações família-escola e estudos etnográficos sobre processos de participação. Tal literatura indica que, embora haja uma forte pressão pela concertação apoiada no discurso da parceria família-escola, os responsáveis possuem visões de educação, valores, posturas e interesses diversos. No caso analisado, identificamos uma tensão nas relações entre os responsáveis que eram, também, profissionais da rede pública (*responsáveis-professores*) e os demais. Essa tensão, condicionada pelos diferenciais de classe, raça, gênero, capital cultural e profissional, relacionava-se às diferenças de posição organizacional, visões, interesses e prioridades; às ambiguidades da identidade dupla de responsável e de profissional da educação, bem como ao próprio status do movimento de responsáveis naquele contexto. A análise pode trazer contribuições para a compreensão dos desafios envolvidos nas propostas de parceria família-escola e de participação parental na gestão dos sistemas de ensino.

Palavras-chave: Relação Família-Escola. Pais-Professores. Participação. Gestão Educacional. Conselho Municipal de Educação.

Introduction

Since the late 20th century, studies in the sociology of education have identified the dissemination of discourses and educational policies that incentivize the approximation and partnership between families and schools. This movement is related to structural changes in different dimensions of the economic and social life, which generated important transformations in the family and schools, thus also reconfiguring the relationships between these two socializing institutions. The works in this field point towards the establishment of a true consensus around the benefits of this partnership, which would bring advantages for students in their learning processes and development, and for teachers and guardians, as well as for society in general (Lareau, 1987; Vincent; Tomlinson, 1997; Silva, 2003; Nogueira, 2006).

Participation is one of the most emphasized points in family-school relationship. According to Silva (2003), several authors argue that the strengthening of the relationships between both institutions, with a greater participation of those involved, would correspond to a democratization that would be important not only for the educational system but to society as a whole, contributing to foment a culture of representative democracy. Regarding families, we have been witnessing — after World War II in most Western countries and, in the Brazilian case, since the redemocratization process after the Brazilian military dictatorship — an unprecedented incentive of the State to develop mechanisms of formal participation of students' guardians in the educational systems (Silva, 2003; Resende; Silva, 2016)¹. However, the sociological studies also continuously point out that, beyond the partnership discourses, the interactions between schools and families are frequently marked by asymmetries, tensions, and conflicts, and the several forms of participation can be filled with traps

¹ Though the literature historically uses the term *pais* [parentes], we consider the expression *mothers, fathers, and guardians* more adequate for the context of family participation in Brazilian public schools. However, we will generally use the term *guardians* due to space issues and writing flow.

and contribute to social and cultural reproduction (Lareau, 1987; Nogueira, 1998; 2005; Silva, 2003; Lareau; Muñoz, 2012; Canedo, 2018).

The present article² emerges from a research that aimed to contribute to this study field, focusing on a public action held in Belo Horizonte/MG, Brazil, between 2018 and 2019 toward incrementing the participation of mothers, fathers, and guardians of students in formal instances of education democratic management, such as school councils³, the Education Municipal Council (*Conselho Municipal de Educação* - CME) and the Education Municipal Conferences. The public action involved the implementation of meetings and the formation of a Mobilization Group (*Grupo de Mobilização* - GM) with thirty guardians representing the families in the school councils and at CME, meetings, seminars, and participation in the Pre-Conferences and the Education Municipal Conference. The research methodology encompassed a participant observation lasting 18 months, the application of questionnaires to 130 guardians who acted in participation instances, and the conduction of four in-depth interviews. In this article, we focus on the analyses of the interactions and tensions identified between *guardians-teachers* (students' mothers, fathers, and guardians that professionally work as K-12 teachers)⁴ and other responsible people.

The sociology of family-school relationships has been including, among its various study themes, the relationship of guardians-teachers with their children's schooling (Silva, 2006; Nogueira; Nogueira, 2017; Zanten, 2018; Nogueira; Coutrim, 2018). French researcher Agnès Van Zanten (2018), when presenting an issue of *Revue Française de Pédagogie* on the theme, argues that investigating the family educational practices of parents-teachers can contribute to renovating the view about family-school relationship and the workings of the educational system in general, as it allows - examining a social group whose peculiarities favor the relationship with this system – shed light on the work implemented by guardians over the students and, thus, bring new elements to the discussion on social reproduction and educational inequalities.

Nonetheless, few studies focus on the political participation of guardians-teachers in the democratic management and education systems. One of these works is Silva (2006), which identified that, in the scope of parent associations in Portuguese schools, the guardians-teachers assumed a recognized role of mediation between working-class guardians and the school. In our case, though

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³ The school council is a collegiate body of democratic management in public education, with the participation of members from different segments of the school community. Brazilian legislation does not determine the obligation of these bodies, attributing to the States and municipalities the competence to define the norms of democratic management. In the case of Belo Horizonte, the Ordinance nº 01, from December 28, 1983, from the Education Municipal Secretary, established the Assembly and the School Collegiate as two of the central deliberative bodies of the schools in the municipal system. In this text, we use the expressions "council" and school "collegiate" as equivalent, while the latter is more recurrent among the research subjects.

⁴ The academic literature uses the term "parent-teacher," as in the title of this text, to represent the mothers, fathers, and guardians of the students who are also K-12 teachers (Nogueira; Coutrim, 2018; Van Zanten, 2018). We will use this expression when referring to the literature, alternating it with the term "guardians-teachers," with a similar meaning, which we will privilege regarding our research data. We highlight that Silva (2003; 2006) distinguishes the expressions "parents-teachers" and "teachers-parents" – depending on the involvement (or not) in spaces of parental collective action – that we did not find in other authors and will not use in this article.

this mediating dimension was also present, what called more attention was the open and rough aversion of a group of guardians, mostly with popular origins⁵ and a history of participation in instances of democratic management in the education system towards guardians-teachers' actions. For this group, the excessive presence of this profile of guardians (the teachers) would distort the families' movement. The group of critics empowered themselves during the process, culminating months later in, perhaps, the only election of family representatives in CME in which no guardian-teacher has been elected in the past twenty years.

The process described above, which will be analyzed in-depth throughout the article, regards a very peculiar dimension of the family-school relationship. To which point do guardians and teachers share the same interests? How does the double identity of guardians-teachers affect their practices and positions in the participation spaces in the education system? How do the other guardians receive these practices?

In line with Van Zanten's (2018) ideas mentioned above, in this article, we intend to approach this particular dimension, contributing to widening the field of studies on families' participation processes in the instances of democratic management of the education system and over the family-school relationships in general, expanding the understanding on the tensions of this relation. To do so, we initially summarize part of the theoretical debate on the themes. After, we present the research context and methodology to discuss the main data selected for this work.

The theoretical debate

We establish a dialogue between the studies in the field of sociology of education that analyze the relationship between family-school, the participative processes in education, and the social interactions of guardians-teachers, considering their actions in spaces of formal participation in the education system and the models through which they deal with their children's schooling.

Talking about family-school relationships means approaching a vast theme discussed in different disciplinary areas, such as Psychology, Sociology, Anthropology, Politics, History, Philosophy, and others. In this universe, sociological studies highlight the "interdependence between the social conditions of family origins and the relationship forms that they establish with the school" (Nogueira; Romanelli; Zago, 2000, p. 10). From this perspective, school and family cannot be taken as something abstract – as often observed in the discourses of participation and partnership -but should be analyzed within their historical and sociocultural conditions.

Hence, the studies that originated the Sociology of Family-School Relationships in the late 20th century (Nogueira, 1998), aimed to analyze the relationships that families from different social backgrounds establish with school education; some of them, at first, analyzing school trajectories, while others later considering more specific aspects, such as school choice, the following of homework, the ways guardians are involved in their children's school life, their actions in spaces

⁵ The participant observation and the informal conversations with guardians during the public action allowed us to characterize them as having low-income origins, considering the low schooling level (most without higher education), occupations (technical and manual), and the life and housing conditions.

of formation participation in education systems, among others. Regarding the investigated family groups, the diversification of studies also led to the complexification of the social class effects and the contemplation of specific social categories, with occupational, ethnical-racial, religious, and gender focuses, and others (Vincent, 2017; Posey-Maddox; Haley, 2017; Lareau; Horvart, 1999; Ball *et al.*, 2013; Lareau; Weininger, 2008). In this context, studies about family-school relationship focused on “parents-teachers” emerge, which we are particularly interested in this text.

As Silva (2003; 2006; 2007) analyzes, the family-school relationship is complex and multifaceted, encompassing two dimensions regarding those involved: individual and collective. The first corresponds to activities individually undertaken by teachers, guardians, or students, generally due to private interests. The collective dimension consists of an organized action focused on the general interests of a group or the whole collective, with an eminently political character. Some examples are the participation of mothers, fathers, or guardians in bodies of democratic management in the educational system or the creation of guardians’ commissions to deal with specific issues or demands (Nogueira; Coutinho; Resende, 2023). Silva (2003, p. 350) highlights that the relationships between the two dimensions can be “complementary but also tense” and that the students’ guardians tend to privilege the individual dimension, a reason why they normally assume a more conservative role concerning school. Zanten (2001) goes beyond identifying that the individual interests of middle-class guardians can be translated into collective actions aiming to guarantee a good education for their children through the promotion of internal segregation in public education establishments. This protection strategy via segregation was called “colonization.” After, the use of the term was enlarged to refer to the different actions undertaken by families to influence the adoption by the school of measures that benefit them (Zanten, 2009; Nogueira; Nogueira, 2017).

The studies about guardians-teachers, which compose a still small group in the field of Sociology of Education, have been stressing the individual actions of those guardians who belong to this professional category in their analysis. Nogueira and Coutrim (2018, p. 77), in a bibliographical review of such studies, considering studies in Portuguese, English, and French, identified 27 works and concluded that there is a concentration of them (in the case, 10), in “themes more related to the so-called ‘effect parent-teacher’, that is, an effect of the teaching exercise by parents on their children’s schooling.” They also show the existence of more specific themes, such as the choice of school for their children, or the influence of the teaching profession in their children’s professional choice. Only one theme group identified by the authors corresponded more directly to the collective dimension of the subjects’ work in the family-school relationship: which gathers works on the “participation of parents-teachers in the democratic school management” (Nogueira; Coutrim, 2018, p. 81). Evidence of the very restricted character of this production is the fact that there are only five works, all from the same author (the Portuguese researcher Pedro Silva), based on the same research he conducted, and not all of them, in fact, focus on the issue of guardians-teachers.

Regarding the more general theme of the effects of the condition of *guardian-teacher* on their children’s schooling, the studies point out that, as a tendency, teachers compose a group of guardians that evolve with much more ease when faced by the demands of “parents profession” (Van Zanten, 2018, p. 5). According to Van Zanten (2018), the use of this expression, many often used metaphorically, in the contemporary contexts of intensification of children’s educational follow-up

by guardians, gains full meaning in the case of guardians-teachers, considering their high investment and the almost professional character their actions in the area.

The literature also points out that, despite a series of conditions to be considered, teachers' children tend to have advantages in school competition, allowed by family capitals, especially strong regarding the knowledge of the education system and the relationship networks connected to it (Nogueira; Coutrim, 2018). There is evidence that such advantages are stronger for the sons of female teachers, pointing out that gender configurations influence the transmission of these capitals (Zanten, 2018). The guardians-teachers know the official and the hidden curricula, master the technical language, the organization functioning, and they think about schooling strategies. This capital affects the participation capacity (Silva, 2006) and the higher action recurrence compared to other groups (Nogueira; Coutrim, 2018). In this sense, the guardians with this profile would adopt more systematic and intensive colonization strategies, even when compared to other professional middle-class profiles (Nogueira; Nogueira, 2017; Zanten, 2018).

About the action of guardians-teachers in the collective dimension of the family-school relationships, some sparse findings – in the scope of studies that did not have this focus and center in the individual practices of following up children's schooling – indicate, for example, that the guardians stand out in their participation in parents' associations (Nogueira; Coutrim, 2018; Van Zanten, 2018) and are also numerous in instances of democratic management, such as school councils (Van Zanten, 2018).

As pointed out, Silva (2006) is an author who more centrally approaches the collective actions of guardians-teachers. He specifically focuses on parents' associations and the possible effects of the "hybrid condition" of guardians' teachers (p. 268), questioning how they conciliate their two roles and reconcile private interests connected to their own children's association and the collective interests considering that they do not always coincide. Thus, knowing from within the school and the educational system, these guardians can act as a "privileged bridge" between the school culture and the local cultures; however, there is also the possibility of becoming "double agents" who end up being "good defenders...of themselves" (Silva, 2006, p. 286).

Since the 1970s and 1980s, guardians' participation in management instances has become increasingly more stimulated by educational policies. We observe an escalation in the demands of family-school partnership, with parental involvement becoming synonymous with good practices for guardians and educational professionals. The dissemination of this ideal was also supported by quantitative studies that demonstrated correlations between a greater involvement of guardians in school and students' school performance. However, this demand frequently ignores structural dimensions of the relationships between guardians and teachers, reducing the tensions to communication problems. Hence, they often ended up justifying the control mechanisms of guardians and students (Lareau, 1987; Vincent; Tomlinson, 1997; Nogueira, 2006; Lareau; Muñoz, 2012).

In previous texts, the dissemination of partnership ideals and participation in public organizations are found in some analyses that currently contribute to a critical perspective of these ideals. Thus, Waller (1965 [1932]) and Becker (1953) identify that teachers and guardians are in different positions in the dynamic of interactions of school organization. According to Becker (1953),

teachers identify themselves as professionals, contraposing the lay people. Their interaction with guardians would involve structural tensions and the fear of risking their teaching authority. Finally, the teachers he analyzed shared the “notion that there is no place for parents in school” (Becker, 1953, p.130). Teachers would tend to incorporate a view of family school relationship based on an institutional perspective, focused on the logic of school organization.

Therefore, for this literature, the discourse of partnership and incentive to the involvement of families is established in an environment in which teachers and schools seek to maintain their authority and functioning, through a series of disciplinary control devices. Such discourse tends to establish itself as a way to co-opt parental support in terms defined by the school (Vincent; Tomlinson, 1997). This scenario contributes to understanding Barrault’s (2013) statement that encompasses the spaces of participation in the education systems as concertation instances, with dynamics that tend to silence disagreements and conflicts. These spaces present a tension between institutionalization and contestation, between co-optation and the construction of an autonomous position. Because of this, studies have identified that building one’s own agenda is a challenge for guardians’ participation in the instances of democratic management of the educational system. Furthermore, the more autonomous participation of the families can trigger tensions and apprehension among schools’ professionals (Silva, 2006; Lareau; Muñoz, 2012).

When guardians collectively engage in seeking a more autonomous posture, they are faced with structuring aspects of their institutional position, such as the fragmented nature and the great rotation of guardians’ movements, the lack of resources, and the institutional dependence. By analyzing the interactions in parent and teacher associations, Lareau and Muñoz (2012) identified that teachers and guardians have more or less common objectives, but this does not stop the existence of conflicts around the authority and the priorities of actions. Though there is an ideal that they are working for the same purposes – educating children and teenagers –, when observing the complexity of contexts and situations experienced in the interactions among individuals, families, and schools in the education system, we can perceive that, in many cases, these actors can have diverging interests, positions, and priorities. Quoting Lightfoot (1977), Silva (2006, p. 276) reminds us that such divergencies are not sporadic but emerge from a structural discontinuity of the interactions between guardians and teachers so that “there can never be a (total) merge of roles” among them, even when, “in the limit, they can get confused in the same subject”.

Research context and methodology

As summed up in the introduction, the research that originated this article followed a public action connected to Education Municipal Council (Conselho Municipal de Educação - CME) from Belo Horizonte/MG-Brazil. The public action started in 2018 through the demand of three counselors that represented the segment of families at the CME, which placed into debate the action of the representatives from this segment in the formal instances of participation in the municipal education system, such as school collegiate, the Education Municipal Conferences, and CME (2018) itself. We should highlight that the arguments raised by the three counselors would meet some of

the challenges identified by the literature regarding parental representations in associative bodies or schools' management, such as the challenge of formation and representation (Silva, 2007).

Concerning the first, the three counselors evaluated the action of family representatives as insufficient and little qualified, as they did not have any type of previous formation regarding the more general political and educational issues nor more specific aspects of the meetings and conferences. For instance, if a family representative started to talk in a conference and someone would interrupt by saying "Point of order", she/he would often not know how to continue. According to the counselors representing the guardian segments, this would create a feeling of worthlessness and would keep families away from the management bodies and conferences.

About the representation issue, one of the three counselors specifically argued that, though he considered himself a representative of guardians, he had nobody he could talk to or rely on. Thus, he demonstrated the sensibility, to which Silva (2007, p. 16) refers, of understanding that "the construction of efficient and regular communication channels with the parents" would be a condition for the "democratic exercise of its functions". Therefore, the three counselors asked CME's institutional support to face these problems and strengthen the participation of the representatives of mothers, fathers, and guardians in democratic management. They specially aimed a more effective and qualified participation of these representatives in the Education Municipal Conference that would take place in 2019.

Thus, in September 2018, CME promoted the "*I Encontro de Pais Representantes de Colegiados Escolares*" [I Meeting of Representative Parents in the School Collegiates] which had approximately one hundred participants. According to the report, the event aimed to "strengthen parents' participation in the collegiate bodies, contributing to a better understanding of their role in this instance and in others, such as the education conferences and several events" (CME, 2018). In this meeting, under the guidance of representative counselors of the family segments, a *Grupo de Mobilização* (Mobilization Group- GM) was established through the election of 30 members, who represented schools from different regions of the city, this group was responsible for planning actions to reach the objective proposed. During the following months, with the support of CME and the authors' of this article, GM carried out several organization meetings of these actions, including two "*Encontros Regionais de Mães, Pais e Responsáveis*" [Regional Meetings of Mothers, Fathers, and Guardians], in different regions of the city, gathering approximately 160 and 110 participants respectively; the "*I Seminário de Mobilização das Mães, Pais e Responsáveis Representantes de Colegiados pela Qualidade na Educação*" [I Mobilization Seminar of Mothers, Parents, and Guardians Representatives in the Collegiates for Quality in Education] with approximately 140 participants; participation in the Municipal Pre-Conferences of Education, held in each administrative region of the city and in the X Municipal Conference of Education, held in July 2019. This conference marked the GM dissolution when the election of family representatives was carried out for the CME, years 2019/2021.

Being invited to the *I Encontro de Pais Representantes de Colegiados Escolares* [I Meeting of Parents Representative of School Collegiate], we developed an ethnographic study that lasted 18 months and 200 hours of observation following the key actors of the mobilization process in the CME assemblies in all the meetings and events organized by GM and their participations in the

pre-conferences and the Educational Municipal Conference. Generally, studies about participation in the education system tend to focus the analysis on a single instance – school councils, municipal councils, etc. In our case, considering the nature of the public action we analyze and the proposed objectives, we needed to build the research design dialoguing with ethnographic studies about participation processes (Cefäi *et al.* 2012; Heredia *et al.*, 2012), which started from the experience context, questioning the frontiers of politics and participation; not disregarding the power structures and configurations, and its influence over the definition of the situations. However, we should care for the processes of coordination, action margins, strategies, and discontinuities.

The participant observation had the support of five research assistants who followed the key actors in work groups and plenary sessions of the events organized by GM, as well as in the pre-conferences and the Education Municipal Conference. At certain moments, seven researchers observed the guardians' participation in the events, creating hundreds of pages in the field notebooks. This data was complemented by 130 questionnaires applied to the Seminar's participants, four in-depth semi-structured interviews with GM members, recorded and transcribed, and countless informal conversations with guardians, CME counselors, and managers of the Education Municipal Secretary.

This work will not discuss the mobilization process's results or more general unfoldings. We will highlight the specific question of the relations between the guardians-teachers and the other family representatives – which, as pointed out, caught our attention during the research. Before the data analysis, we should highlight that our research focuses on guardians who already acted more than the average in the formal participation spaces. While seeking sociological patterns found in other situations and contexts, or that allow the reflection on more general questions regarding the family-school relationship and the participation of family representatives in the management of the public system, we stress that our analyses are an interpretation of this specific case.

Data discussion

The analysis proposed in this text mainly uses the data raised in the observation of the interactions between family representatives in two spaces: the assemblies in the Education Municipal Councils (*Conselho Municipal de Educação – CME*) and the meetings and events organized by the Mobilization Group (*Grupo de Mobilização – GM*), though the tensions also appeared in the debates that took place in the events held during the public action, in the pre-conferences, and the Education Municipal Conference. In these environments, the interactions among the participants of the public action were extremely intense, with the need for more elaborate positions and the construction of understandings, as well as latent or explicit tensions and conflicts. To understand this context, we need to briefly describe the guardians' profiles and the configurations of the representatives in both spaces.

CME-BH has 24 counselors; three represent the guardians of students from municipal schools, each with a substitute, elected every two years in the Education Municipal Conference. During the development period of the public action, the group of six counselors representing the

families was composed of two women and four men, a male overrepresentation, as our survey pointed out that 79% of school counselors who participated in the Seminar were women. Out of the six municipal counselors, three members came from low-income classes, and the other three were from the middle-class⁶, three declared themselves black, one brown, and two white. Finally, two were guardians-teachers.

Only the three who proposed the public action, Jorge, Nilda, and Denise⁷, actively participated in the mobilization process; another counselor appeared at some public action moments, and two never participated. Among the proponents, there were two women, one brown from a low-income class, with a trajectory of participation in education movements, and a black one, teacher in the municipal system and a union member. The third counselor was a black man, an autonomous worker in civil construction, who had been a municipal counselor in previous mandates representing the young and adult students in the municipal system.

International studies in the field highlight the weight of social class and access to cultural capital as conditioning for the actors' actions in participation spaces within the education system. For example, Vincent and Tomlinson (1997) perceive the protagonism of middle-class and white guardians. Barrault (2013) identifies a formation tendency in two poles. One comprises guardians with more cultural capital, mainly from the middle class, who are more mobilized and have more diversified participation practices. And in the other pole, the low-income guardians intervene little in the discussions, with interests associated with private, punctual, and practical concerns. The case we studied does not fit this frame, which does not mean that these profiles and class tension are not present. We should highlight that important leaders in the process were black people from low-income groups, some raising very elaborate reflections about pertinent issues for the mobilization.

Regarding the GM composition, we collected general data on the participants' profiles during the first group meetings, which involved a presentation for each member. The meetings never had the presence of all elected members, with approximately 20 people present. Since the first meeting, we identified a significant diversity of profiles among the guardians partaking in GM. On the other hand, it was also possible to highlight tendencies and interest groups.

There were clearly some groups that, though numerically minorities, tended to be protagonists and guide the agendas of the meetings, thus becoming more representatives. These groups were the guardians-teachers; guardians of special education students, and groups with some other affiliation (social and education movements, social projects, churches, and parties). Many of the 30 representatives already had a history of social participation inside or outside education. However, though some participants had better defined and apparent affiliations, belongings, and agendas, others reached there with no significant experience of participation, stimulated by the schools' direction without being clear of its role.

⁶ There were three counselors with an undergraduate diploma, two teachers, and a parliamentary aide, who were considered middle class. The other three had finished middle or high school in YAE and had manual occupations with low salaries or did not work.

⁷ All subjects' names are fictitious to keep anonymity.

Since the first GM meeting, some participants had an elaborate discourse and were critical of their schools, which, according to them, would systematically sabotage the engagement actions of the guardians. This was the case of Luciana, a mother of two elementary school students, one of them with Autism Spectrum Disorder. In her own words, this mother participated “in all school movements”:

I'm a member of the Collegiate and I wasn't informed of this meeting. I knew about it by chance. The school is not interested on parents participating. The Regiment says that the school would provide us with training. And this does not happen. The main role of this help in the Council would be to give us a guide, a direction. (...) We'll be in a Conference with candidates running for principals. They need to know that their role is to foment the functioning of the Collegiate in the school. To know what families expect (Luciana, mother of two students).

In this excerpt, Luciana expresses a very common feeling among participants. Though some of the guardians reported a great interaction with the school direction and its incentives to participate in public action, several expressed the tensions experienced in the relationships with school management. This mother showed a certain disbelief in the school's capacity to foment the participation of families and listen to them. Moreover, she believed that a public action proposed by the representatives of the family segment at the CME could contribute to the work of the guardians who acted in the school councils. Another mother, with experience in activism in party politics, affirmed during an event that she had given up acting in the councils because she saw little action margin in these spaces due to the bureaucratization level. In general, the guardians that shared this view believed that the school structure and a considerable part of the education professionals limited the space of families' political action in the school councils.

Considering the guardians-teachers, we identified four GM members in this “hybrid condition” (Silva, 2006): a teacher from the state system and three teachers of municipal Childhood Education. Though the group was not numerically big, its members' cultural, professional, and militant capital would contribute to them occupying an important place in the debates and in the organization of actions. One of these guardians-teachers, a substitute counselor and union member, had a central role in the mobilization. Empowered by this multiple connection, the formation, and the experience in the teaching and union systems, she strongly influenced the *Grupo de Mobilização* meetings and the events it promoted. Initially, she led a group of guardians-teachers seeking to make her viewpoints known.

A common characteristic in this group of guardians-teachers discourse was the statement that teachers and families were always on the same side, an argument that was also hegemonic among the different segments with representatives at CME. That is, a great partnership among all stakeholders would be established, and they would be there willing to seek ways to improve the quality of education by promoting better work conditions for the education professionals and students' learning. We could observe a general intention to collaborate to create actions and policies for education in the city. However, in CME and in GM, their belongings crossed the actors' participation and individual and collective interests.

In the CME assemblies, the Education Municipal Secretary managers, teachers from different education systems, and other segments had their own interests and perspectives. However, in the

functioning of the Council – considered a space of concertation (Barrault, 2013) and regulation -, a good part of the conflicts of interests between the groups tended to be diluted or diminished in the debate, in the name of collaboration towards quality education. Therefore, the situation is not easy for the family representatives: out of the 24 counselors, 18 were representatives of the institutions or unions.

In this context, two of the counselors who led the public action considered it important to strengthen the movement of guardians, building their own agenda, more autonomous, which could be closer to the interests and positions of the other segments in the necessary moments but that was not subsumed and even submitted to the interests of others. They considered alliances with teachers necessary in given moments and agendas, for example, when fighting for school resources. However, they also claimed that adhesion to the discourse of teachers would hinder voicing the specific demands and positions of the families - for example, the criticism toward the problems of schools' educational offer that, in many cases, could be related to the behavior of education professionals.

These counselors denounced the isolation of the representatives of the segment and the superficial and peripheral level of family participation in the instances of democratic management in the education system. During the first GM meeting, Jorge, one of the CME counselors, characterized this demand as follows:

The parents who were counselors so far were only concerned with politics. There was no single action to talk about our responsibility as families. We were never called to assess education, the democratic management. How many millions of students and families are we representing? (...) We have the Collegiate; the association – which is often composed by teachers. The Parent and Teacher Associations normally run for president as teachers. We need to bring more conscious parents to CME. We feel alone. I don't have your words to represent (Jorge, stepfather of a middle-class students).

We can see that Jorge is unhappy, among other elements, with the historical overrepresentation of guardians-teachers in the places for families in the bodies and instances of democratic management in education. During the process, we identified that this dissatisfaction was not only his. Four out of eleven guardians who developed some degree of leadership in the mobilization were openly critical of guardians-teachers' presence and practices, which only consolidated a leader in the process. These participants, as well as Jorge, criticized the guardians-teachers' presence and actions. If there was an alignment in some issues, they argued that there was a strong conflict of interests between the guardians-teachers and the others in certain key situations.

The counselor Nilda, titular representative of the family segment at CME, in one of the GM meetings, showed her discontent with the topics raised by the teacher segment for the Educational Municipal Conference; later, with the effects attributed to the strikes:

During the Conferences, when we discuss financial issues, we always discuss the question of teachers' salaries and their valuing. They never discuss anything with the parents. If we want social control, democratic management...Our question is quality. (...) When there is a 50-day strike, they never consider the quality. The replacement of classes after does not have the same quality. We want the constitutional right to quality education. And stop

looking just to the issue of management, teacher, salary (Nilda, representative of the family segment at CME).

A central issue that emerged in the discussions of CME and GM, marking the tension between the guardians' groups, was the teachers' strike and its unfoldings. A little before the start of the public action, there was a strike by the teachers of the municipal system. The guardians-teachers claimed the support of the other guardians, arguing that the salary gains would represent an improvement in education with direct effects on learning and the quality of students' experience. Other guardians supported them; however, those more critical of the actions of the guardians-teachers, though not ignoring this argument, were more concerned with the resolution of the conflict between the city hall and the union, with questions on how the families deal with the difficult situation of children without classes in everyday life, the replacement of school days and curriculum content.

As portrayed in the case of the teachers' strike, there is a tendency in some actions of the guardians-teachers and CME in general – also identified in studies in other countries (Vincent; Tomlinson, 1997) – to try to make a segment of families support external positions, from other segments. According to two leaders of the public action, given the existing power configurations, the counselors elected to represent the families were easily co-opted or captured by these mechanisms because they had little political articulation with their bases. Hence, the segment could not, in their perspective, build an autonomous action based on its own agenda.

On the other hand, the guardians-teachers argued that they had the right to participate in the movement because their children studied in the municipal school system, which shared the same interests as the other families. They defended that teachers and guardians would be on the same side, that everyone fought for a quality public school, and that salary improvements and work conditions represented gains for the students and, consequently, their families. This was, for instance, the sense of Denise's reaction after Nilda's speech:

To talk about valuing and training teachers is not to stop talking about education, about quality. I'm tired of this separation. As a mother, I also want teachers to be valued that they have better training. For my daughter to be educated in a broader sense (Denise, mother of an elementary school student).

Regardless of the considerations in this sense, the tensions continued or even intensified because Denise became a Teachers' Union board member. Due to this connection, Jorge even asked to discuss the pertinence of Denise's participation in the organization of the group's actions in a GM meeting. Nonetheless, she continued to participate in the public action. Finally, we should highlight that the conflict peaked during the Education Municipal Conference. Some guardians-teachers who were not at the GM but participated in the conference seemed uncomfortable with the behaviors and arguments they faced. During the election of the new counselors, the guardians present organized themselves not to elect any guardian-teacher, a successful strategy.

Final remarks

As pointed out in the theoretical debate section of this text, the discourse that preconize the partnership between family and school – including those inciting the participation of families in the

democratic management of the educational system – frequently considers these two institutions abstractedly, disregarding their historical and sociocultural conditions of the structural conflicts that the increase of participation can highlight (Lareau; Muñoz, 2012), reducing the divergences to simple communication problems that could be solved by increasing the dialogue between the parts. The data presented in this article contributes to complexifying this discussion and building a more realistic and objective perspective of the possibilities and challenges of parental participation and partnership.

In the public action of mobilization from family representatives and in the CME meetings, we could see that the guardian-teachers had a strong presence and influence in the debates and follow-ups, as observed in other studies (Silva, 2006) – which can be explained by their technical knowledge on the educational system, higher cultural capital, and greater ability to articulate action and discourse. However, in the mobilization studied, there was a group of participants, mostly from low-income origins, to whom the consolidation and expansion of the guardians' movement would involve reducing the influence of guardians-teachers that, in the perspective of this group, represented, to the limit, their union's interests.

In general, the group of more critical leaders, already used to participating in instances of education democratic management, were aware of the difficulty in organizing the guardians' movement, the institutionalization dilemmas, their dependency on the educational bureaucracy, the little power of influence they had in the local educational politics, and the advantages and identified an ambivalent character in the participation of guardians-teachers in the political arena. In their perspective, certain guardians-teacher practices could be seen as an expansion of the school devices of control within the movement of guardians. In a way, they denounce a sort of colonization of the spaces of democratic management implemented by the guardians-teachers.

Silva (2006; 2007) indicates that the guardian-teachers can become important mediators of the family-school relationship in schools, acting as a bridge between school culture and the local culture and/or from specific groups. In his research, he affirms that in some schools, the guardians tend to elect as representatives those who are teachers because they believe that guardians with this profile would have better conditions to act in association and/or management bodies.

In the case we analyzed, on the one hand, these observations were pertinent – Denise, for example, was a mother-teacher who played an important role in the mobilization process. On the other hand, we could see that, in a series of other situations, in the scope of the municipal educational policy, the interactions of these actors with the other guardians can acquire other contours of tension and conflict, which emerge from the existing structural discontinuity between guardians and teachers (Lightfoot, 1977), who, playing different roles in the relationship with the education system and the students, will necessarily have, in some moment, divergent perspectives and/or interests toward the same questions.

Nonetheless, revising these contours does not mean denying the potentialities of the participation or the partnership between families and schools. On the contrary, we believe that, as Lareau and Muñoz (2012) state, the conflicts should be integrated into the studies about parental participation in the management of educational systems to contribute to planning this participation and conducting the tensions in a more realistic and efficient way.

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