CHILDREN’S WELL-BEING AS ‘BOUNDARY OBJECT’ BETWEEN PARENTS AND SCHOOL

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Who are responsible for children’s relational well-being in school, the parents or the school? This question often becomes the focal point when parents address teachers and principals with issues of the relational well-being of their child in school. In this paper, I propose that children’s well-being in school can be regarded as a ‘boundary object’ that separate as well as, potentially, bridge the worlds of schools and homes. My main argument is that pupils’ well-being among their peers is a concern and an area of responsibility in the intersection between homes and schools. Schools generally distinguish between what they consider their core output, i.e. pupils’ learning, and pupils’ well-being. While they acknowledge a responsibility for the learning, schools tend to reject responsibility for the children’s relational problems, which they interpret as individual, pointing to the child’s psyche and the parents’ inadequate upbringing as the root cause of the child’s difficulties (Hein, 2009). Schools do so by drawing on popular psychological conceptualizations of ‘home-made selves’ and on strong discourses about modern ‘outsourcing parents’, both very present and performative in the school arena. I use the concept ‘boundary work’ to denote this process.

My research is based on qualitative interviews with parents, teachers and principals about children who have experienced bullying in school. I apply the concepts ‘boundary object’ and ‘boundary work’ to explore the barriers as well as the potentials of a home/school collaboration focused on the well-being of pupils. In the original definition (Star & Grisemer, 1989), boundary objects help establish coherence across intersecting social worlds. The well-being of children could serve as boundary object, i.e. as the basis of a new partnership between school and parents. Such a partnership would not only be based on intersecting responsibilities, but also on a shared and genuine goal in children’s well-being, that potentially could transgress problems of social inequality in the home-school collaboration.

Keywords:
Children’s well-being in school; school-home-relationship; Boundary objects; Boundary work.

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2 Star & Grisemer, 1989.
References:


Star, Susan Leigh: This is Not a Boundary Object: Reflections on the Origin of a Concept. In: Science, Technology, & Human Values, no. 35 (5), 2010