

What hinders and what motivates parents' engagement in school?

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In this paper we discuss what hinders and what promotes parental involvement in regular school, on account of the supplementary school which children attend alongside their regular school education. The main study lasted from autumn term 2002 to spring term 2004. A home-school mediation project was established in an urban school in Sweden to promote parental involvement. Here we will present the part of the study which is concerned with supplementary schools. The questions to be discussed in this paper are: is there a mutual distrust between parents and school, what motivates the parents to be engaged in supplementary schools and what hinders them from directing their engagement to the regular school? First we discuss trust and distrust between parents and teachers, secondly, on account of the answer to the question addressed, we try to understand why the parents put their energy and hope to supplementary schools.

Do the teachers' distrust parents?

Research on parental involvement in school shows a distrust of minority parents by teachers in urban schools. In analyzing the conceptions, assessments and intentions of the teachers regarding their pupils of immigrant background, Lahdenperä (1997) found that most of them regarded the parents as being the root of the difficulties teachers had with the children. Her findings agree with those of Stigendal's (2000) study in Malmö. The teachers in his study claimed there was nothing wrong with the school and the teachers, the problems they faced being due to the children and their families.

In Lahdenperä's study the fathers were the group whose behaviour they considered to deviate most sharply from the norms accepted in the school and the group that most readily became the object of antipathy, discrimination and prejudice. The mothers were found to far more readily attract the sympathy of the teachers, although they were sometimes described as being malicious and ignorant.

Various of the teachers felt that the parents were in need of knowledge of what they as parents should provide their children with, their regarding the parents as either being too strict or as lacking in a mind of their own. The basic assumption common to all of these negative judgments appeared to be that the parents were not satisfactory as parents and that the children's problematical behaviour in school reflected the deficiencies of their parents.

Persson and Tallberg (2002) discuss the lack of parental involvement from teachers' perspective put into a historical context. Throughout the 20th century there was a continual increase in Sweden in the degree of public responsibility taken for the socialization of children in the schools (Persson, 1994; Svensson, 1981; Tallberg-Broman, 1991).

This led to frequent discussions of the division of responsibility between the parents and public institutions in such matters. Parallel with this, there were changes in the goals and character of the bringing up of children. A dominant discourse found from the 1930s onwards concerned the family having lost a variety of different functions during the building up of a highly industrialized society and of the Swedish welfare state (Persson, 1994; 1998a).

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This discourse tended to provide legitimacy for the increase in the state's taking of responsibility here. The criteria of families' functioning as they should were defined in normative terms as being those of reproduction, the bringing up children, and the support and protection of family members, the family also being seen as a center for relationships of a personal and emotional character. The losses in the proper functioning of families as a result of industrialization were discussed in terms of these criteria. These losses were seen as indicating the family to be in a state of crisis. Since industrialization was regarded as having led to a loss in many of the "natural" functions of the family, it was felt that there was a "socialization gap" that needed to be filled by the school and other public institutions.

Persson and Tallberg (2002) emphasise that the school as a public institution has been given increasing responsibility not only for the teaching of children but also for their upbringing. There has been a shift in the view taken of the preschool's and elementary school's task, in the position a child should have within a school of either type, and in the relationship that should be established between the school and the parents. This is reflected in documents providing guidelines for the work of schools of both types. The changes that have occurred in the responsibilities of the parents and of the school or preschool have meant that teachers are forced to deal with a variety of new tasks and problems.

The expanded task with which teachers are faced is linked with an altered conception in postmodern society both of childhood and of the responsibilities schools should take on. The teacher's task today is also coupled with promoting ideas both of democracy and of the rights of the individual citizen (Boman, 2002), as well as with the goal of increasing parental involvement in the work of the schools and in their children's situation there. The increase in the responsibilities of teachers results their relation to the parents being more complex. This represents a challenge to the teachers' sense of professional identity and calls into question traditional conceptions of what the central tasks of the teaching profession are. Both teachers and parents are given added responsibilities, teachers in relation to the parents and the parents in relation to the teachers, making it uncertain where the line of demarcation between the responsibilities of the two should be located.

Bouakaz (2007) shows that for the teachers in his study, parental involvement had a home-centered character which meant efforts being made by the parents at home to help their

children understand how important their school education is for their future.

The teachers' were engaged in a dialogue with the parents on how Swedish society and the Swedish school system function. The parents and the teachers each endeavouring to learn more about the other's culture. The important thing was felt to be that of showing the children and the parents how things done in school and things done at home correspond with and influence each other, emphasizing the fact that the school and the home should not be regarded as two separate worlds.

Teachers are described in many studies as being positive toward other groups being closely involved in what is going on in the school, yet at the same time they are reported as feeling that this added involvement of others represents a questioning of their role and the placing of undue demands of various sorts on them, which they find difficult to deal with (Falkner, 1997). Accordingly, the teachers tend to feel increasingly threatened as parental influence increases, resulting in a conflict between the idea that teachers should be open to the wishes and views of the parents and the idea that teachers should assert their authority and the strength of their own profession (op. cit. p. 90). The views of the the teachers also differ markedly in many ways from those of the parents as regards the school, children generally and how teaching should be conducted.

Lindblad and Pérez Prieto (1997) summarize the results of the Swedish Board of Education's attitude survey concerning the respective possibilities of the pupils, the parents and the teachers to influence what is taught, how teaching is conducted, and the like, their speaking of "a school steered by professionals".

Do the parents' distrust the teachers?

How the parents view their role and involvement in the education of their children depends very much on the amount of the school capital they have. By this we mean the amount of educational knowledge including knowledge of the school system and its practices, matters which help decide the degree of the parents' involvement (cf. Crozier, 2000). Parents with limited social capital and lack of cultural and economic capital often display a sort of resignation, not because they have stopped loving their children or stopped caring for them, but because they are afraid of getting involved in the wrong way, such that it could cause more harm than good for the child.

The parents' views concerning the school system and their trust in it can become an obstacle in itself, as expressed by one of the parents in Bouakaz study (2007), who said, "My trust in the school did not allow me to interfere". Thus, trust in the school need not mean trust in

the content of the subject the children are studying. It is more a material trust in which parents who themselves did not get so much material help during their schooling value the material things their children get in school today. They tend to delegate everything that concerns their children's school to the teachers declaring "The school is the business of the teacher".

This is also expressed by Crozier (2000) in a study of working class parents in England, with the statement that "Teacher knows best" (p. 61). The parents in her study regarded the teachers as experts who knew more about their child and their education than they themselves did, which led to their delegating the responsibility for their children's schooling to the teachers. She found that middle class parents seemed to be more anxious to gain access to information than working class parents did, who seemed to have a resigning attitude (*ibid*).

The parents who showed a sense of resignation in this study can be compared in their thinking to what Bourdieu (1993) designates as "the resigned submission to being excluded" (p. 9) in describing the distance and the misunderstanding between teachers and working class students in higher education. Lack of knowledge, as the parents here stated minimized their participation in the school and made them less curious and involved. Knowledge is an important key to gaining access to the school world (cf. Crozier, 2000). The school has been described as a different universe for parents who do not dare to interfere for fear of making mistakes that could cause more harm than good for their children.

Vincent (2000) in discussing active citizenship and governing of the school, points to knowledge as a key component in citizens' participation. The knowledge parents gain regarding the organisation of a school increases their self-confidence, which in turn leads to their becoming more closely involved. According to Lareau (1989), however, parents' lack of knowledge of the school their child attends can be due to the absence of a social network and social capital that can provide the parents with correct information about the school.

The parents in the study presented by Bouakaz (2007), in contrast to the study by Crozier (2000), did not go to school to get information but instead waited for the teachers to contact them and to the extent they received information it was often their children who transmitted it to them. For many of the parents of Arabic background in this study it is regarded as very "shameful" to interfere in the work of the teachers. Also, their own habitus does not allow them to interfere since they possess cultural capital of a different currency (cf. Vincent, 1996).

The conclusions we draw from research are the following: No, it is not likely that parents' distrust teachers. It is probably more likely that parents with low social and cultural capital put too much trust in school and the teachers. Bouakaz (2007) draws the conclusions that the minority children's parents remain excluded from the work of the school without a network of relationships that introduce the school to them.

The parents call for a common vision and a platform to stand on that involves the children being spoken to in the same voice at home as at school. The parents' willingness to help develop a good working relationship with the teachers has its roots in these parents caring about their children, just as any other parents in the country do. They simply lack the tools to develop such a relationship easily. Lacking knowledge of the school and its educational practices, the parents try to protect their children against the school, especially regarding moral values and religious beliefs, which they often feel that the school does not assign sufficient importance to. The latter seems to be an important statement to understand why minority parents put their energy and hope to supplementary schools.

Methodology

The main study, on which this paper is based, is about the involvement of minority parents in the work of the school and efforts to develop closer relations between the parents and the school their children attend. A home-school mediation project was established in an urban school in Sweden to promote parental involvement.

Two main approaches used in the study are those of critical ethnography and participatory action research, an integrated form of the two is being considered. Critical ethnography based on the work of Thomas (1993) is seen as an approach for adopting a political goal aimed at effecting change. Participatory action research (PAR) can represent a methodological approach to studying practical measures directed at change (Whyte, 1991).

In contrast to more conventional research methods, PAR, when integrated with critical ethnography accepts a relationship being found between facts and evaluations, feeling and reason, and science and non-science. PAR stimulates the researcher being strongly involved in the research he or she conducts and to feel a clear sense of responsibility for its consequences (Hansson, 2003). The basic point in conducting such research is that on the basis of praxis. Both the researcher and the actors involved can obtain experience and knowledge regarding social processes concerning such matters as the hidden

resources a person, a community or an organisation can possess.

A further advantage of this approach is that the knowledge obtained can be applied rather quickly through its being made available successively to the parties involved.

According to Coghlan and Brannick (2004), action research can include different forms of data gathering methods. They argue that action research does not preclude use of methods from traditional research as well as the important thing being the planning and the use of the data gathering tools selected. As a means of data collection formal and informal interviews, questionnaires to teachers and parents, observations and a journal were used. People outside the school were interviewed in order to adequately understand certain things that were observed. In addition the work of parents who provided supplementary schools in the neighborhoods were observed and interviews were conducted in both a formal and an informal manner.

The results presented are mostly based on interviews with parents with Arabic background. Six fathers and four mothers were interviewed initially in the first period of the project; six of them were re-interviewed six months later. Ten new parents were interviewed in supplementary schools, six mothers and two fathers in. Six new interviews were conducted with the parents in their homes to get to know more about the problems in the neighbourhood. Most interviews lasted about 55- 60 minutes.

The questions to be examined and discussed further are: what is a supplementary school, what motivates the parents to be engaged in supplementary schools and what hinders them from directing their engagement to the regular school?

What is a supplementary school?

We define supplementary school in a broad sense. It is organized activities for the children aimed for promoting their success in school. Sometimes it is the parents themselves who teach the children school subjects or help them with their home work.

The aim of organizing supplementary schools could be ideological; minority parents want their children to build a collective identity in a society which alienates them from their cultural heritage. The reason for participate in supplementary schools could differ, some parents wants the children to learn more about specific subjects, cultural and religious matters, sometimes it is a way to keep the youngsters away from the street culture. Often, for minority parents the supplementary school is a place were

children could be proud of their culture, language and origin.

Although supplementary schools are becoming increasingly important in the last decades for parents from minority background, there is a long tradition in Sweden of arranging activities, initialized by parents, outside school to promote children's success in school. Parents in the Labour Movement were sceptical to the more religious schooling in Sunday school, organized by the church, and wanted to build their own organization (Persson, 1998). In Sunday school the children learned Christianity. In the early 1900s the Labour Movement organized advanced schooling for young children from six to ten, to prepare them to do better in school (Sagostundsrorelsen) (Henchén, 1979). It was usually parents who taught the children on Saturdays in the peoples' park.

The idea was to give the children of working-class parents adequate education, as well as reading and writing skills. The education was political influenced by socialistic values. For the same reasons the Labour Movement organised advanced schooling for young people and adults in study circles all around Sweden. This kind of popular adult education was a reaction on the way school was organized and on the lack of possibilities for working class adults to advance to higher education.

For other reasons but with the same consequences the Free Church movement organized their own schooling in Christianity for children. Usually the children would attend Sunday schools to learn about the bible and Christianity.

Today it is very common in the Swedish context that, children, young people and adults attend activities outside school to study and learn more about their special interests.

This short historical review shows that parents, or organization with support of parents, for different reasons have organized or let their children attend to supplementary school activities when the parents felt that the school could not fulfill the task of being a school for all children. This becomes evident in the case of minority parents and their children.

Reay and Mirza (1997, 2005) have examined how supplementary schools can provide safe spaces for alternative discourses concerning positions that differ from the dominant mainstream ones. Hall et al. (2002) compared the supplementary schools in two cities, Oslo and Leeds. They have highlighted the role of supplementary schools in raising educational achievement. Greese et al. (2004) have studied the role of supplementary schools in enhancing the sense of identity of learners, and explored how such supplementary schools provide support and

encouragement of the learners' identities and promote flexible bilingualism.

Reay and Mirza (1997, 2005), referring to activities of this type as representing supplementary school, described the involvement of black women in arranging extra curricular activities for children in a black neighbourhood in London, largely hidden from public gaze. Networks of this sort are often established through the different ethnic associations in which parents are represented. According to Reay and Mirza the parents wish to give their children what the school fails to provide, in particular the parents' culture, which includes their language and their religion, arranging extracurricular activities after school and on the weekends for children between about 5 and 16 years of age. These authors found there to be more than 60 black supplementary schools in the inner section of Greater London, an area in which approximately 300.000 black Caribbeans live. Reay and Mirza's studies (1997, 2005) illustrate how the investment of black women in their social capital and their use of networks within the black community is able to establish and to maintain the activity of supplementary schools there.

The research described above gives a hint on why minority parents engage themselves in supplementary schools, but what hinders them to be involved in regular schools?

The background and the organisation of the supplementary school in this study

How involvement of the parents in their children's education manifests itself can differ from the expectations that the teachers have. The teachers often expect the parents to visit the school spontaneously and to show up at meetings the school arranges. Many of the parents in this study is concerned with have quite different views of how their involvement in their children's education should be expressed.

Those parents who often fail to attend meetings and do not visit the school very often tend to not see themselves as being less involved in their children's education. Rather, they consider the roles they play to be outside the school itself and to be within the networks they already belong to. The parents who took part in the study spoke of supplementary school arrangements made available to children in the neighbourhood and in other parts of the city, which they generally considered to be a safe environment for their children and to be a form of parental involvement in the education of their children.

The group of parents who were involved in these activities consisted of four mothers and two fathers. The fathers of the children took the responsibility for the activities as a whole and for

supplying the materials needed. The mothers had responsibility for the educational part since all of them were previous teachers in their home countries. They contacted other parents who registered their children and the time for the study there were about 50 pupils between the age of 6 and 15 in the supplementary school.

The aim and the content of the supplementary school activities

Arabic speaking parents in the present study arranged for different activities for both the children and their parents after the parent-teacher association had been established. Here we will consider both the supplementary school arrangements that were set up and the "invisible" role the parents can be said to have played to help their children in school and to prevent them from succumbing to the "culture of street".

It isn't that we're not involved in our children's education. The teachers sometimes might want to show us a lot more about what they think we should do with our children at home. We of course do take care of our children, it's not that, but it's that the teachers don't know what we do with our children outside of school. We have many worthwhile activities for our children and we belong to associations that often arrange many different activities for our children.

But the school and most Swedes don't realize this and that we want the very best for our children, like any other parents. We do our best to give our children a good education, and even send them to Saturday school in Rosengård School. I think the problem is that we do it in our way (Bahia, a mother, interview, 2003).

Teaching activities of this sort were conducted in the children's mother tongue, the children receiving help with various school subjects, such as math and English. Efforts at cultural empowerment and identity building were also made. Some of parents expressed an increasing distrust of the formal school regarding certain of the subjects in the curriculum, such as the teaching of the mother tongue, of cultural studies, and of the history and geography of the parents' countries of origin.

They gave their warm support to the supplementary school arrangements, which they conceived of primarily as providing help with their children's homework and a way of protecting their own language and of furthering their children's cultural socialisation. As one of the parents said, "What shall we call the Arabs if they lose their culture, religion and language? We would still call them Arabs, but we have to do the best we can, nevertheless, to protect our culture and our language."

According to the parents who were responsible for the extracurricular teaching their aim was to fill a gap that the school failed to fill. It also represented the parents' way of involving themselves in the school. According to them, their chances of becoming involved in the education of their children were limited, for this reasons their preferring to do it differently. One of the fathers responsible for the extra teaching arrangements expressed his views of this activity as follows:

We arrange many different activities for the children. These activities are often carried on by us parents so as to give our children what the school fails to teach them. The lessons in their mother tongue that the children receive at school are not enough and the teachers there are often not qualified enough, or they speak dialects that our children have difficulties in understanding. We do this teaching because we feel our children need to learn two sides of things, the Swedish side and their parents' side. We often have difficulties in getting large enough rooms for holding the lessons for all the children we receive. The parents come with their children even from other parts of the city. The children often have difficulties with their homework and want also to learn better Arabic. We do our best to arrange either with some student or with persons who are good in Swedish to help the children with their homework (Aziz, interview, 2003).

The parents involved in the supplementary school wanted their children not only to achieve educationally but also to be proud of their Arabic culture, language and origin. They were willing to invest economically to provide their children a better education. For many of them, the fact of their children being Arabs and Muslims was a problem for their getting ahead in school and in life in general.

Through the supplementary school, the parents wanted to give their children an identity. They would otherwise risk its losing due to stigmatising discourses and because of the parents' culture not being highly valued by the school. The parents wanted the supplementary school arrangements to make their children aware of whom they were and of their parents' culture, in addition to providing them help with their homework. According to the parents the school did not place any emphasis on the gap there could be between what the child was learning at home and in school.

The help the children were being given in the supplementary school with the homework provides clear justification of the efforts made by the members of the parent-teacher association on the children's behalf. Activities of this sort were given high priority by the parents.

They can be said both to contribute to the legitimacy of the parent-teacher association and at the same time to also partly delegitimize the association through the activity being separate from the school.

The importance of the supplementary school

The term "outgoing parents" is repeatedly expressed by the teachers at the supplementary school. These parents described the importance of such arrangements being located in an environment in which their children could both study and be protected from being out in the street.

There are some parents who feel there are so many problems they need to help their children with, that they give up. They simply don't know what to do. That's why, thanks to this parent-teacher association, the mothers have the opportunity to just sit and talk about their problems with their children. They need very much help. The school should understand that the parents sometimes cannot help their children, even if they want to, especially the boys. Often, the mothers already have so many problems. It's difficult for them (Samia, a mother and teacher at supplementary school, interview, 2003).

The parents explain how their efforts to help their children with their schoolwork, with all the difficulties they had, began long before the establishment of the supplementary school arrangements, and would not have stopped even if the arrangements had been closed down. Their search for such school arrangements can be presented as clear proof of their interest in the schooling of their children.

This is the problem: the parents don't abandon their children. They despair they don't know what to do. This is why I sought assistance. If we didn't seek assistance, one could say that we simply gave up that we don't care. But we seek assistance and find it. No one can't say we don't care (Hamida, a teacher in the supplementary school arrangements, interview, 2003).

They understand very well that the school cannot provide their children adequate help, and at the same time they are conscious of their own educational limits in helping their children; thus, they welcome being released from this heavy concern by others who may be better qualified or are simply interested in their children's education.

Zahra describes this arrangement as a release. She uses the metaphor of "removed a thorn from my foot".

Zahia: That helped me very much; it removed a thorn from my foot, since even if I attended sessions with him at school I was unable to help him. Neither his attention nor his concentration was there; I couldn't give my children all the attention they asked me to with their schoolwork. Each day is completely filled up. One has to be here, there and everywhere.

L: Did you feel that you needed some sort of help?

Zahra: Yes, I needed help at this. I didn't know how I would manage (Zahra, interview, 2003).

Difficulties the parents faced in efforts to help their children

The parents described two major sets of reasons for explaining their difficulties and their vexation, in trying to help their children do their schoolwork; it was difficulties of a relational nature and difficulties of an educational nature. These often exist in parallel.

Difficulties of relational nature

The parents often tend to speak of their relational difficulties in putting the child to work. Nader said:

I tried to help them many times but it was difficult. They don't listen to me and the relations became bad. They seemed to not grasp what I said to them. Their mother was better than I was. She is more patient than I am. Anyhow, I think it's better that someone else helps them and does this in a place where they can be together with their friends (Nader, interview, 2003).

The position the parents take and their status make it, according to them, not particularly easy to establish educational relationships with their children. Difficulties in controlling the child and the intense conflicts in connection with carrying out of homework show how much aroused emotions invade a relationship of attempting to assist in schooling. Some parents thus feel unable to control their feelings, or to achieve the sense of distance needed to free the relationship of such passions.

Children have so many leisure-time activities today that they are often busy playing computer games or watching TV rather than working with their homework. They often try to escape and make me forget about their homework. You see! We mothers have a lot to do, cooking food, cleaning, shopping and doing our own homework. They often throw their bags as soon as they come home and say, "Mother, we are going to our friends at our neighbour's house". They sit and play games as they decided to do after school. They often forget about their homework (Zahia, interview, 2003).

The expression "throwing their bag down" is one used by some of parents in speaking about a situation in which the children get rid of everything having to do with the school when they arrive home and of their refusing to submit to the parents' orders or advice when they encourage them to do their homework. This difficulty in controlling their children concerns both the girls and boys, but according to the parents it is even more the case with boys, largely because of the attraction exerted by the street or by computer games. Those working in supplementary school also endeavour to stabilise the children's behaviour in a place where they accept a certain degree of social control.

Before, I sent the children to a school located in another district, only two days a week. Now, it's near here and the children find it to be an opportunity to meet their schoolmates. My 10 years old son, is being protected. It's better that he learns some Arabic or does his homework instead of hanging around in the playground or in the street. I was always pushing him trying to get him to do his lessons. But he'd said, "I'm going to go and play a little bit, I'm coming!" And he didn't come. At the supplementary school, he knows that the hour is the hour, that he cannot come later. He goes there by himself now and he feels encouraged to do things since he can meet his friends there. He can't simply be alone in the play yard or in the street. He joins his friends. Nobody is annoyed, nobody is irritated (Hania, interview, 2003).

For certain of the parents, the difficulties boil down to the simple question of how they can succeed in putting children to work who often rebel against doing their schoolwork, whether by open revolt or by means of tricks. The children slow down and develop strategies of avoidance, of diverting their parents' attention so as to flee from their homework. Yet things are different with the teachers in the supplementary the school.

Difficulties of educational nature

In discussions with the parents about how to make assisting their children in their schoolwork effective, the parents often tend to speak about their lack of knowledge of the subject matter or the language. Parents who mention language emphasise the impossibility of their helping their children.

This does not necessarily mean their withdrawing at all from efforts to help, yet they feel unable to provide the concrete help their children are in need of when they ask for it. Some of the parents, of course, are well educated (often at a level higher than the Swedish parents are). But others emphasise fear of being inefficient and ineffective.

I arrived in Sweden in 97. My children were 6 and 8 years old at that time. Since I didn't speak Swedish very well, I didn't want to try to explain things to them in a way that would be difficult for them to grasp. My children often told me, Mom you explain things one way, but the teacher explains them in another way. It's often very problematic when the children get older and the lessons get to be more difficult. I used to ask my neighbour who has lived here for a long time, to help them with their homework (Zahra, interview, 2003).

For parents who attended school themselves, the difficulties increase as their children get further along in school. They succeed in looking after their children's schoolwork to some extent at least during the whole of primary school, but when their children enter secondary school the majority seemed to give up attempting to provide assistance they feel unable to give. The parents stress in particular the changes that have occurred in the methods of teaching, especially of reading and mathematics as compared with their home countries. They see this as complicating the task for them in helping their children.

Thus, even if the parents do not challenge the "educational approach" of the teachers when they express their points of view regarding changes in the methods, they note in their child's homework the new manner of making divisions and the innovations in the training of reading skills as a source of insecurity for them. These innovations fuel controversy and the parents' doubts regarding the effectiveness of the current teaching methods. Actually, the parents feel they are deprived of their knowledge and are prevented from providing their children support. Ashamed of

their incapacity of following what their children do, some of the parents, instead of acknowledging their own inability, choose instead to defend their own methods. Of course, this trial of the old against the new is hardly productive. Bahia describes a conversation she had with her son while trying to help him.

Subtractions, he's unable to grasp them, me either, it's odd. I say to him. It's the same as an addition, but in reverse. This is the way one teaches him, I think that the trick of a child is that, it's subtraction but that he performs addition. Maybe it's here the problem lies. It's like division. A division for us was this and not something else. Now, their division operation is a whole page, it's not logical. There's the multiplication, addition and multiplication that's all contained in division. It's pell-mell. They learn in a very different way. It's difficult to teach him to do the homework like the teacher wants them to be done. Then sometimes I say to him come, I'll show you a trick, it's easier to do it like this. For me yes, but for him it was not easier. Then I said: But I understand nothing about this trick. Then he said to me: "You didn't go to this school. You don't know anything". "Yes, but it wasn't like that when I went to school", I said (Bahia, interview, 2003).

This can be said to be an experiment in humiliation corresponding to the painful astonishment of children in acknowledging of their parents' inability to explain the things in the same way as the teachers do at school.

Limited help at the supplementary school

The parents at the supplementary school recognise their educational limits. They feel that being there for the children and making them feel that the grownups are caring and are there for them is very important. These parents keep hope alive even though their methods and resources may not be sufficient. Hamida said:

We often manage to put them to work, They know why they are here and their parents often send them here on purpose to study Arabic or to get help with math or other school subjects that we can help them with. We approach the

children and make them see the benefits of their succeeding in school. We keep motivating them and talk about how important school is. The older boys and girls often do homework by themselves here. They sit and work for an hour or two (Hamida, a teacher at the supplementary school arrangement, 2003).

Samia explained how she helps the children with math in Arabic, which she feels is very important for the children to learn. She said:

We teach the younger children math in Arabic. They learn how to count and take part in many games through which they learn multiplication, addition, division and subtraction. I think it is important for them to learn to count in their mother tongue. Many of the children do not know how to count in Arabic (Samia, interview, 2003).

The teachers at the supplementary school speak of their lacking knowledge of many things but their trying to help up to the limits of their own knowledge. They often concentrate particularly on teaching Arabic, as well as cultural and religious studies.

Recruiting older brothers and sisters to help the younger children with their homework is also a strategy that was often found to succeed.

Discussion

In this paper we have discussed the complex issue of parental involvement in school and why parents, especially those from minority background, seem to put their efforts in supplementary schools. Although the presented study is concerned with minority parents with Arabic speaking background, we want to emphasise that this is not solely an issue concerning minority parents. As shown in this paper, there are historical roots to be considered when we discuss parental involvement in school.

Participation in supplementary schools was seen legitimate for parents to direct children towards a set of objectives children were to aim at, or the setting of rules, something the school often fails to do. Yet one can reasonably expect a supplementary school to fulfill a variety of worthwhile missions, while the public schools, remaining the major institution created for educating children.

It is completely comprehensible that the parents' endeavour, at the same time, to keep their children in the race, that they seek allies to help them, and that the arrangements involved build up an identity of their own through following the wishes of the parents involved. The establishment of such arrangements can be seen as reflecting the difficulties of both educational and relational character parents face at home in trying to help their children. The Arabic speaking parents appear to place a great confidence in the supplementary schools.

They appear also to accept the political and educational choices suggested by those responsible for the parent-teacher association, and they value the action of those parents who have taken the initiatives required. They have the conviction that even though it may seem naïve to think that the assistance they give the children can help them significantly in overcoming the barriers to success that the school alone cannot overcome, there is a genuine need of efforts of this sort and doubts as to the ability of the school to accomplish all that is needed.

The supplementary schools are being given an important task here.

As described in this paper, it is not hard to find hinders for parental involvement: teachers' attitudes, the schools' institutional habitus, the parents' own ambivalence and lack of social and cultural capital, the historical distrust of parents as adequate socialization agents, etc., these are some of the hinders described in this paper. This can lead to (minority) parents being thought to have little interest in the schooling of their children. We would rather say that (minority) parents' are engaged and that they have a will to be involved, but for reasons described this is not easily done. For some of the parents, their engagement will be directed to supplementary schools. Some may argue that this will only increase the isolation of minority groups and that segregation will be the result of parents' engagement in those schools. We do consider that as a risk, but then this must be the calculated risk that minority groups always have to be taken into consideration.

The historical perspective give some implications that groups who consider themselves to be marginalized often tries to find alternatives to marginalization by their own activities and organizations, sometimes outside what is institutionalized in society.

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