Family narratives about the difficulties in the schooling process

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Abstract

The objective of this study was to understand the narratives of the students' relatives about the difficulties in the schooling process. The concepts of meaning, educational self and narrative were used. This is a qualitative study theoretically based on Historical-Cultural Psychology, whose method was narrative analysis. The participants were 10 family members of Elementary School students, in a public school in the State of Bahia. Focus group and individual semi-structured interviews were carried out. The basic analysis procedure consisted of setting up collective narratives from individual contributions that complement each other, supported on the meanings presented by the participants. Understandings and positions about the children's learning process were identified. The findings allow to distinguish the versions constructed by the student families from those that make up the school complaint. These symbolic constructs indicate modulations of the educational self and the occurrence of problematic communication between the school and the family.

Keywords: Narratives; family; school.

Narraciones de familiares sobre las dificultades en el proceso de escolarización

Resumen

El objetivo de este estudio consistió en comprender las narraciones de los familiares de los estudiantes acerca de las dificultades en el proceso de escolarización. Se utilizó los conceptos de significado, de *self* educacional y de narrativa. Se trata de un estudio cualitativo, orientado teóricamente por la Psicología Histórico-Cultural y metodológicamente por el análisis narrativo. Los participantes fueron 10 familiares de estudiantes de la Enseñanza Primaria, en una escuela pública de un municipio del estado de Bahía. Se realizó grupo focal y entrevistas individuales semiestructuradas. El procedimiento básico de análisis consistió en configurar narrativas colectivas a partir de aportes individuales que se complementan, teniendo como soporte los significados presentados por los participantes. Se ha identificado entendimientos y posiciones sobre el proceso de aprendizaje de los niños. Los resultados permitieron diferenciar las versiones construidas por los familiares de los estudiantes de aquellas que componen la queja escolar. Esas construcciones simbólicas indican modulaciones del *self* educacional y la incidencia de comunicación problemática entre la escuela y la familia.

Palabras clave: Narrativas; familia; escolarización.

Narrativas de familiares sobre as dificuldades no processo de escolarização

Resumo

O objetivo deste estudo consistiu em compreender as narrativas dos familiares dos estudantes acerca das dificuldades no processo de escolarização. Foram utilizados os conceitos de significado, de *self* educacional e de narrativa. Trata-se de um estudo qualitativo, orientado teoricamente pela Psicologia Histórico-Cultural e metodologicamente pela análise narrativa. Os participantes foram 10 familiares de estudantes do Ensino Fundamental, numa escola pública de um município do estado da Bahia. Foram realizados grupo focal e entrevistas individuais semiestruturadas. O procedimento básico de análise consistiu em configurar narrativas coletivas a partir de aportes individuais que se complementam, tendo como suporte os significados apresentados pelos participantes. Entendimentos e posições sobre o processo de aprendizagem das crianças foram identificados. Os achados permitem distinguir as versões construídas pelos familiares dos estudantes daquelas que compõem a queixa escolar. Essas construções simbólicas indicam modulações do *self* educacional e a ocorrência de comunicação problemática entre a escola e a família.

Palavras-chave: Narrativas; família; escola.

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Introduction

School failure has encouraged many investigations in the fields of science. In the last decades, it has undoubtedly been one of the most salient themes in the field of School and Educational Psychology and related sciences that aim to understand the processes involved in schooling (Bray& Leonardo, 2011; Cabral & Sawaya, 2001; Dias, 2008; Marinho-Araujo & Neves, 2006; Moysés, 1998; Nakamura, Lima, Tada, & Junqueira, 2008; Patto, 1990; Scortegagna & Levandowski, 2004; Zibetti, Souza, & Queiróz, 2010).

School failure has its most deceptive expression in the early years of elementary school. Appears asgrade retention and dropout. In 2015, the official failing and dropout rate in Brazilian public and private schools was 6.8% (equivalent to one million fifty-six thousand children). But what seems to be the best expression of the chronification of this failure is the distortion between age and grade. About 15% of the students were two or more years behind.

What has been very striking when looking at the problem of school failure and, more specifically, the high rate of students with learning disabilities, is the realization of the school's initiative to promote referral of these students for health assessment and treatment. In such cases, psychologists and physicians are the most sought specialists. According to Souza (1994, quoted by Dias, 2008), in Brazil, 50% referrals for psychological care are made by the school, while 26% are made by the family and 23% by physicians.

These referrals translate demands related to the difficulties and problems of students in the schooling process. Difficulties in learning and problems in living with peers and teachers are identified, gain diagnostic explanations and go to the health area. These formulations are accredited to student's teachers, pedagogical coordinators, and parents, although students are rarely heard. They are discursive productions that objectify what is conventionally called a "school complaint" (Dazzani, Cunha, Luttigards, Zucoloto, & Santos, 2014). Referring to the authors cited in the first paragraph, the school complaint is understood as a hegemonic version, historically created within the school, which explains the difficulties in the learning process and behavioral problems based on the alleged unfavorable characteristics of the student (cognitive deficit, indiscipline, disinterest, etc.) and his/her family (disruption, disinterest, etc.). School complaint can also reveal what is meant by pathologization of education (Patto, 1990; Moysés, 1998; Zucoloto, 2003), which presupposes the existence of diseases that prevent or hinder students to learn or behave according to expected by the school institution.

In conducting a critical literature review on the topic, Dazzani et al. (2014) found that scholars converge to consider that the school complaint pathologizes sometimes the child sometimes the poverty of his/her family. For the non--learning of the child, internal causes are considered, dispositional factors. As for the family, its precarious conditions of existence, its presumed lack of socio-affective structure and its low level of education are highlighted, aspects that would make it difficult for children to adhere to school processes.

Interestingly, however, the school does not engage in the learning process when it fails. That is, the school complaint does not include school practices and their pedagogical peculiarities.

Although there are researchers who perceive and point out the need to listen to all the actors involved in the production of the school complaint, to properly deal with it - for example, Collares and Moysés (1996), Machado (2000) - studies that address the versions of students and their families are still very limited. In the field of psychology, the interests of scholars seem to be more centered on the perspective of teachers and psychologists, as can be seen from the literature review by Dazzani et al. (2014).

In terms stated so far, the school complaint is presented as a narrative. For Bruner (2002), narrative is a form of discourse whose structure is "inherent in the praxis of social interaction" (p.72). Narrating is about telling stories, events, and especially explaining how deviations from the ordinary occur. Therefore, the narrative is normative. Its sequential composition involves events, human characters and mental states. Their stories refer to what is morally valued or appropriate. Because of this understanding, we ask the following questions: (1) How do family members understand the difficulties in their children's schooling process? (2) Are their narratives always convergent with the school complaint?

Both the narratives and the questions, in the context of Historical-Cultural Psychology, refer to the concepts of meaning and self. According to Vigotski (1934/2000), meaning is a common knowledge shared in a particular culture or social group. It is produced and exchanged in social coexistence, while enabling communication. Meaning simultaneously expresses individual thinking and collective knowledge.

The concept of self is constructed by the person through interactions with significant others as a means of structuring their consciousness, shaping its identity, situating its position, and establishing its commitment to others. Based on Bruner (2002), self is dependent on dialogue and, as such, is necessarily multiple. The self is in the convergence between two movements, one that goes from culture to mind and another that goes from mind to culture; it is a product of the situations in which the subject acts. We agree with Bruner in the conclusion: "The self, then, is not something static or a substance, but a configuration of personal events in a historical unity that includes not only what we were, but also anticipations of what we will be" (Bruner, 2002, p. 100).

Recognizing the multidimensionality of the self, Marsico and Iannaccone (2012) formulated the concept of educational self. As a specific dimension of the self, for these authors, the educational self is constituted by individual experiences in educational contexts. The constitutive educational experience of the self is appropriated by the individual to make sense of what happens in school. Therefore, the educational self can be understood as a process of elaboration of meanings in motion, referring to the past and, at the same time, building the future. In this process, parents may adopt (combining, alternating) the I-teacher (assuming the teacher's point of view) and I-father or I-mother (taking

the parent's point of view) positions, as appropriate, when evaluating the school and their child at school.

For Marsico and Iannaccone (2012), school success or failure can contribute to a positive or negative view of the self not only in relation to the child. The school's assessment of the child may be perceived by its parents as an assessment of their own educational skills or abilities. In their research, guided by Cultural Psychology, in which they analyze the self in the relationship between family and school, the authors noted that, depending on the success or failure of their children, parents may establish an alliance, opposition, or relationship of acquiescence with the school. Alliance and opposition are more frequent in higher socio-cultural families, and acquiescence is more common in lower socio-cultural families.

Collares and Moysés (1996) observed the persuasive power of the diagnosis conceived by the school. This diagnosis can be assumed by parents in such a way that their perception of the child changes. They may come to see in the child what the school ensures that determine his/her failure to learn. The supposed knowledge of the school, embodied by the teachers, is imposed in the pathologizing assessment that is directed to the family.

In this context, the goal of the present study was to understand the narratives of students' families about their difficulties in the schooling process. To this end, besides taking reference to the studies on school complaints found in the literature, we use the concepts of narrative (Bruner, 2002), meaning (Vigotski, 1934/2000) and educational self (Marsico & Iannaccone, 2012).

Method

From the perspective of Historical-Cultural Psychology, the approach is qualitative. Its interpretation is based on the narrative analysis proposed by Bruner (1991, 2002). As stated by Bruner (2002), we interpret the interpretations that people make about their lives.

Participants

The participants were 10 family members of students from the early grades of elementary school, including seven mothers, one father and two aunts. Their children or nephews study at a public school in a municipality in the State of Bahia and were pointed by their teachers as having a history of learning disabilities and grade retention in different school subjects. For some of them, the school had already advised parents to seek help from health specialists. That is, these children were targets of school complaints.

Instruments and procedures

The narratives were produced through semi-structured individual interviews and focus groups, developed at the school. Participants responded to the invitation made through the school board. The focus group and the interviews were recorded in audio, with the appropriate consent of the participants. All precautions necessary for research with human beings were taken, in accordance with current legislation. Each interview session lasted an average of 30 minutes and the focus group lasted 60 minutes.

Focus group and interview development focused on the following questions: how did participants know about children's learning difficulties; and how they have dealt with it. In addition, a form with sociodemographic questions related to the socioeconomic status of the family and the educational level of the participant was used. The present research report refers to only part of a broader research on school complaint, conducted in two municipalities of the State of Bahia. This study involved psychologists from the respective municipal education systems, teachers and students from three schools as well as family members of the children. Some information obtained through participant observation will be required to facilitate the analytical work presented here.

Analysis

The guiding questions of the focus group and the interviews allowed the construction of stories that were delineated in their composition: events, characters, conceptions of teaching and learning, identification of learning difficulties, positioning of family members (using the notion of educational self), etc. The individual contributions were compared and had their similarities, convergences and divergences evidenced. Similarities and convergences were taken as indicators of narrative complementation. Bruner (1991) points out that stories connect to each other in everyday life and constitute narrative wholes. In the constitution of these totalities, which express collective understandings, the meanings (shared knowledge) were emphasized. According to Bruner (2002), it is within the narrative that meanings are produced. These narratives were named based on their plot and their meanings.

Results and Discussion

During the analysis, participants sometimes expressed a determination to make their own checks and come to their own conclusions about their children's learning. Other times, they just reproduced the versions presented to them by the teachers, assuming them. At other times, they challenged the teachers' explanations and actions. From this, the narratives were divided into three categories: family complaint, acceptance of school complaint and family counter--complaint. This categorization was inspired by that used by Marsico and Iannaccone (2012): alliance, opposition or relationship of acquiescence. The names of the participants have been replaced to ensure confidentiality, and the speech transcriptions were kept as close as possible to the original record, that is, we only made grammatical corrections.

Family complaint

The family complaint is presented as a report provided by family members' findings and explanations about their children's non-learning, as well as the search for solutions. As an example, we have the following: "*Yeah, I teach him things, and he puts the name on it but not put it right*" (Palmira, mother). The finding has an evaluative meaning and that the mother takes the authorship of the teaching for herself. But the assessment may result from the comparison between school performance and home performance, as in this example: "*I look at her test to make corrections, I already see that she doesn't answer the way she did at home*" (Quirina, mother). For this to be the case, the mother must necessarily perceive herself with sufficient knowledge to teach her child at home and to evaluate what has been done at school, or what comes from there. This leaves openness, of course, for possible discrepancies between what happens at home and what happens at school in terms of teaching and learning.

It is even possible that these discrepancies mean the denial of alleged school learning: "*One says, he is better at math, sometimes he is not, sometimes stays at home and says: Mom, I don't understand that*" (Selena, mother). The participant points out a disparity between the teacher's assessment - as she received it - and her own assessment of the child's performance.

Sometimes, the evidence simultaneously reveals the child's cognitive competences and incompetences: "*then she keeps asking me and I keep explaining to her. And she can use the computer there, but she only knows how to play, but she doesn't know the letters*" (Poliana, aunt). Thus, it implicitly questions school work, because if the child is able to learn (to use the computer) and does not learn to know the letters, the failure can presumably be only in teaching. What makes this interpretation possible is the fact that we know (through participant observation) that there are no computers in the school in question. So, the child learns to use the computer regardless of school. However, from her aunt's perspective, the child does not yet know the letters of the alphabet, which she should have already learned at school.

The finding is not necessarily made by the child's mother or father. Another more experienced person in the family can do it (a cousin, for example): "*I always knew that Maria* [her niece] *knew. But I kept [the] boy teaching, because I have a 13-year-old boy and he always helped her in homework, he teaches her. Then one day he said: Mother, Maria doesn't know the letters, no! Then I explained to her, that she doesn't know*" (Poliana, aunt).

A pattern of education is formed among the students' family members. Quirina (mother) refers to the practice of test correction. This practice raises two questions. The first refers to a teaching that values content reproduction and dismisses error as a pointless deviation. The second question concerns the centrality of the teacher, who emerges as the bearer of a supposed knowledge to be imposed on students. Selena (mother) emphasizes the teacher's explanation, which must be followed by the student's memorization and reproduction:

"*My son, why don't you ask the principal, the teacher, to explain it again?! Then explains, then sometimes he forgets, he stays there, he doesn't take it: Mom, I don't know, Mom. So, it's like that in memory, I don't know*". Again, the centrality of the teacher, which is reaffirmed by Poliana (aunt), also with the idea of explanation as a teaching strategy. This explanation must be repeated to ensure memorization and consequent reproduction by the student.

The reports of the findings allow to observe that the teaching attempted at the family level is apparently guided by a traditional approach, as well as at school. Mizukami (2015) characterizes traditional teaching as a practice that highlights the transmission of information, based on the teacher's intellectual and moral authority, and its reproduction by the student. The student must passively listen and observe the teacher and then imitate him/her. The teacher repeats the explanation and the demonstration. The student reproduces the model through exercisesand tests. Thus, it is sought the exact reproduction of content and skills.

At different times, we have obtained from some school teachers who study the children of the participants in this study the statement that their practice is based on traditional pedagogy, despite their academic background. Bray and Leonardo (2011), for example, point to traditional teaching as the predominant model guiding teacher practice. In this model, student passivity and mnemonic ability are considered key factors for success. Mizukami (2015) clarifies that traditional teaching refers to a practice that is passed from generation to generation, without the support of empirically validated theories. We argue, then, that students are the most exposed to this practice and, of course, those who are most susceptible and able to apprehend and reproduce it. In this sense, the statement of Quirina (mother) is exquisite: "*… I try to teach her math <u>the way I learned</u>, but she didn't get it, like the subtraction she doesn't know, the way I explain to her*" (emphasis added). Therefore, it is possible that this appropriation of traditional teaching, based on individual experience as a student, is constitutive of a kind of popular pedagogy, a cultural construction analogous to popular psychology, both advocated by Bruner (2001, 2002).

In the understanding of the students' families, this teaching expresses the development and the positioning of the educational self of the student. In these examples, mothers and aunts assume the I-Teacher position, as indicated by Marsico and Iannaccone (2012). Therefore, the family imports from school and with it shares explanations for non-learning. Students' relatives appropriate historically meaningful explanatory models. Thus, they go beyond what Collares and Moysés (1996) found in their study. That is, they do not appropriate teachers' discourse only regarding the non-learning of their children. They take for themselves explanatory models and pedagogical practices.

The narrative constituted by the family complaint, in making the transition from finding to explaining non-learning, sometimes places the school as a place where learning developed at home can be confirmed or legitimized, but which can also be presented as an environment not conducive to this:

"*Yeah, she learns at home, she demonstrates everything, but when she gets to school, I don't know if it's because she's very friendly with everyone and talks to everyone and in the end gets distracted with everyone and don't know what she does in the notebook*" (Quirina, mother). Thus, there is a certain reversal of roles between school and family. Still, the child's individual characteristics remain at the center of the problem.

In general, these explanations tend to prioritize cognitive or mental aspects of the child, even when school education raises questions: "*Then I don't know what it is like, if it's the way teachers teach it, which is it, I've even asked for psychologist, something like that!*" (Quirina, mother). Palmira (mother) says, quite suggestively also: "*... there are only a few things like that, at home with the girls, I already realized that. He hits the girls*". Scortegagna and Levandowski (2004), among other authors, point out the tendency, also among teachers, to refer children who do not learn to psychological or medical service. The family complaint is pathologizing, therefore, in the sense that it tends to associate idiosyncrasies identified in children with cognitive dysfunctions or disruptions in their mental health. Thus, the family uses the medical model to envision possible solutions to the impasse produced by non-learning. Sometimes, still, the option adopted is the intensification of out-of-school education: "*Then, for the year I'll see if I enroll her in tutoring classes because she doesn't know anything in the third grade*" (Poliana, aunt).

Pathologization of non-learning is recurrently evidenced in the literature, in studies that focus on school complaints from the listening of teachers or psychologists. The following authors can be cited as examples: Machado (1997), Moysés (1998), Cabral and Sawaya (2001), Marinho-Araújo and Neves (2006) and Souza (2007), who indicate the prevalence of complaint based on medical model, care centered on the search for intrapsychic factors; Scortegagna and Levandowski (2004), Nakamura, Lima, Tada and Junqueira (2008), Zibetti, Souza and Queiróz (2010) and Bray and Leonardo (2011), which, based on their findings, characterize production, referral and attendance to school complaints as individualizing and stigmatizing.

What distinguishes the family complaint from the school complaint is, mainly, the peculiarity of the former being a version of the student's non-learning findings made by his/her family members (and not by the teachers). In addition, the findings that underlie the family complaint, as well as its subsequent referrals, are relatively independent from those of the school complaint, as in the following statement: "*Because I, as a mother, I think she needs [a psychologist], but a teacher told me it was her time, she said: No, woman, it's her time to learn!*" (Quirina, mother). It is also evident in this example, when it comes to the educational self, the I-Motherposition. However, the fact of constructing a particular narrative about the non-learning of their children does not prevent the family from accepting and firmly adhering to the complaint from school, as we will see below.

Acceptance of school complaint

In terms of finding, the acceptance of the school complaint enables family members to point differences between the child who does not learn from their peers:

> *No, her main complaint is that she can't keep up with her classmates, you know? In the activity, to get out of the blackboard, she is slow. But this process takes place from the very literacy, she was always the last to finish the activities in school* (Quirina, mother).

Sometimes, what is emphasized, in accepting the school complaint, is the divergence between orality, reading and writing: "*It's… their grades are not bad, you know? Because, so, she can… you ask her, give her a questionnaire, you ask, she can answer you, now when it's time to write, then it gets complicated…*" (Quirina, mother). Or the mismatch between reading and writing: "*…he is having difficulty, so when it comes to reading, doing some homework, he has a little difficulty, but to write, he writes well, but at the time of reading, there is no much development*" (Paul, father). Zibetti et al. (2010) found a high incidence of school complaints in the early grades of elementary school and related it precisely to learning to read and write.

Other times, the acceptance of the school complaint highlights the student's performance in a specific subject: "*In Math, he has a lot of difficulty. His grade is even low. Thank God it's only in math*" (Selena, mother). The indiscipline can also hinder learning, as in the following statement: "*My children, since last year, had difficulty learning, very naughty, did not stay in the room, wanted to just play, you know?*" (Nanã, mother). Or as in the following: "*The teacher said he's naughty, said he looks like fight, gets involved in gossip*" (Otávia, mother). Scortegagna and Levandowski (2004) and Nakamura et al. (2008) include mathematical calculations, indiscipline and lack of interest in the list of complaints that are usually referred to care services.

Above all, when it comes to explanations about non-learning and the referrals envisaged for its solution, the acceptance of the school complaint leads family members to an individualizing perspective, as in the previous examples, and sometimes to a pathologizing perspective. The latter appears in the report by Quirina (mother), suggesting the existence of cognitive deficit in the child, and in the statements of Nanã (mother) and Otávia (mother), characterizing indiscipline. In the following example, the pathologizing perspective presents itself as a suspected brain or mental disorder: "*... she [the teacher] said she is going to look for someone like this, a doctor, to see if it's something in his head, that is unknowingly ... the tests he does, he cannot answer ...*" (Palmira, mother).

What is fundamental in characterizing the acceptance of the school complaint is a dual absence of investigative attitude and criticality. Family members passively adopt teachers' explanatory models for children's difficulties.

Family counter-complaint

The family counter-complaint appears as an expression of opposition and resistance to the school complaint, being formulated by the students' family members. These formulations are critical oppositions to teacherperformance and teaching outcomes and thus denounce the schoolwork, biases and disconcerments. Simultaneously, they reveal and dimension the development of the educational self and the positions that it enables the subject. Thus, in comparative terms, we can assume that, in order to engender the family counter-complaint, the configuration of the educational self needs to be more complex than in the case of the production of the family complaint and the acceptance of the school complaint. The counter-complaint movement requires more elaborate knowledge and more critical positions about the schooling process.

The counter-complaint may mean a refusal to return teaching problems to the family, reaffirming the school as the locus of the supposed knowledge necessary for its resolution:

And that's it, it doesn't give you a ... a solution, it gives you a problem, but it doesn't give you the solution ... I'm a kind of mother that I thought so, my daughter, particularly, since she has this situation, I think the school should help me solve it, not like the girl told me there... that I told her like this: I don't know what I do for her anymore, then she, her teacher said: If you don't know, imagine us! (Quirina, mother).

The counter-complaint comes here through an expression marked by intense emotionality, especially indignation. The counter-complaint may place the teacher as an expert with the supposed knowledge of the school, with the duty to exercise it effectively. "*I think so, if she's a teacher, she had to know more than me, if I'm looking for help, it's because I couldn't solve it. Then she said that, I thought it was absurd!*"(Quirina, mother).

The question regarding the mismatch between the serialization of teaching and the expected learning may be present in the counter-complaint: "*... then I say: is it for a child who is in the third grade and not even know the letters... of the alphabet?*" (Poliana, aunt). It can be expressed as a conclusive consideration that nothing else can be expected to happen in school other than the advancement of the learning process, especially when considering the content and skills of practical importance in everyday life: "*Look, I thought so, that she had to learn more, like, I'll tell you, math, which is something we always use*" (Quirina, mother).

The counter-complaint may be a synthetic conclusion of broad significance that questions the effectiveness of the school work: "*What is missing most is teaching and learning here…*" (Selena, mother). It supposes a more refined intellectual elaboration, when compared to the family complaint and the acceptance of the school complaint, since it requires a reflection on the role of the school, on teaching and learning, on the teacherperformance, on the specificities of the taught subjects, etc. Moreover, the counter-complaint is marked by an emotional dimension that is intensely apparent, especially in the form of indignation and amazement. The family counter-complaint critically brings to light the student'sdissatisfaction with the school performance in view of their expectations about learning.

In constructing the family complaint, the students' mothers and aunts in this study assume, from the perspective of the educational self, the I-Teacher position, to assess their children's learning and develop teaching activities, and take the I-Mother/I-Aunt position to provide third-party (alternative) education services or seek care in health services. This shows the non-sharing of the father, reminding us that men still participate less in the education of their children than women. However, multiple positions of the self gain expression in the experience of student families:

- In the case of family complaint: I/Teacher, active, independent, convergent; and I-Mother or I-Auntactive,independent, but convergent with the school;

- In case of acceptance of the school complaint: I/Mother or I/Aunt or I/Father passive, dependent, convergent with the school;

- In the case of family counter-complaint: I-Mother or I-Aunt active, independent and divergent from school.

Although these results resemble the findings of Marsico and Iannaccone (2012), when referring to alliance, opposition or acquiescence regarding teacher assessment of their children's performance, the differences are very pronounced. While these authors focus on school success and failure, the present study investigates only aspects of failure. Furthermore, these authors deal with families of different socio-cultural levels, while in the present study the families have very similar socio-cultural characteristics and similar disadvantageous socioeconomic conditions (none have a monthly income above two minimum wages). We believe that family counter-complaintrequires a more complex educational self, but it does not seem reasonable to relate this to the number of years of schooling, either because we did not intend to statistically treat the information obtained, or because we consider it possible for the development of the educational self to occur, also through indirect experiences, such as monitoring the schooling process of children.

In summary, children's families basically believe and expect the school to teach effectively and students to learn well, all at about the same time; and learn at least the rudiments of writing, reading, and calculus. It is the violation of this belief that generates all the production of narratives and meanings that we configure. According to Bruner (2002), narratives are constructed only when constitutive beliefs of popular psychology are violated.

Final Considerations

The narratives of the students' relatives suggest the precariousness of the dialogue between school and family. In them we identify symbolic constructions concerning the non-learning and the school complaint, that follow, however, in relation to the latter, diverse paths and presenting distinctive characteristics. These distinctions are important because they enable a more accurate look at the interactive processes that take place in everyday school life, especially those involving teachers, students and student families. In this understanding, the school and family are in symbolic interaction on a daily basis. Between them, there is a routine, two-way traffic of various meanings. However, this does not necessarily mean the existence of a fluent dialogue between the actors involved in this transit.

This scenario leads to the understanding that communication between school and family is not always effective and that contributes to the relationship between the two social instances to bring considerable tension. When we try to visualize the different plots and dynamics suggested by the school complaint, the family complaint and the family counter-complaint, we get the clear impression that sometimes, instead of dialogue, there is a kind of collective monologue. That is, each instance - school or family - is so involved in its own processes that it cannot give a comprehensive listening to what the other is saying, although both are engaged in saying something continually.

It is possible to point out the existence of a kind of collective monologue because:

- The school complaint is formulated without listening to the students and their families, based only on observation and denunciation of what is not expected by the school institution;

- When formulating the complaint, families seem to ignore the teacher's complaint, even though they use the same guiding model as this;

- The counter-complaint constructed by the students' families does not seem to count on the listening of the teachers (as can be inferred from the studies of the area);

- Only the acceptance of the school complaint clearly effects the flow of communication, although it is asymmetrically established. This asymmetry is then configured as a vector of the power relations prevailing within the school, as well as the relations between it and the students' families. But still here, the students are not heard.

The family complaint reveals that the family assumes a parallel teaching, when it realizes that the school is not succeeding in its task. On the other hand, sometimes the family accepts that non-learning persists because it considers, in an uncritical way, that teachers' explanations and justifications express the knowledge of authority.

Thus, the family complaint constitutes a mechanism to reaffirm the social exclusion represented by school failure. This occurs as the family uses the explanatory models provided by the school and undertakes or pursues alternative teaching practices to schoolchildren that ultimately differ in no way from them.

Therefore, families deal with their child's school failure in three distinct ways, sometimes simultaneously:

- Accept the school complaint that the difficulty of learning or non-learning is due to the child's personal characteristics. The family adheres to the thesis of motivational, behavioral or cognitive dysfunctions or deficits;

- Conceives school education as insufficient and decides to complement it, by their own means, by promoting alternative, out-of-school education. In this case, also respondto the appeal of the school, whose narratives attribute co-responsibility for teaching to the family;

- Returns responsibility for teaching and corresponding failure to school. In this case, assume a critical, contestatory position, before the authority of the teachers in the school institution. However, the speech does not seem to resonate at school, given the asymmetry between the powers involved in the clash.

These three types of expression may be present in the same narrative. This makes clear not only the existence of different levels of complexity of the educational self, but also its contradictions and ambiguities. At this point, we can point out that the present study brings relevant contributions to School and Educational Psychology, in order to improve understanding of the processes involved in schooling. This occurs in two ways: by resizing the school complaint and the consequent analytical increase of this phenomenon and the school failure; and by expanding the investigative reach, including listening to family members and suggesting the inclusion of the students.

The expression "school complaint" does not do justice to the complexity of the phenomenon to which it refers. To be more precise, we should refer to the plurality of complaints, which are not restricted to the school environment, although all concern non-learning and school failure. The findings of this research make it possible to distinguish complaints made by teachers from those made by students' families (as well as their counter-complaints), but leave open the possibility that students are also building their complaints. And this, of course, demands new investigative endeavors. Perhaps the expression "teacher complaint" is more appropriate when it comes to the complaint formulated by teachers, considering their descriptive and distinctive capacity.

Therefore, the phenomenon of symbolic constructions around non-learning does not end with the narratives of teachers and students' families. Very little listening has been devoted to those who are (or should be) the center of convergence of teaching and learning processes, that is, the own students. The drama (or tragedy) of school failure, in order to make itself more properly known, requires, however, more than that, the clarification of the possible dialogues (and their impediments) between its protagonists, as well as their sociocultural, political and historical context.

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