

SUBJECTIVE THEORIES ABOUT SCHOOL COEXISTENCE: WHAT DO PARENT SAY?

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this work was to describe and to interpret subjective theories about school coexistence in a group of parents from a Chilean primary school. A theoretical sample was used, group discussions and episodic interviews were conducted to 16 parents from a primary school. Data was analyzed through grounded theory, finding (a) simple subjective theories lead parents to raise their children on an environment-based approach; (b) associated factors with school coexistence and emerging proposals to improve them; (c) as well as a schooling parental role that it organizes around three levels of climate schooling teaching. In the discussion section, we analyze implications of these subjective theories into schooling environment and parental role.

Keywords: school coexistence; subjective theories; parental role.

Teorías subjetivas de la convivencia escolar: ¿Qué dicen los padres?

RESUMEN

El objetivo de este trabajo fue describir e interpretar las TS de la convivencia escolar, de un grupo de padres y madres de una escuela de educación primaria chilena. Se utilizó un muestreo teórico y se aplicaron grupos de discusión y entrevistas episódicas a 16 padres y madres de una escuela de educación primaria. Los datos se analizaron mediante la técnica de la teoría fundamentada, encontrando (a) teorías subjetivas simples, pero que disponen a los padres a educar a sus hijos en convivencia; (b) factores asociados a la CE y propuestas para su mejora, (c) además de un rol parental educativo que se organiza en tres niveles para enseñar a sus hijos a convivir en la escuela. En la discusión se analiza la implicancia de estas teorías subjetivas en la convivencia escolar y el rol parental.

Palabras clave: convivencia escolar; teorías subjetivas; rol parental.

Teorias subjetivas da convivência escolar: o que os pais dizem?

RESUMO

O objetivo deste trabalho foi descrever e interpretar as teorias subjetivas (TS) da convivência escolar (CE), de um grupo de pais e mães de uma escola de educação primária chilena. Uma amostragem teórica foi utilizada e se aplicaram grupos de discussão e entrevistas episódicas em 16 pais e mães de uma escola de educação primária. Os dados foram analisados através da técnica da teoria fundamentada (*Grounded Theory*), encontrando: (a) teorias subjetivas simples, mas que proporcionam aos pais educar seus filhos na convivência; (b) fatores associados à CE e propostas de melhoria; (c) além de um papel educativo dos pais que se organiza em três níveis para ensinar seus filhos a conviver na escola. Na discussão é analisada a implicação das teorias subjetivas na convivência escolar e no papel parental.

Palavras-chave: Convivência escolar; teorias subjetivas; papel dos pais.

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INTRODUCTION

School coexistence (SC) is an important issue within educational policies at the international level (Ascorra, López, Carrasco, Pizarro, Cuadros, & Núñez, 2018). The results of different investigations (Román & Murillo, 2011) indicate that the quality of the interpersonal relationships of the school directly affects the performance of the students, thus denoting the importance of generating spaces in which well-being is present in the school. Even the themes of coexistence, conflict resolution, cooperation and teamwork are recognized as elements of international evaluations given their importance in the educational setting (OECD, 2013).

Authors such as Del Rey, Ortega and Feria (2009) define SC as a fundamental principle for a participatory, democratic, civic and well-integrated curricular education, which is developed through life together in all school spaces. This, through a permanent process of learning social and affective competence to establish interpersonal links centered on democracy, respect, empathy, tolerance and solidarity.

Regarding the family, it is assumed that the relationship it establishes with the school is fundamental for the student's adaptation and academic achievement (Shute, Hansen, Underwood, & Razzouk, 2011). Family functionality has an important impact on SC, since it can act as a protective factor of interpersonal relationships (López et al., 2013), or a risk factor for the generation of a negative school environment (Cid et al., 2008; Senra, Lourenço, & Pereira, 2011). Research even shows that educators consider the family as the sole cause or the greatest influence on student behaviors at school (Vinha & Tognetta, 2013).

Notwithstanding the foregoing, there is evidence of a crisis in parental participation in school, especially in those groups with high social vulnerability (Acuña, 2016). In this way, there are frequent proposals for working with parents that focus on promoting their participation in educational decision-making (Alcalay, Milicic, & Torretti, 2005; Sandoval, 2014), improving communication with the school (Acuña, 2016) and parental education (Tognetta & De Nadai, 2018).

Achieving a school-family alliance for SC learning requires considering the experiences and meanings built by each of the educational actors in the school communities (Ascorra et al., 2018). However, most studies about the subject incorporate much more the meanings of teachers, other professionals and students, considering less those of fathers and mothers (Ascorra et al., 2018; Saldivia, 2008).

When children enter school, parents develop

expectations and beliefs about academic success, student adaptation, and even professional future (Rahmawati, Tairas, & Nawangsari, 2018). However, they give more importance to the academic preparation of the student, than to social skills to coexist in school (Kaufman, 2009). When parents beliefs about students socio-emotional skills are described that are relevant to functionality in school, they refer that the ability to interact with their peers and express their opinion in class is important (Rahmawati et al., 2018). Latin American studies show that although parents are concerned about school violence, they tend to minimize it within their school (United Nations Children's Fund, 2011). Also that the problems of coexistence are due to their low participation and interest in the education of their children (López et al., 2011; Saldivia, 2008; Vinha & Tognetta, 2009) or to the little appreciation that the school makes of them (Griffith, 2001). Similar results have been found in schools with social vulnerability, where family-school relationships are characterized by mistrust and failure is interpreted by parents who exercise leadership in schools, as a family responsibility (Montecinos, Sisto, & Ahumada, 2010).

In this study, it has been chosen to investigate the SC from the subjective theories (ST) of the parents. ST are a type of individual and / or collective cognitive representation of greater elaboration, complexity and generality, which allows explaining, organizing and modulating action, defining situations and justifying one's own behavior (Catalán, 2010; Flick, 2007). The general objective of this work is to describe and interpret the ST of the SC, of a group of parents from a Chilean primary school. At a specific level, we sought to: (a) describe the subjective meaning of SC and the way in which participants characterize the coexistence of the school, (b) describe the explanations they present of SC, (c) determine how they explain the parental role education in the SC and (d) propose a comprehensive model of the SC, based on the ST found.

METHOD

It corresponds to a descriptive interpretative study that used qualitative methodology (Taylor & Bogdan, 1987), since it sought to characterize the SC from the interpretive framework of the fathers and mothers. The design was a case study (Stake, 1999).

Sample

A theoretical sample was carried out, looking for the representativeness of cases, including: (a) fathers or mothers who are part of the directive of the sub-centers and who do not constitute it; (b) parents of students with high and low academic performance and (c) parents of

students with and without disciplinary problems in the classroom. We worked with 16 fathers and mothers of the first cycle of primary education of a public school in the Atacama region, Chile: 6 fathers and mothers of the directives of the sub-centers¹ of the first, third and fourth year of basic education and 10 of the third year of basic education that did not constitute the directive of the sub-center. 94% were women (mother) and 6% men (father). 81% of them are between 25 and 40 years old, while 19% are over 50 years old. In addition, 19% qualify in a medium socioeconomic level and 81% in a low one. The families that make up the educational community present a low-medium socioeconomic level and between 62% and 80% of social vulnerability, according to the evaluation carried out by the Ministry of Education of Chile.

Information gathering procedure

The school management and the parents were contacted, to whom the objectives and methodology of the research, in addition to the ethical criteria, were explained. Those who agreed to participate in the study signed an informed consent. In the first place, two discussion groups were held, each one made up of five mothers and / or fathers of the third grade. Its implementation was based on a thematic script that considered as axes of inquiry: (a) meaning of SC, (b) characteristics of SC, (c) explanations about SC, (d) educational parental role in SC and (e) proposals to improve the SC. Each discussion group lasted approximately 1 hour and the data was recorded in audio. Subsequently, episodic interviews were applied, an instrument that made it possible to delve into the collective subjective theories found through the first instrument and to contrast these preliminary findings, in order to give the study greater credibility. The episodic interview is an information gathering instrument especially indicated to reconstruct subjective theories based on biographical episodes (Flick, 2007). Six episodic interviews were applied to 6 mothers with managerial positions in the sub-center: 2 of the first basic year, 2 of the third basic year and 2 of the fourth basic year, using the same thematic script of the discussion groups. The episodic interview lasted approximately 1 hour and their data was recorded on audio.

Data analysis procedure

The transcripts of the discussion groups were

¹ In Chile, the parents of a school legally organize themselves in Centers for Parents and Guardians. This last term is used to denote the person who assumes the educational responsibility of the child and is linked to the school. The Sub-center corresponds to the proxies of a school course, organized by means of a directive.

subjected to content analysis according to the grounded theory technique (Strauss & Corbin, 2002). The simultaneous analysis of the data obtained through the discussion groups allowed guiding the inquiry through episodic interviews, information that was subsequently analyzed using the same technique indicated. In this way, three types of coding were carried out: (a) open coding, where by means of constant comparative analysis, phrases, sentences and / or paragraphs containing explicit explanatory sentences were identified in the transcribed text, taking as reference the expressions (Flick, 2007) related to the study problem and also implicit, inferred by the researcher, transforming them into codes that allowed limiting the information; (b) axial coding, where the codes developed were subjected to constant comparative analysis in order to construct representative categories of the study problem and (c) selective coding, which allowed the construction of a comprehensive model of the ST found, establishing relationships among categories and assigning one of them as the core of this process. In this work, following the suggestion of Flick (2007), the result of selective coding is presented by means of a short explanatory text and a figure.

RESULTS

Subjective meaning of school coexistence

Parents understand SC as a positive interpersonal relationship among students and between students and teachers, which manifests itself inside and outside the classroom. The indicators that account for the SC are: (a) sharing among students, (b) respect in the teacher-student relationship and among students, and (c) good treatment among these educational actors.

Get along with colleagues, share. (p2, dg2)²

Good treatment, getting along with the whole group of children who get along, who play, not fight, for me that is coexistence. (i1).

The participants explain that a certain degree of disobedience and indiscipline in the students are constitutive elements of the SC, considering them normal behaviors in the students' interaction at school. This probably implies an educational parental role that is exercised with relative flexibility in teaching the norms and rules for SC, which the child must implement when she integrates peer groups:

Maybe at school they do become more unruly because they are with their friends, they get like that and they don't pay attention, but I think it's normal. (p1, dg1).

² P= Participant; dg= discussion group; i interview.

The SC is also understood as a process that begins in preschool in a positive way and that deteriorates when the student goes through higher levels of schooling. The above is explained based on a parents' difficulty to adapt to the development of their children and the greater protection that the school provides to preschoolers.

... when children are very young in pre-kindergarten or kindergarten, it is another reality that one lives inside ... because it is like more togetherness ... that suddenly the older children walk around with a clean scribble ... and they treat each other badly ... the children grow up ... I don't know, they acquire other kinds of things. (i2)

I think that school never wants bad things, it always looks for good things for children (p1, dg2).

They are not motivated [to carry out coexistence activities] (p3, dg1).

It seems to me that the teacher lacks interest to do that (p5, dg2).

At the guardian level, they identify a negative school social environment, characterized by low participation in course activities and a high level of conflict. This last situation also occurs in students.

The relationship of coexistence between teacher and student is also evaluated negatively: they consider that it is conflictive, that the teacher has low control to address the discipline of students and that the latter tend to break the rules. They explain that the above leads to the teacher frequently having to resolve conflicts in a reactive and aggressive manner.

... there comes a time when the teacher yells in general to the whole class or sometimes she catches a stick and hits the table, so that everyone is silent, because she has to get to that, because she really screams, screams and screams and they don't obey her. (p2, dg1)

As factors that hinder the SC of their school, they name (a) the lack of participation and communication among the parents; (b) insufficient communication between parents and teachers; (c) the lack of allocation of time and space by the teacher, to educate students in SC and the limited communication she has with her students and (d) the insufficient communication of students with parents and teachers when they face conflicts.

But the teacher if ... my son misbehaved today, she goes out and talks to me, but if she didn't do anything, she doesn't go out to talk to you, then you don't know. When she sees her: "ah, he misbehaved", because she comes to say

something, but that's the only thing, when you see her. (p5, dg2)

Factors associated with school coexistence

The SC is explained fundamentally in terms of the type of parenting that fathers and mothers exercise with their children. It is assumed that the family values and norms transmitted to the child are the basis of the student's coexistence.

It is that I believe that this comes from the base of the house, from how the coexistence at school is, so I believe that everything is part of the house, because one knows what it is like at home and how it will be at school. (p3, dg2)

The school also has a leading role in the SC, attributing to it the same impact that family upbringing can have on it. The participants explain that the effect that the school has on the students' SC learning is fundamentally due to the large amount of time they spend in this context. For these fathers and mothers, this last argument represents a support for the school's duty to educate in coexistence.

It is that it is fifty and fifty, fifty is at home and fifty percent is at school, because they still spend most of the day at school, so they still have to see how they teach them here. (p1, dg1)

The participants identify a factor that hinders their educational parental role and that of the school in the development and teaching of SC. They consider that the enactment of children's rights inhibits the correction of undisciplined behaviors in students, by teachers, parents, since punishment, which is considered by them as a necessary educational tool, it could be evaluated by the community as a violation of these rights, a situation that would lead to a legal sanction. In this way, to avoid legal consequences, they explain that the tendency is to make the rules of parenting and school more flexible. From this, an orientation to action is hypothesized that inhibits the educational parental role of the SC, when planning and implementing measures to regulate the behavior of their children.

So the student is very liberal in the establishment, that's why a lot of things are happening, not only inside the room but also inside the school. The rules, the teachers, because those of us who studied before in this same school were not like that, so that's why I tell you that because of the issue of the rights of the child. (p2, dg2)

This group of parents also identifies a series of measures that could improve SC: (a) use of information and communication technologies to strengthen communication between the teacher and the guardian,

(b) the adequacy of teaching, position that they consider that this would allow all students to guide their behavior towards learning goals; (c) education in values and interpersonal relationships and (d) strengthening the educational parental role.

... Go to a specialist, because I did it and another thing is communication and treating our children with great affection (i3).

That the teacher dedicate a half hour or twenty minutes to talk, to stop doing homework and talk with the children: what do you think of your classmate, your classmate, then they get to know themselves (p1, dg2).

Educational parental role of school coexistence

In general, the parents of the students consider that they educate for SC, although they define it as a difficult role to fulfill. A subjective theory is observed at the base that explains the teaching of coexistence as a process that must be implemented from early childhood, an evolutionary stage that they assume as highly significant and determining in the learning of SC.

Also, these parents consider violence in childhood as a characteristic of today's society, a situation that could account for its naturalization.

This is how I perceive it, children are very violent today, they are too violent ... (i6).

I think your case is very different, because you have it from now on, you don't know how it came, because you are eight years old, so you don't know how it came from before, maybe that's why you took it wrong, it's already messy, it misbehaves and you are trying to straighten it out that it is different. (p2, dg1)

Likewise, participants use a SC teaching method that can be classified as: (a) focused on dialogue, incorporating conversation topics such as respect, rules and how to approach SC problems; (b) focused on the manifestation of unconditional support to resolve SC conflicts and (c) the limited use of punishment, despite being considered as an important tool for parenting education, given that there is a fear of being involved in legal disputes by failing to comply the rights of the child.

... we as a family, we tried to give her support no more ... that she ignored, that she was a skilled girl, that she did not have to die for things that were not worth it in the long run [abuse] ... because she was a person who was worth a lot. (i2)

You have to take time to talk to him, tell him this is wrong, this is good. You have to have manners, explain the good and the bad, if you did something bad you have to tell it and we will talk about it.

Support always, no matter if it is good or bad, I will always support it. (p2, dg1)

As an educational strategy of the SC, parents incorporate the teaching of procedures to deal with interpersonal conflicts, that is, patterns of action that children must follow successively in the face of certain school conflicts: (a) ask the teacher to mediate in the conflict, (b) request authorization from the teacher to leave the classroom, in order to seek the support of the province; (d) if the inspector does not provide the necessary support, report the problem at home, so that ultimately it is the parents who mediate to resolve the conflict.

If you, a child told you this, someone else told you this, you stop and say to the young lady: she told me this. If the teacher did not listen to the first, she did not listen to the second, she did not listen to the third, you ask permission and go to the inspectorate: but she won't let me, let me know. (p4, dg2)

... you go to the teacher, you go to the inspector or you go to the assistant or you go to the aunt, you say the child hit me, but you don't have to hit ... after 5 or 10 minutes play again, because you are a child, because you have to go through these stages ... (i6)

Finally, the fight, understood by them as a violent confrontation among peers, is also a procedure that some parents teach their children to implement when other conflict resolution strategies do not work. This is how some participants put it:

I don't know, my son, the mentality that he has, what I tell him: if they hit me ... I hit (p2, dg1).

... The moment came that he began to do the same [fight]. So what do I do as a mother, if I tell him not to do it, what do the other mothers do? ... they do the opposite ... that is, "no, you have to do it." (i4)

Comprehensive model of school coexistence, from the parents' ST

The ST of the parents' SC are organized based on meanings and ontological and epistemological assumptions of what the SC is and how it is taught and learned, including more practical and concrete levels from where they exercise this educational role, which considers methods and procedures. These ST are developed based on different knowledge about how to raise and educate children, one of these is that transmitted by the school, knowledge that reflects important shortcomings in the approach to SC. This causes confusion in parents or limitations in the way they face the role of teaching their children to live

together, which ultimately impacts SC (Figure 1).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study sought to determine the ST that a group of parents from a school with social vulnerability have about the SC. ST were found that define, explain and guide the educational parental role of the SC.

Regarding the meaning that parents attribute to SC, a simple ST is observed that, although it highlights the need to achieve harmonious interpersonal relationships at school, these social relationships only include students and teachers, a finding that has already been noted in other works (Saldivia, 2008). It is not easy to understand what SC is and even in the scientific literature and educational policy there is no full consensus about this construct (Ascorra et al., 2018).

Probably the focus of schools on academic content leads to this dimension being less reasoned, producing multiple visions of what it means to coexist in school, for example, the naturalization of the student's indiscipline that this group of parents considers to be constitutive of the SC. This omission made by the proxy about himself in the school network interactions could be partly associated with his participatory crisis in the educational system, especially in those families with high social

vulnerability (Acuña, 2016; Cid et al., 2008). From this, it is clear the need to generate instances where the SC is discussed and reflected, incorporating above all the experiences and subjectivity of this group (for example, their TS), given that the only access to the subjective knowledge of the people develops motivation, involvement and is willing to change (Helmke, 2009). It is necessary for the school community in general to understand the value that SC has for the development of the student and all those who make it up (Ascorra et al., 2018; Román & Murillo, 2011; OECD, 2013).

The ST were also found in fathers and mothers with internal and external SC attribution. That in this and other studies (López et al., 2011; Saldivia, 2008; Vinha & Tognetta, 2009), parents consider that their educational parental role is highly incidental in the development of SC, represents a first step in strengthening parental education. Although the international literature shows that parents are aware of the importance of their role in the school adaptation and academic success of their children (Rahmawati et al., 2018), a present difficulty is the capacity of educational institutions to systematize a valued, reasoned, grounded and limited work to the educational reality, which not only favors an adequate SC, but also formally educates its students to coexist harmoniously in society.

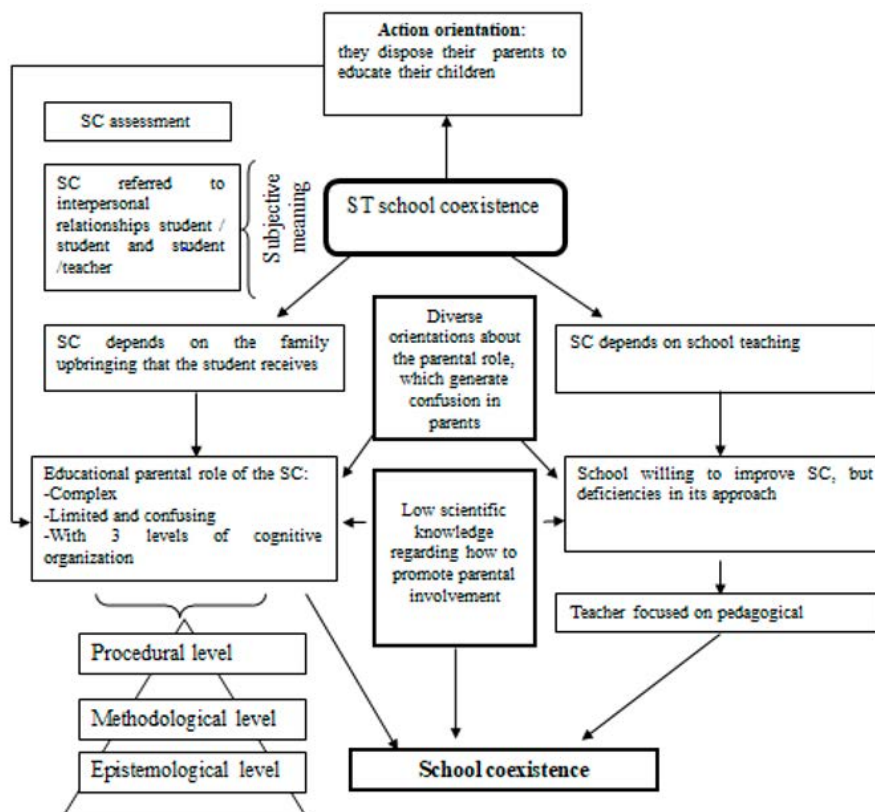


Figure 1. Comprehensive model of the SC, from the ST of the parents. Source: made by authors. Note: SC = School coexistence; ST =Subjective Theories.

Regarding the latter, educating in the parental role seems not to be an easy task, given that there are contradictions from different disciplines and knowledge regarding how to raise children (Castro, Van Der Veer, Burgos-Troncoso, Meneses-Pizarro, Pumarino-Cuevas, & Tello-Viorklums, 2013; Castro, Cuadra, & Hu, 2019), a situation that can undoubtedly lead to confusion in parents regarding how to exercise their educational parental role, in this case, of the SC. To name just one area of contradiction, parents' questions about child protection laws, as factors that prevent more rigid actions from being used in the education of students, are consistent with a Brazilian study in which it was identified the non-concordance of both parents and teachers with the "Bernardo law", which in Brazil prohibits educators from using physical punishment in the education of their children (Tognetta, 2016). As in the Brazilian research, the parents of this present study seem to consider punishment as an important tool for the education of their children.

A novel finding that requires further study is the complexity of learning this role, since it basically includes three cognitive levels of organization: (a) one that appeals to the nature of the knowledge of the parental role and of how children learn the SC, which seems to represent an important foundation for making decisions about how they educate and discipline their children; (b) another methodological method, which appeals to the methods that parents use to teach their children to live together at school, with those focused on dialogue and the transmission of information being predominant in this study; and (c) a practical procedural one, which involves teaching their children behavioral procedures to address interpersonal conflicts at school, a finding similar to that proposed by Máizquez et al. (2000), when referring to different levels of performance in parenting, including a strategic level and a specific tactical level.

From the above, the implementation of spaces for strengthening the parental role should consider these three cognitive levels of organization of parental education in SC. This probably implies addressing a constituent area of their personal identity (Fuller, 2000), which is why interventions are required that include a subjective change (Cuadra & Castro, 2018) and not only of content and procedures.

In psychoeducational interventions, one way to consider the subjective knowledge and experience of the parents is by including the suggestions they propose to improve SC. In this work, they propose the use of various tools to improve communication with the school, for example, technologies; in addition to a reorganization of the teaching-family meeting spaces.

Regarding the use of information and communication technologies, Patrikakou (2015) points out that precisely the participation of parents in the education of their children is in a new era, based on the use of these technologies, however, schools seem to go a step backwards, resisting incorporating them as a means of promoting participation.

Linked to the above, when parents indicate protocol actions that the school can use to resolve internal conflicts, they offer indications of actions that schools do not always understand: parents understand the need for conflicts that occur at school to be resolved within the institution and they know what most schools have not yet been able to understand: that conflicts can be learning opportunities in more assertive ways of solving them and thus, that it is necessary that the professionals of this institution do not avoid or avoid "outsource" the problems that could occur in this context (Vinha & Tognetta, 2009, 2013).

Finally, family participation in school is a key measure for educational success, in this case for the improvement of SC. The methodological option of this study seems pertinent as a first step to achieve the long-awaited participation of parents in the education of their children, given the possibility of rescuing their subjectivity (ST), the humanistic character of the paradigm, which favors construction processes of realities, placing the participant as the protagonist of change (Taylor & Bogdan, 1987), in this case, parents as key educational agents of the SC.

Certainly, countries show that reduced parental involvement in school is not something they want. In this case, parents also teach the schools that rather than being called upon to carry out support tasks for events promoted by those institutions, they can be allies to achieve the same objectives that education professionals have: take their children and students to the conquest of citizenship.

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