

DOSSIER

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

For a sociology of the school-family relationship

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ABSTRACT

This paper corresponds to a personal essay where I propose the use of the expression sociology of the *school-family relationship*. For this purpose, I present elements of social and theoretical legitimation – for example, through the analysis of hundreds of publications in the most varied formats, as well as through reference to the organization of academic and scientific events – which, in my opinion, support this proposal by pointing to the existence, for decades, of both a field/issue of the school-family relationship and a consolidated practice of a sociological analysis of the same. At the same time, I briefly present my own conception of a sociology of the school-family relationship.

Keywords: School-Family Relationship. Sociology. Sociology of Education.

RESUMO

O presente artigo corresponde a um ensaio pessoal onde proponho o uso da expressão *sociologia da relação escola-família*. Para tal, apresento elementos de legitimação social e teórica – por exemplo, através da análise de centenas de publicações nos mais variados formatos, assim como da referência à organização de eventos académicos e científicos – que, em minha opinião, sustentam tal proposta ao apontarem para a existência, desde há décadas, quer de um campo/problemática da relação escola-família, quer de uma prática consolidada de análise sociológica da mesma. Simultaneamente, apresento, de forma sucinta, a minha própria conceção de uma sociologia da relação escola-família.

Palavras-chave: Relação Escola-Família. Sociologia. Sociologia da Educação.

Introduction

The *sociology of the school-family relationship* has been interpreted, for decades, into a consistent practice of scientific research with the corresponding publication under the most varied formats (books, papers, theses, etc.). However, as this expression is not frequently used, this text constitutes a defense of its use.

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Two notes to begin with:

- 1) I understand this expression – sociology of the school-family relationship – as synonymous with what is, in practice (and a recurring one), a sociological analysis of the school-family relationship;
- 2) I also understand, in this context, the expression “school-family” as a synonym for “family-school” or other similar expressions.

In this regard, I fully endorse Tânia Resende: Although considering that they can be used with different meanings, in this text we will use, with equivalent meaning, the expressions “relations between schools and families”, “relations between families and schools”, “family-school relationship”, “school-family relationship” (Resende, 2013, p. 199, footnote).

As the proposed expression is infrequent, I seek to present in the following sections a set of arguments and facts that support my proposal. For this purpose, I will briefly present elements of legitimation (social and theoretical), as well as my personal perspective of a sociology of the school-family relationship. I include in this overview a quick look at the research in the field of school-family relations, especially since the beginning of this century. The entire chapter was written with brevity in mind, taking into account natural space constraints.

Legitimation elements

The relationship between schools and families refers to the interaction of two central social institutions of post-industrial societies, highly educated societies where the naturalization of the status of student often tends to merge with that of a child and/or young person, which has motivated the use of the expression *studentization* of childhood and youth by authors such as José Alberto Correia (2008) and Manuel Matos (2008; 2009).

The existence of a highly educated society, with the aforementioned naturalization of the student condition, thus constitutes a social condition that allows, at the very least, to raise the question of the possible autonomy of a field focused on the school-family relationship (and given that, at the same time, families have always existed, regardless of their concrete form, as history, sociology and anthropology of the family have shown). It happens that the relationships between schools and families have been the subject of increasing and multidisciplinary attention for decades, notably from sociology, psychology and anthropology.

As we will see, the sociological analysis of school-family relations is a recurring practice with solid foundations, especially in the sociology of education, which simultaneously constitutes a branch of sociology and one of the sciences of education. Although the expression sociology of the school-family relationship is not frequently used, there are two notable exceptions through the usage of very similar terms: a) an article by Jean Pierre Terrail, published in a scientific journal in 1997 and entitled *Sociology of family/school interactions*; and b) the OSFE (Family-School Sociological Observatory), a research group created in 2003 at the Faculty of Education of the Federal University

of Minas Gerais. If the full designation of OSFE is, in itself, significant, we can also read the following in the presentation offered to us on its website:

Thus, in the main centers producing research on Sociology of Education – that is, in countries such as France, Switzerland, Belgium, England and the USA – the creation of a new field of studies began, which came to be known as “sociology of family-school relations” (OSFE, s.d. – my italics, quotation marks in the original).

The use of these two similar terms – “sociology of family/school interactions” and “sociology of family-school relations”; one from 1997; the other from 2003 – did not, however, become recurrent; it did not take root. But it has gained its effective practice.

I will present, below, some elements of social and theoretical legitimation, both from the field of school-family relations and from a sociology of this field.

Social legitimation

There is a whole set of indicators that point to the relative autonomy of the field of school-family relations.

One of them refers to the definition of national and international policies with their conversion into the legislation of the different countries, where, for decades, an approach towards promoting greater parental participation in educational systems has been registered, at least in Western countries, even tending, for various reasons, towards a certain legislative consensus (Beattie, 1985; David, 1993; Silva, 2003). This consensus is also translated into supranational political guidelines from agencies such as UNESCO or the European Commission. A strong signal, in the European context, is the creation, in 2002, of the European Day of Parents and Schools (the second Tuesday of October).

On another level, we can mention the existence of scientific associations and the organization of academic events, national and international, which provide social visibility to the field of school-family relations.

For example, in 1916 the AERA, American Educational Research Association, was created, a century-old association that holds an annual conference that always attracts thousands of participants and has around 180 SIG (Special Interest Groups). One of them, SIG nº 43, is named *Family, School, Community Partnerships* and organizes its own sessions. In 1994, a similar European association was created, EERA, European Educational Research Association, which also holds annual conferences. It has 33 Networks, including Network nº 14 with the name of *Communities, Families, and Schooling in Educational Research*, which is also responsible for organizing events in this area, particularly during the EERA annual conference.

If we are currently facing international associations in the area of education that have formed research groups linked to the issue in question, there are also associations and research networks dedicated exclusively to this area. This is the case of the *International Network of Scholars on Families, Communities, and Schools*, created by Don Davies and Joyce Epstein, in 1991, following the promotion of an *International Roundtable on School, Family, and Community Partnerships*, which continues to meet biennially in the United States since the end of the 80s. Also in Portugal, in 1993,

a *European Roundtable on School, Family, and Community Partnerships* was held, which became the embryo of ERNAPE, *European Research Network About Parents in Education*, founded in the same year in Glasgow. This association holds a biennial conference (in alternating years with its North American counterpart), the first having taken place in Copenhagen in 1996.

It is acknowledged that the topic of the school-family-community relationship gains legitimacy in education associations, but not so much in sociology associations. In this case, both the APS (Portuguese Sociological Association), the ESA (European Sociological Association) and the ISA (International Sociological Association), have research groups in sociology of education and sociology of the family, but not on school-family relations¹. Therefore, it is noteworthy the creation, in 2003, of the aforementioned OSFE (Family-School Sociological Observatory), which aims to constitute “an instance of production and dissemination of knowledge in the field of family-school relations”, as well as “seeks to contribute to the problematization and appreciation of the theme of the family-school relationship within the scope of Brazilian Sociology of Education”. In this sense, it points to “an approximation between Sociology of Education and Sociology of the Family” and takes in account the emergence of a field of studies entitled “sociology of family-school relations” (OSFE, s.d.).

The previous information, however, should be complemented by highlighting that several Sociology of Education conferences provided some visibility to the school-family relationship, not so much through the acceptance of oral presentations on this topic (which are recurrent in sociology and in education and in other social and human sciences), but by including roundtables or panels on it. This is the case of the II International Conference on Sociology of Education, in 1993, in Faro, with the *School-Family Plenary Roundtable: What Relationships? What Contradictions?*², or the 1st Luso-Brazilian Conference on Sociology of Education, in 2008, in Belo Horizonte, through the Roundtable No. 3: *Family-School Relations in Contemporary Times*³. Interestingly, the creation of these roundtables or panels does not seem to be a prerogative of Sociology of the Family meetings. It appears, therefore, that the school-family relationship has been the focus of attention mainly in education events and not so much in the sociology ones. At the same time, in this last field, it is the sociology of education that has given it some visibility.

It should be noted that in Portugal there have been scientific meetings with experts in the school-family relationship⁴. Both ECER (EERA's annual conference), in 2002 (in Lisbon) and in 2014 (in Porto), and ERNAPE in 2013, held conferences in Portugal. The ERNAPE conference, which took

¹ This statement also applies to SPCE, the Portuguese Society of Educational Sciences, founded in 1990, which has a section on Sociology of Education, but not on the school-family relationship.

² This Roundtable had as participants Joyce Epstein and Pedro Silva and was chaired by Raúl Iturra.

³ This Roundtable included the participation of Léa Paixão, Maria Alice Nogueira, Nadir Zago and Pedro Silva, and was chaired by Maria José Braga. Ana Diogo also presented a paper entitled “Family and School Strategies” at a roundtable on school effects.

⁴ Take, for example, the *Encontro Internacional Escolas, Famílias e Lares* (International Meeting Schools, Families and Homes), in November 2007, at the Polytechnic University of Leiria, where the book *Escolas, Famílias e Lares, Um caleidoscópio de olhares* (Schools, Families and Homes, a kaleidoscope of perspectives), edited by me, was launched. This Meeting was attended by 13 of the 14 authors, thus bringing together a significant number of Portuguese and foreign experts

place in Lisbon, brought together renowned experts such as Don Davies, Miriam David and Joyce Epstein, among others⁵.

In addition to these types of indicators on the school-family relationship, in general (definition of policies by international agencies which are converted into the national legislation of many countries; special interest groups in several scientific associations, being many of them international; organization of panels on the issue in academic events), the relationship in question has also been the subject of mediatization by the written and audiovisual press, including the visibility brought by the parental association movement through parents' associations and their respective confederations.

It should be noted that we are facing signs of social legitimization of the field of the school-family relationship, in general. Some of them, however, also include a specifically sociological view on the relationship, as is the case of panels/roundtables organized within the scope of sociology and/or sociology of education meetings or the creation of a research group about it, as is the case with OSFE.

Theoretical legitimization

The issue of the school-family relationship has also been the subject of numerous publications. This has been consistent for decades and encompasses a diversity of types of literature, including essays, guides, handbooks, systematization works, presentation of projects, scientific papers. This diversity also corresponds to a plurality of formats, including books and scientific, journalistic and opinion articles, as well as master and doctoral theses, among others. Many of them attract an openly disciplinary perspective, others not so much. Within these hundreds of works that delimit a field of school-family relations, as we will see, a significant number stands out relating to a sociological analysis of the relationship.

Below, I will briefly present some data relating to the journal format and the book format.

Scientific journals

Since it is impossible to list here the multiplicity of articles published in a countless number of periodical publications from the most diverse geographies and languages, I will limit myself to highlighting some *thematic issues* that have been published in very different journals. I will then focus on one journal in particular.

Therefore, I will begin by limiting myself to referring to examples such as the *International Journal of Educational Research* which, in the 1990s, published the thematic issues *Families, schools and children's learning*, with editing and texts by Kevin Marjoribanks (1994), and *Crossing boundaries: family, community and school partnerships*, with Don Davies and Vivian Johnson (1996) as Guest Editors; the issue of the French journal *Lien Social et Politiques*, entitled *Familles et école*

⁵ At this Conference, for example, the book *A escola também se vive cá fora* (The school is also lived outside; *Beyond the bake sale*, in the original) was launched with the presence of its four authors, all experts in the relationship: Anne Henderson, Karen Mapp, Vivian Johnson and Don Davies (Henderson *et al.*, 2013).

and edited in 1996 by Léon Bernier and François de Singly; or the issue of the Spanish periodical *Aula Abierta*, published in 2019 under the title of *Relación entre Centros Educativos, Familias e Entidades Comunitarias*, edited by Beatriz Rodríguez-Ruiz, Lucía Álvarez-Blanco, Raquel-Amaya Martínez-González and Joyce Epstein (Rodríguez-Ruiz *et al.*, 2019).

In the Portuguese case we have some examples of thematic issues from education journals: a) in 1993, the thematic dossier *School-Family*, from the April-May edition of the journal *Educação e Ensino*, from the *Associação de Municípios do Distrito de Setúbal*; b) the thematic issue *Education and Family*, edited by Natércio Afonso for the journal *Inovação*, in 1994, International Year of the Family; c) the *School-Families* issue, edited that same year by Ramiro Marques for *ESES* (1994), the journal of the Escola Superior de Educação de Santarém; d) in 2006, the *Plurality of perspectives on schools and families and their intra and inter-relationships*, from the *Interações* journal, with Pedro Silva as guest editor; and e) in 2022, the issue *School, family and community in building partnerships*, of the journal *Medi@ções*, from the Escola Superior de Educação do Instituto Politécnico de Setúbal, whose thematic dossier was edited by Isaura Pedro and Pedro Silva (2022).

In this brief mention of scientific journals, I could not fail to point out the only international magazine to my knowledge that is specifically dedicated to the issue in question here: the *International Journal about Parents in Education* (IJPE). This is the official publication of ERNAPE (European Research Network About Parents in Education), which began to be disseminated in 2007 under the initiative of Stefano Castelli, one of the founders of that research network. It is a journal that publishes exclusively in English and has contributions from authors and empirical research originating from all continents. IJPE has published so far (2007 to 2023) a total of 153 articles in 15 editions spread over 13 different years. With some of the issues featuring subtitles, the papers are distributed as follows:

- v. 1 (2007), *Schools and families in partnerships: looking into the future*, 35 papers;
- v. 2 (2008), 5 papers;
- v. 3 (2009), 5 papers;
- v. 4 (2010), 6 papers;
- v. 5, n. 1 (2011), 5 papers;
- v. 5, n. 2 (2011), *Current issues in home-school-community partnership*, 15 papers;
- v. 6 (2012), 6 papers;
- v. 7, n. 1 (2013), 8 papers;
- v. 7, n. 2 (2013), *Families, schools and communities: new trends for a future with equity*, 21 papers;
- v. 8 (2014), 4 papers;
- v. 9 (2015), *Schools, parents and communities: building new futures through research and innovation*, 13 papers;
- v. 10 (2018), *Intensification, constraint and opportunity: changing roles for parents, schools and communities. Addressing equity and diversity issues*, 10 papers;
- v. 11 (2019), *What we talk about when we talk about parental involvement*, 5 papers;

- v. 12 (2020); *Parent engagement as power*, 9 papers;
- v. 13 (2023), 6 papers.

In a brief content analysis, we can include the contents of these hundred and a half papers in 16 categories (some papers are part of more than one category):

- Parents/parental involvement: 41
- Relationship between teachers and parents: 22
- Special education: 13
- School-family-community relationship: 12
- Teachers: 12
- Homework: 9
- Dimension of collective action: 7
- Reading/literacy: 7
- Teacher training: 6
- Children/young people: 5
- Gender: 4
- Legislation and educational policies: 4
- ICT: 3
- Democracy: 3
- Students-parents-workers: 3
- Epistemology/methodology: 2

As we can see, matching the title of the publication, there is a predominance of papers in which parents are explicitly the target. They constitute one of the main social actors in a vast web that includes central and peripheral actors (Silva, 2003). It is also worth noting that around 1/5 of the articles, that is, around thirty, rely on a sociological perspective, thus integrating the field of a sociology of the school-family relationship.

Having very quickly reviewed the contribution of scientific journals – through the mention to thematic issues and a brief analysis of IJPE –, which support the existence of a theoretical corpus of the field of school-family relations, let us now shift our gaze to the contribution of publications in book format.

Books

Since it is also impossible to inventory everything that has been printed, I identify in a Table⁶ the works which I have knowledge of and have been published in several languages (Portuguese,

⁶ It corresponds to the update of a table originally presented at the *I Conferência Luso-Brasileira de Sociologia da Educação* (1st Luso-Brazilian Conference on Sociology of Education), in 2008, Belo Horizonte, and later published in

English, French and Spanish), highlighting the Portuguese language (notably books from Brazil and Portugal, with emphasis on the Portuguese reality, the one I know best). It is a personal itinerary, which, therefore, can only be faulty. However, it supports – as I believe – the existence of a solid bibliographical corpus, either regarding the topic of home-school relations, in general, and the affirmation of a sociology of the school-family relationship, in particular.

The table comprises a total of 149 books, including eight Brazilian and 77 Portuguese. They are distributed across the following categories⁷: a) Essays; b) Guides, handbooks and systematization works; c) Non-sociological works on the relationship; d) Sociological works not focused on the relationship; and e) Works of sociological analysis of the relationship, that is, of a sociology of the school-family relationship (SSFR), marked in bold. The books are divided as follows:

- Pre-1980s: seven books, including two about the SSFR;
- 1980s: eighteen books, including nine about the SSFR;
- 1990s: thirty-nine books, including eleven about the SSFR;
- 2000s: fifty-four books, including nineteen about the SSFR;
- 2010s: twenty-seven books, including three about SSFR;
- 2020s: four books, including one about SSFR.

One hundred and a half books on the school-family relationship in a list that is not exhaustive supports, in my opinion, the existence of a solid bibliographical corpus on this subject-matter. Continuing to analyze the table, but now changing the focus to a sociology of the school-family relationship, we found 53 books, sixteen of which by Portuguese-speaking authors, including six Brazilian and ten Portuguese, distributed as follows:

- Pre 1980s: 2 (0 Brazilian + 0 Portuguese)
- 1980s: 9 (0 Brazilians + 0 Portuguese)
- 1990s: 11 (0 Brazilian + 2 Portuguese)
- 2000s: 19 (3 Brazilian + 7 Portuguese)
- 2010s: 11 (2 Brazilian + 1 Portuguese)
- 2020s: 1 (1 Brazilian + 0 Portuguese)

We realize that, of these 53 books (some of which are collective), 22 were published until the year 2000 and 31 after, which could suggest a growing interest in the sociological analysis of the relationship in question. Equally interesting is, in this context, to acknowledge that there were only two works in Portuguese until the year 2000, while they increased to 14 between 2000 and 2023

Silva (2010, 2012). For reasons beyond the control of the author and the organisers of this volume, the table was not included. It can, however, be requested via the following email address: prioliveiracoutinho@gmail.com.

⁷ Although several books could be included in more than one category, I chose to match each one to just one.

(six Brazilian and eight Portuguese). In other words, there also seems to be a growing interest on the part of a sociology of the school-family relationship within the scope of Lusophony, at least in Brazil and Portugal.

Making a brief analysis of the 53 works on the sociology of the school-family relationship, we realize that their content covers the following categories (several books integrate more than one category):

- Social classes, gender and ethnicity: 24 books
- Family educational strategies: 11
- The child as a social actor: 5
- The collective action dimension: 5
- Cases of countertrend: 4
- Partnerships: 4
- Teacher training: 3
- Unequal childhoods: 2
- The relationship in private education: 1
- Relationship between parents' and students' associations: 1
- Parent-teachers⁸: 1
- Reconfiguration of the relationship: 1

As we can see, the predominant focus refers to a central problem in sociology: the structural cleavage in terms of social class, gender and ethnicity. This is followed, at a distance, by the concern with the home flank through the incorporation of some type of look at family educational strategies, the child as a social actor in the relationship, the dimension of collective action (parents' associations and parental representatives in school boards, but also students' associations), cases of countertrend, partnerships, the issue of teacher training, and unequal childhoods, with other topics being addressed punctually.

Again, I insist, more than 50 works in a book format, written in several languages and originating from multiple geographies, contribute to support the existence of a solid bibliographic corpus relating to a sociology of the school-family relationship.

Doctoral and master's theses

This section only refers to the existence of a countless number of this type of works produced within academia. They are certainly in the order of many hundreds, even thousands, if we take into account an international scale and go beyond Lusophony.

⁸ Here understood as parents of students who, professionally, are teachers.

It should be noted that Maria Alice Nogueira and Tânia Resende (2022) offer us an analysis of the production of theses and dissertations in Brazil within the scope of the school-family relationship between 1997 and 2011. In just a decade and a half, they inventoried 266 works, of which 88 in sociology of education (that is, we could consider them sociology of the school-family relationship).

In the case of Portugal, there are also countless master's dissertations on home-school relations, many of a disciplinary nature, as well as a reasonable number of doctoral theses. Since 2000 have been produced at least four doctoral theses that take an explicitly sociological look at school-family issues: Pedro Silva (2001), Virgínio Sá (2003), Ana Diogo (2005) and Eva Gonçalves (2015). It should be added that we are faced here with works that formally fall within both the scope of sociology and educational sciences (in the specialty of Sociology of Education or without a specialty). This aspect draws attention to the importance of the contribution of many works in sociology of education linked to educational sciences and not just sociology. A sociology of the school-family relationship also suffers from this double influence, so visible in Portugal: that of sociology and that of educational sciences.

Personal perspective

In the following lines I present, in a synthetic way, my perspective of a sociology of the school-family relationship. This is a view that I have been presenting over time in various texts (for example, Silva, 2002; 2003; 2013; 2014), so I limit myself here to its enunciation in an almost schematic way.

On the one hand, I would like to emphasize that I understand the relationship as being permeated by a sociological cleavage in terms of, at least, social class, gender and ethnicity. The school represents the socially dominant institution and culture. Students and their families come from the most varied types of social environments. To paraphrase Orwell, when it comes to school, some parents are more equal than others. To paraphrase Bourdieu, schools discriminate against families (and children/students) by treating them as equals. Social class, of course, makes all the difference. As highlighted by several works on the sociology of education (for example, Lightfoot, 1978; Connell *et al.*, 1982; Lareau, 1989; David, 1993; Vincent, 1996; Henry, 1996; Nogueira *et al.*, 2000; Silva, 2003; Diogo, 2008; Payet, 2017), not only do parents from different social classes have different capacities for information and intervention in the school context (the forms of interaction are quantitatively and qualitatively different, in the words of Lareau, 1989), but also the way in which parents are treated by the school institution may also differ, meaning, in some cases, situations of circumstantial or even structural discrimination (Lightfoot, 1978; Silva, 2003; 2013).

In conjunction with the previous thought, I understand the relationship between schools and families also as a relationship between cultures, that is, a social relationship (between cultures), therefore, one of power. In our stratified societies there is a social hierarchy (not natural or scientific!) between cultures where, as Tomaz Tadeu da Silva (1995) argues, their anthropological equivalence coexists with their sociological inequality. In other words: there is a relationship between the school culture (socially dominant) and family culture, locally based. This means that we are facing a relationship between a school culture characterized as being mostly of the (new) middle class,

urban and literate, where the logic of the elaborate sociolinguistic code (Bernstein) prevails, and the local culture or cultures. In this sense, the relationship between students and their families and the school institution can be of greater or lesser cultural (dis)continuity; even, at the limit, of cultural shock (a typical situation in working-class background, including some ethnic minorities).

At the same time, most of the studies identified above also account for the importance of gender interactions in a relationship that tends to be feminine (Silva, 2003), between women teachers and mothers, and where the presence of fathers tends to be overrated by teaching staff, who tend to view these families as particularly committed to their children's schooling (e.g., Lareau, 1989; David, 1993).

Additionally, issues of ethnic identity (and even an immigrant condition) can make a difference, particularly if we take into account that societies tend to be increasingly multicultural, which raises the difficult question of how to build intercultural relationships, including issues of mediation in a school context and, consequently, the role of teachers/educators as builders of bridges between cultures (Stoer and Cortesão, 1999; Vieira and Vieira, 2016a; 2017; Vieira and Vieira, 2016b; Silva, 2003; 2014).

Finally, I would like to refer to my concept of a relationship with a *double dyad*, which points to the existence of two flanks (school and home) and two dimensions of action (individual and collective). We know that the legislation and most of the corresponding research and bibliography focus on the school flank. However, what happens inside homes is no less important in relation to the schooling of children and young people. In this sense, concepts such as family educational strategies, family paradigm, family life or family investment (Clark, 1983; Kellerhals and Montandon, 1991; Montandon, 2001; Lareau, 2003; 2007; Lahire, 2004; Diogo, 2008) have been proved useful and given rise to some minority but relevant studies. If we should understand what schools do to families (Perrenoud, 2001), it is also necessary to apprehend what families do to schools (Almeida, 2005).

The logic of action of the web of social actors in the relationship (central actors such as children/young people, parents and teachers; peripheral actors such as non-teaching staff, parents' associations, local authorities, various local organizations, etc.)⁹ can take on an individual trait (such as when a parent acts at home or at school in exclusive representation of their own child) or a collective one (cases, for example, of a leader of a parents' association or a parental representative in a school body, who are supposed to represent the generality of parents and, ultimately, of children and young people). In the first case we are dealing with the defense of individual, private interests; in the second, we are before collective, general interests. In the first case we deal with involvement; in the second, with participation. These two types of action are not always made explicit in research; however, they follow different logics and can even merge in the same individual, generating intra-individual tensions that are not always taken into account (Beattie, 1985; Silva, 2003).

The crossing of some of the proposed concepts – notably that of the *sociological cleavage* that permeates the relationship and that of its *double dyad* – allows us to better understand phenomena

⁹ Knowing that relationships are dynamic and two-way, in some moments and contexts peripheral actors can become central.

such as the *invisible involvement* of parents as being typical of working-class backgrounds, or *parental participation* as constituting a middle-class job (Beattie, 1985; Silva, 2003). In the first example we have parents who get involved at home in supporting their children's school education, but do not show up at school (even though, in some cases, they are systematically summoned), which creates misunderstandings in their relationship with teachers, who tend to point to a parental dismissal, without understanding the sociocultural barriers that permeate the relationship; in the second example, Beattie and others have shown that it is not a coincidence that parental participation (leaders of parents' associations and parents' representatives in school bodies) falls mainly on those parents who master the dominant sociolinguistic code and the legislation, playing with the same weapons as the school and its teaching staff.

In short, the relationship between schools and families is asymmetrical, despite the fact that many schools relate to families on the basis of an assumption of equality, which often induces a social reproduction effect. I understand, however, that every trapped relationship (Silva, 2003) is distrapable. It is always possible to put a stick in the gear, as Paulo Freire and so many others have shown us.

Final remarks

In the previous pages, I tried to demonstrate the relevance of using the term *sociology of the school-family relationship*, taking into account a set of elements of social and theoretical legitimation regarding the existence, for decades, of: a) a *field of the school-family relationship*, which has been the subject of non-disciplinary, disciplinary and sometimes interdisciplinary views; and b) a *sociological analysis* of the school-family relationship, with national and international research, publications and events.

While the sociological analysis of the school-family relationship is a recurring and consolidated practice, the designation *sociology of the (school-family) relationship* is not, however, frequent. The two exceptions previously mentioned – Terrail's paper and OSFE – have not paved the way. A sociology of the school-family relationship, as a possible branch of sociology, draws (more directly, but not exclusively) on the contributions of two of the oldest branches of sociology: education and the family. A possible problem for purists of the traditional boundaries of the social and education sciences, in particular sociology, can thus be equated: the emergence of a new branch of sociology in the face of already established branches, some of which would even be pillars of the new branch. Perhaps here lies part of the resistance to the use of the proposed term, as it raises epistemological questions. It should be added that another possibility would be to look at the sociology of school-family relations as a specialty or sub-branch of the sociology of education, given that the field has been addressed mainly by this branch of sociology. However, at least since the 1990's, many sociologists, including experts in home-school interactions, have been pointing out the need for a link between the sociologies of education and the family (Epstein, 2011¹⁰; quote above from the OSFE website),

¹⁰ As early as 1993, Joyce Epstein's presentation at the *II Conferência Internacional de Sociologia da Educação* (2nd International Conference on Sociology of Education), in Faro, Portugal, was an explicit call for links between these two established branches of sociology.

knowing that other branches of sociology, some more recent, also have their contribution to offer (and receive): for example, the sociologies of childhood and youth, but also of organizations. From this point of view, to consider the sociology of the school-family relationship as a branch of the sociology of education might seem reductive.

Since, as we have seen, the sociological analysis of the school-family relationship corresponds to a recurring and consolidated practice, I don't see any serious reasons for not using the proposed term, although I do recognize that it may raise some epistemological problems, particularly, as noted, for purists of inter and intra-science boundaries, as if they were rigid and not dynamic, and watertight and not porous. And as if the constitution of the branches of the sciences was not also the result of a dynamic and never definitive history. Using an expression in common language, the proposal put forward – to use the term *sociology of the school-family relationship* – corresponds to calling the thing by its name. Who is afraid?

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