HOME SCHOOL PARTNERSHIP: A GLIMPSE OF ITALIAN REALITY

Michelle Pieri, University of Milano - Bicocca, Italy

While at the international level parents’ involvement in school has received ample attention in education research (Telem & Pinto, 2006), in Italy there are few studies in the literature that attempt to analyze the way in which the family and the school share and negotiate their educational duties (Nigris, 2002). In Italy there is no training for teachers in the management of home-school communication and partnership. We went in an Italian primary school to see how parents and teachers articulate their discourses around the home-school partnership. In the fall of 2010, we organised two focus groups, one involving 9 parents and one involving 6 teachers. The main points during the focus groups were: What is the parent-school partnership for you? What is its purpose? What is it like now in this school? How would you like it to be?

Parents and teachers agree that home school partnership is essential “for training future citizens” (parent), “to raise the children, also to give an education, because education is not only the family but in collaboration with the school” (parent), “create well-being and achieve educational success for all children” (teacher). Parents and teachers agree that home school partnership should be based on dialogue and mutual respect. “Even if there is a misunderstanding or a parent has something to ask, how he speaks with the teacher must always be polite” (teacher). “I think it’s very important to never contradict the teaching of the teacher or do not contradict her in front of the child, because otherwise children, especially when they are small, they are already confused, they do not know what is right, what is wrong. If anything, if there is any doubt, go and report directly, talk face to face with the teacher, rather than through the child, because it creates confusion otherwise” (parent).

Teacher underline that in the home school partnership it is essential that it is the will of parents to cooperate, if the parents don’t have this will, or they tend to criticize the work of the teachers, the work become more difficult not only for the teachers but also for the children. “I must say that sometimes I’ve found parents uncooperative, they criticized your work at the level of teaching for stupid things. And the work becomes much more difficult, both for us and for the children” (teacher).

Since teachers have not received any teacher training in the management of home-school communication and partnership. Teachers have to learn how to do this through experience and work with the colleagues. To manage the home school partnership the agreements with colleagues are essential, for example the teacher of our sample decided a common strategy to communicate with parents: “We need to communicate something that has happened, for example, a child who put bread into the cup of mate in the canteen, first of all, before you write something in the the diary, we talk with
the children. Then if any behaviors are repeated, you write in the diary, you write the exact behavior that took place, without judging, "he stuck his bred in the glass of his classmate" in a very objective way, without comments. In this way the family has the opportunity to respond as they wish, according to their educational style. We do not say anything, but simply write the behavior.” (teacher). "When are the interviews with the parents I personally always prefer to have someone (a colleague). We're always two, I mean, a witness is always better." (teacher) And agreements between teachers and parents are also very important, for example:’I remember that the teachers had told all the mothers’ please, “if they (children) do not understand they must ask us, you explain differently from how we explain at school. Because if I explain myself in one way and she (the teacher) does it in another way, then the child goes into confusion.” (parent).

Keywords:
Italy, Primary school, Focus group, Teachers, Parents.

References: