EDITORIAL

PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT:
CHANGES AND CHALLENGES

The theme of the current issue of *Studia paedagogica* is parental involvement in schools. For several decades, an approach has been established according to which parents are indispensable actors in the upbringing and education of their own children, even if they partially and essentially obligatorily delegate their role to the school. Parents, alongside the child and the teacher, form another essential vertex in the imaginary triangle of relationships in the educational process. Through their opinions, attitudes, and activities, parents significantly influence the running of the school, and even more the educational outcomes of their children. In recent decades, there have been several discourses on the topic of parents and parental involvement in Europe (Betz et al., 2017; Paseka & Byrne, 2020).

The first discourse focuses on the role of parents in supporting their own children in learning. This strand is in response to large scale-assessment studies like PISA that emphasize the importance of parents in their children's assessment and the role of parents as *supporters* in the learning processes, especially at home.

The second discourse focuses on the role of parents as *actors* in schools as organizations. This strand is motivated by democratic movements that enlarged the role of parents in decision-making processes in schools and gave them an active role in such processes. These two discourses of home and school cooperation can be summarized in terms of the home-based and school-based involvement of parents.

A third discourse focuses more on the role of parents as *consumers* due to changes in governmental policies that expand the rights of parents in choosing schools. Schools are in competition for "good" parents, meaning socially attractive and well-educated parents. As a result of these changes, new risks have arisen for parents as well as for schools.

A fourth discourse must be considered that can be described as a normative discourse, emphasizing parents as *partners* of schools. Such partnership rhetoric is interwoven with ideas of good parenthood, which is again oriented toward "good" parents and their options for supporting their children in their learning processes.

The choice of topic for this issue was inspired in part by the experiences of families and schools during the COVID-19 pandemic situation. The first discourse (*parents as supporters*) became very visible in discussions among parents and between parents and schools especially in the last few years, and it seemed strongly intertwined with the fourth discourse (*parents as partners*). The second discourse (*parents as actors*) and third discourse (*parents as consumers*) seemed to become lost, although the engagement of parents in schools seems more necessary than ever and the disadvantages of parents that are constructed as "hard-to-reach" are still present.

These four discourses on parental involvement were the starting point from which we, as editors, entered the preparation of this issue of the journal. There was a strong response to our call for papers. We received 30 abstracts, of which 16 authors were invited to prepare full texts. From these, we selected five texts for this issue. It was not easy to unambiguously assign the individual authors' approaches to the four outlined discourses. The submitted articles make clear that the topic of parental involvement in education is multi-faceted and the results are ambivalent. The fact that not all authors refer to the given structure might be seen as a result of the current and varied situations in schools and education systems and in educational research on parental involvement. The national context determines the general situation of education systems as well as the areas that are emphasized in the political discussions about parental involvement (Paseka & Byrne, 2020).

The selected articles present results about various forms of home-based and school-based parental involvement and about parent-school communication in various countries (Slovenia, Palestine, Portugal, and Brazil), about the limits and barriers under challenging conditions (refugee parents in Czech Republic), and about the (international) phenomenon of "shadow education". There are a wide variety of topics as well as methodological approaches. The authors use quantitative approaches by analyzing large-scale data (Slovenia and Palestine) and qualitative approaches by carrying out interviews and group discussions with teachers, headteachers, and parents (Slovenia), students (Portugal and Brazil), and refugee parents (Czech Republic). One article presents a review of shadow education emphasizing the theoretical approaches used in the international debate.

Most amazing was the result that the roles of parents mentioned in the call for papers did not seem sufficient to describe the different tasks parents are given or take on for themselves. Instead, the description of such roles

was enlarged by new dimensions and, through this enlargement, became more precise. If we try to find what connects the articles presented in this issue, it will be a topic that goes far beyond parental involvement alone. This topic is educational inequalities, in which the family and parents play an important role. The theme was foreshadowed in the 1960s by James Coleman when he pointed out that social and family background has a major impact on a child's school performance and on their future career. Coleman identified the school and the family as two sources of two different inputs into the socialization process: schools produce opportunities, demands, and rewards; families produce attitudes, motivation, and self-concepts. School performance arises from the interaction of the qualities a child brings from home to school (Rabušicová et al., 2004). This topic is taking on new forms that are highlighted by the contributions presented in this issue of *Studia paedagogica*.

The first text, by the authors *Mirjana Ule* and *Andreja Živoder* from Slovenia, is entitled *"Good" Parenting: Parental Support in Education as a Factor in Inequality*. It discusses the consequences of the discourse on good parenting in education that are suited to well-functioning, middle-class parents. The parents' rationale is described as "Only the best for my child!" and that means parents feeling responsible for their children's good grades. Parents act as gatekeepers by preventing their children from making decisions for a "bad" school and as way-keepers by informing them about "good" schools and options. They want to support their children in their educational trajectories to enlarge their chances of succeeding in school, at university, and by getting a good job. They do this in a very active, direct, and continuous way. Many other families, especially those with lower cultural and social capital, cannot meet such expectations. Hence, parental involvement has a dual role in the social differentiation of children. On one hand, it reproduces the existing interclass inequalities through the available capital of families leading to less prospective educational choices for socially and economically disadvantaged children; on the other, it produces new inter- and intraclass differences despite the emotional and supportive practices in education. Parental support is thus one source for the reproduction of social differences and a mechanism of social exclusion.

The second contribution, by the authors *Thiago Freires* and *Fátima Pereira*, is directly set in the context of disadvantaged neighborhoods, which the authors themselves call a "peripheral" context, using the example of young people in Brazil and Portugal. In their article, entitled *Parental and Family Involvement in Schools: Perceptions of Young Brazilian and Portuguese People from Underprivileged Contexts*, the authors interviewed young people about the role of their parents and the parental involvement in their school and then categorized families with several perspectives, identifying three groups of

families. In "anchor" families, parents are more or less passive; they ignore school and have no expectations concerning their children and their future. They are not able to support the children in their school career; they leave them alone. School and family seem to be parallel worlds with hardly any points of contact. In "haven" families, parents play a more active part: they are seen as supporters of their children in their educational trajectories. In "windmill" families, parents take an even more active part. They are assessed as partners in learning and educational processes, promoters in cooperation with the school, and assistants for their children pursuing their goals. The article aims to understand how young people reflect school-family dynamics in their educational trajectories; it concludes that schools do not educate alone and should involve parents and families in compulsory schooling in more inclusive ways.

Parental Involvement in Palestine is the topic of the third article, authored by *Tahani Ali-Rweide.* He analyzed large-scale assessment data to determine whether there were correlations between parental support and learning results of children. He uncovered several factors underlying parental support. Looking at home-based parental involvement, two factors of parental support emerged: "support" describes the activities of parents who provide help in doing homework and preparing exams and show interest in their children's success by asking teachers about performance; "control" describes the activities of parents who support their children indirectly by controlling their contact with friends, the amount of TV they watch, and their smartphone usage. Looking at school-based parental involvement, the factor of "cooperation" appeared, emphasizing the roles of parents as actors and partners on a school level. The author stated in the abstract that "It is normal that parents want to support their children at home and at school; however, not all of them are able to do so. Many schools prefer to limit parental involvement since they prefer to manage without parental help."

In their article *Theoretical Perspectives on the Role of Parents in Shadow Education*, the authors *Magda Nutsa Kobakhidze* and *Vít Šťastný* (Hong Kong, Czech Republic) analyze different theoretical approaches to capturing shadow education as an international phenomenon. Looking at the reasons parents accept and even advance shadow education, for example by arranging private tutoring or special courses for their children, it becomes evident that these parents want to support their children in the best way. They try to enhance their children's chances of succeeding in the education system and in their educational trajectories by being accepted at the best schools and universities. Because of the latent competition in getting such good positions, parents see themselves as under pressure to support their children. They therefore invest a lot of money and time. They behave as consumers and customers of the education system by strengthening their children's position to succeed.

Shadow education appears to be an example of inequalities in education, in which an active expression of parents' support for the best educational outcomes for their children can at the same time be seen as an expression of distrust in the education system. As emerged from the theoretical analysis, the dominant perspective used to study parents is influenced by Bourdieusian theories of social capital, class, and socioeconomic background. Pierre Bourdieu's appeal to shadow education scholars is evidenced by the frequent use of theories such as the theory of capital, parentocracy, middle-class advantage, and intensive/tiger parenting. "When it comes to understanding parents in shadow education, the explanatory power of Bourdieu's theoretical concepts is unparalleled," the authors state.

In the last contribution, entitled *Ukrainian Parents' Engagement with Czech Public Schools: Challenges and Roles for Parents*, by *Natalia Dombinskaya* (Czech Republic) a certain disadvantage is evident, this time for refugee parents of Ukrainian children enrolled in Czech schools. The article addresses the question of how they view the challenges in their cooperation with schools and in their roles as parents. They would like to support their children as they did before leaving their home country. However, in the new context they encounter barriers: language barriers as well as barriers from not knowing enough about the Czech education system and the subjects taught. They feel guilty, tired, and stressed because they are unable to take the role of supporters of their children's learning in school. Nevertheless, they feel like supporters as they try to give their children a good structure for doing homework and for preparing for school, and they motivate their children to learn. All of this goes together with the fact that teachers are looking for the best ways to support the refugee parents and their children.

Reviewing these five articles concerning the role of parents, it becomes evident that they focus on parents in different ways: as supporters of their children, as assistants of schools, as gate-keepers and way-keepers in their children's educational trajectories, as promotors of and partners in cooperation, and as customers and consumers. Parents seem to become part of the problem of educational inequalities, especially if they are not able to take on supportive roles in relation to their children's education for a variety of reasons. But they can also become part of the solution, just like schools.

What do these results mean for schools and the education system beyond the national context? Parental involvement and the ways to manage expectations seem to be a big challenge all over the world. Some schools feel driven by the parents' demands concerning their children's assessment results; other schools feel ignored by the low involvement of parents. Teachers complain about the lack of interest of some parents ("hard-to-reach" parents) and at the same time there are complaints about the intensive demands of other parents ("tiger" parents). The pedagogical staff seem to be uncertain

about how to cooperate with parents and they feel isolated in their efforts to establish a "good" cooperation, whatever that might mean. With such ambivalences and uncertainties, home-school cooperation is not on the agenda of school-development processes in most schools, although there are standards and quality criteria for implementing a strong home-school cooperation that could be used as starting point for such processes (for example, the National Parent Teacher Association and Vodafone Stiftung Deutschland).

Articles in this issue offer hints of where schools might start when wishing to build up a strong(er) home-school cooperation with the aim of working together and supporting children and young people in their educational trajectories: by communicating with parents more intensively although their situation is not easy, by making pedagogical aims more transparent and thereby enhancing parents' trust in school, and by involving parents as actors in development processes to give them a voice and the chance to participate. There is still a lot to do in the schools and in educational research on parental involvement to evaluate and analyze programs, processes, and outcomes.

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