No More Homework? Negotiations of Parental Engagement in All-Day Schools

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In the course of the implementation of all-day schools in Zurich, traditional homework has been integrated within the new educational system. This action is altering the arrangement and opportunity of parental engagement and requires new negotiation processes between family and school. In this qualitative study including interviews with parents (n=8), three patterns of relational connection between parents and professionals were found. The integration of homework is perceived either as a relief or as a loss of control and requests an adaption of communicative forms. It can be seen that parental engagement in children's learning at home highly depends on individual parents' attitudes and trust toward school as well as the student's success at school.

Keywords: homework, all day school, trust, parental engagement

Introduction

Due to societal changes all-day schools are slowly being implemented in Switzerland, mainly in the cities (Schuler Braunschweig & Kappler, 2018). All-day schools require a program with extracurricular activities that support an extended education. Such extended education enriches the curriculum and is more compatible with the working schedules of families (Honig, 2007). Additionally, hopes are raised for all-day schooling to allow educational equity (Holtappels, Klieme, Rauschenbach, & Stecher, 2008) as extended education offers a greater amount of educational opportunities for all children and prevents educational and social inequity (Chiapparini, Kappler, & Schuler Braunschweig, 2018). According to Allemann-Ghionda (2005) and Coelen (2006) several countries in Europe organize their schooling as all-day schools that last from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m., including extracurricular activities alongside formal schooling and traditional teaching. In Germany transformation of traditional half-day schools into all-day school was started about fifteen years ago.

The school development process suggests extending the educational program to allow better performances and results in teaching and learning (Hansel, 2005; Holtappels, 2009).

Whereas very few schools in Switzerland, mostly private international institutions, are organized as all-day schools, the development of public all-day schooling in Switzerland is significantly slower. One reason for this fact might be that cultural traditions of the roles of family and motherhood (Allemann-Ghionda, 2003) have influenced political process in a slower establishment of all-day schools. Education beyond formal learning is considered a private issue. Consequently, professional and institutional education beyond school has been focused exclusively on families in problematic situations. This led to a marginalization of all-day schooling. The traditional family with a father as breadwinner and a stay-at-home-mother, who is responsible for the children, nowadays does not reflect the variety of family life, especially in urban areas. Societal and economic changes such as changing perceptions of traditional roles or an increase in qualified professional mothers are further reasons for parents to look for childcare (Salvi, 2015). Public state funds as well as public funded childcare have gained access into national educational policy (Criblez & Manz, 2011; EDI,

2004). The rising demand for professional childcare in preschool and primary school shows that parents are in need of extended education that provides support to families in various educational matters (Lanfranchi, 2004).

Starting in 2016 all-day schools will be implemented in the city of Zurich. All schools will provide lunch and extended education at the school building. Children and young adults will use the provided services upon request; parents are charged for the services needed (City of Zurich, 2018).

The implementation of all-day schools is a considerable educational school improvement change. Multiprofessional teams are more broadly responsible for formal and non-formal education (Chiapparini, Selmani, Kappler, & Schuler Braunschweig, 2018). The strict division of education and responsibilities by teachers, care givers, social workers and families will not be supported. Formal, non-formal and informal learning take place at school during the day supervised by a diverse group of professionals. Due to the increased time children spend in school, learning tasks are to be completed at school. As a result, traditional homework is integrated into the new educational system. This includes two hours per week in primary school. For parents this change is expected to have consequences on the engagement of parents relating to school issues of their children. This change in agency[1] suggests that both parents and school staff undergo a re-interpretation of both their own role, that of the others and their position as agent (see Goodall & Montgomery, 2014, p. 401). In the following article we track the view of the parents[2] , the leading research question is: *What does the integration of homework into the all-day school schedule signify for parents' engagement with their children's learning?*

Homework and Parental Engagement

Educational literature assumes three types of learning (see Rauschenbach et al., 2004): *Formal learning* is typically located in institutional arrangements (e.g. school lessons), it is mandatory, intentional from the learner's perspective and may lead to a formal recognition such as a diploma or certificate. On the other hand, *non-formal learning* may consist of planned activities which are not explicitly designated as learning, but which contain important learning elements. It is institutionally structured, has a legal basis and is intentional from the learner's point of view (e.g. sport clubs). Finally, *informal learning* results from mostly non-intentional learning processes that usually take place in extracurricular settings and outside of organized, structured and controlled learning arrangements and public institutions (Chiapparini, Kappler, & Schuler Braunschweig, 2018; Colardyn & Bjornavold, 2004).

Homework can be understood as a specific type of formal learning. Teachers give assignments to their students for completion outside of lesson time. This transition is a boundary crossing of learning arrangements and learning forms. Students transport scholarly material home to continue their studies in the family environment with various degrees of support given by the parents or family members.

Reasons why teachers assign homework can be defined as (a) academic functions (e.g. to complete unfinished work, revise, drill, consolidate, prepare, or expand on concepts introduced in the classroom); (b) more general socialization purposes (e.g. to encourage responsibility, study skills, or time management), also called "personal development"; (c) home / school / community communication (e.g. to inform parents of work conducted at school and of the level and quality of the child's work); (d) school and system requirements (e.g. to ease time constraints in a crowded curriculum) (Coutts, 2004; see Epstein, 1988).

According to Epstein (1988), three "overlapping spheres of influence" – family, school and community – affect directly children's learning and development. The student's learning depends heavily on the fit between these spheres in order to achieve high learning outcomes. The shared responsibility and the character of the "educational partnership" between school, family and community for students' learning is crucial (see

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[1] Following Goodall and Montgomery (2014), "agency" is defined as "a process of social engagement informed by the past and oriented toward the future and the present and encompassing the possibility of choice and action" (p. 401; see also Emirbayer & Mische, 1998). The agency in this case is primarily the one that both parents and schools have with children's learning, which is the object of the relationship.

[2] Like Crozier & Symeou (2017), by 'parent' we mean mothers, fathers, guardians and care givers.

also Crozier & Symeou, 2017). In this article the shift of the notion "educational partnership between parents and school" during the educational change process is analyzed by looking at the subtraction of homework.

Homework can be seen as a potential avenue for parental involvement into school issues. In Epstein's Framework of Six Types of Parental Involvement (Epstein, 1995; Epstein et al., 2002), one type is resumed as "Learning at Home" that includes the parents' practice of helping their children with homework. Although homework often is perceived by children as boring and – especially when problems in learning and performance arise – can increase conflicts between parents and children, most parents and teachers as well as pupils consider them as important for educational participation and effectiveness (Wild & Lorenz, 2010, p. 120). The latter emerges as a meaningful factor for the parent's practice: Their intrusion and control of homework increase when children get a bad grade (Niggli et al., 2007).

To differentiate parental involvement from parental engagement Goodall and Montgomery (2014) have traced a continuum between parental involvement with school and parental engagement with children's learning. This movement represents "a shift in emphasis, away from the relationship between parents and schools, to a focus on the relationship between parents and their children's learning" (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014, p. 399). Parental involvement with school occurs mostly at school, is school agency based and school staff dominates the relationship with the parents. On the other side parental engagement occurs mostly at home and is parental agency based on their choices and decisions of how to act and be involved. The movement from involvement to engagement represents "a change in relational agency, with the relationship being between parents and schools, and the object of the relationship being children's learning" (ibid.; see Strier & Katz, 2015). "Engagement" encompasses "more than just activity – there is some feeling of ownership of that activity which is greater than is present with simple involvement" (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014, p. 400). Therefore, parental engagement involves "a greater commitment, a greater ownership of action, than will parental involvement with schools" (ibid.). This corresponds to the different motivations of parental participation in the school that ranges along a continuum between a desire to receive information, to demands for oversight and control (Shapira & Goldring, 1990, quoted from Strier &

Katz, 2015, p. 6). In this article we use the term "parental engagement" to highlight the meaning of children's learning standing in the center of the relationship between school and family.

In the concept of all-day schooling as introduced in Zurich, homework as formal learning is an integrated part of the student's daily schedule at school that lasts until 4 p.m. It can be hypothesized that the omission of homework, previously being executed at home, is altering the arrangement and opportunity of parental engagement and requires new negotiation processes between these two spheres of influence.

Method and Sample

In the following study we investigate the educational partnership between parents and professionals in all-day schools and the process of negotiating educational responsibilities by exploring the omission of homework. To shed light on the analysis of such meaningful processes in extended education qualitative approaches are highly suitable (Coelen & Stecher, 2014).

The Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF) research project AusTEr examines processes of negotiating pedagogic responsibilities in the transformation of regular schools to all-day schools in the city of Zurich, the first Swiss municipality that has started to introduce comprehensive all-day schools. It explores the meaning of all-day education given by the professionals and parents in order to find similarities and differences among the roles and functions of the various authorities to then analyze the processes of negotiating pedagogic responsibilities in all-day schools. This allows a deduction of the partnership between family, school and educators in all-day schools and adds knowledge to the debate on public education.

The project is being conducted over a period of three years and financially supported by the SNSF. Three primary schools and one secondary school being set up are being analyzed and compared at two points in time, two months before (t1, 2016) and one year after the implementation (t2, 2017). The relevant stakeholders, principals, teachers, social workers, external providers, parents and children, were interviewed about their daily routines as well as their understanding and definition of all-day schooling, with the objective of developing all-day schools and further enhancing extended education.

To answer the research question, data from t2 were analyzed as at this point of time relevant

themes of parental engagement were experienced and became manifest. The eight interviews with parents from four different schools took place in the schools, either with one parent alone (n=4), a parent couple (n=2), in a group of two (n=1) or three (n=1) parents of different children. The data consisted of semi-structured interviews and group discussion. The interview themes dealt with issues of daily routines, cooperation with school staff and the wellbeing of the children.

One purpose of the study was to discover and delineate in what manner parents are connected to the school and where the boundaries and overlapping spheres would lie. Symbolic interactionism was thus central to the study as it is in search of portraying and understanding the process of meaning making (Schwandt, 2000).

The transcribed interviews were analyzed using the MAXQDA data analysis software and the grounded theory methods coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) to draw patterns of interpretation and activity from the subjective perspectives. The coding process was done in three steps: open coding (creating labels for chunks of data), axial coding (identifying relationships among the open codes), and selective coding (defining the key thesis). For reasons of intersubjectivity, the steps of axial and selective coding were executed within the research group.

Results

By analyzing the topic of homework in our data to perceive the character of parental engagement we found three patterns of relational connection between parents and professionals: 1. relational trust with distinct boundaries between school and home, 2. the adaption of parental engagement in overlapping spheres, and 3. relational mistrust with an increase of parental control.

1. Relational trust with distinct boundaries between school and home

One pattern that emerged from the data is the parents' appreciation of the new homework regulation. It is perceived as an advantage for daily family life due to the reduction of the pressure to enforce formal learning matters at home. Several parents emphasize the new coherence in family life:

P3: Children have less homework now, this is a great advantage.
P1: Yeah, this is cool.

P3: They're doing it in school now, so there is more free space at home in the evening.
(SH A, EL1)[3]

These parents delegate the task of formal learning to school and highlight home as a "free space" – free from formal learning and typical school tasks. These parents do not express any doubts or criticisms of the new regulation; they fully trust school staff and are convinced that formal learning is performed sufficiently at school. Homework is perceived as a potentially problematic and difficult task that used to be done in a setting that wasn't inherently responsible for it, so its omission has positive consequences for family life. A mother describes it as follows:

P1: I think it is easier to hand our children over to school, because it is like a day package now. What I really see as an advantage is that the children don't have homework anymore, that's a true relief.
(SH C, EL3)

School is perceived as a "package" full of learning opportunities. The concept of a linked curriculum integrating formal, non-formal and informal learning settings at school seem to be perceived and shared by these parents. Home is described as a "learning free space"; formal learning matters are delegated to the responsible professionals who have their trust. The boundary between school and home is drawn clearly. The overlapping spheres seem to be free of conflict, no compensatory measures can be defined on either side. This pattern, though, only seems to perform under certain conditions as parents also express certain limitations of their trust:

P1: At the end of the week I get some information in a folder about what was happening during the week. So once per week I have the chance to inform myself about the learning matter, how my daughter is performing. (…) For me this is great, because it works so well for my daughter. (…) But I'm sure if a child isn't doing so well in school, the parents would be worrying more. Who knows, maybe that is going to happen to us too.
(SH C, EL1)

Weekly reports replace homework and are given to parents to inform them about the learning topics and the student's performance and achievement. A sheet of information replaces the (supportive) parental act of assisting with homework. This

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[3] Code for the speaking person, SH = school, EL = parent. E.g. "SH A, EL1" = parent from school A, person number 1.

unilateral way of communication can be perceived as a threat. Parents have a passive role by receiving relevant information without being able to assist their children early enough. Two kinds of fears become visible: the fear of missing the chance of supporting and the fear of being dependent on the professionals. Giving up a part of their active parental engagement occurs in favor of peace within the family. As long as the child is performing well at school, some parents seem to accept and even to welcome this new regulation.

2. Adaption of parental engagement in overlapping spheres

The absence of homework, perceived as a burden by the family, but also as a form of contact and information by the professionals with the family, requests new forms of contact.

A mother – a former primary teacher – complained that she wasn't informed properly about her daughter's learning achievement. Teachers had announced they would maintain a notebook in which the learning achievement would be reported at least weekly, so parents would have insight into their child's work. The notebook then wasn't immediately introduced which caused insecurity on various levels. Although this mother experienced the omission of homework as "relaxing", she then described the exchange of information between teacher and parents as "problematic" and "precarious" (SH C, EL2). The mother perceives herself as "responsible on various levels": for the social behavior of her daughter, but also for the school-related learning achievement.

P1: I think learning should not be sourced out only to school. (…) I feel very responsible for my daughter and therefore it bothers me so much because often I have no clue what they're doing in school and what is going on.
(SH C, EL2)

This mother experienced a personal and professional loss of control over her daughter's learning achievement that made it impossible for her to assist her daughter in scholarly matters. Educational responsibility for a child is seen as shared on equal terms. Clear communication between the two parties by means of an adapted form of parental engagement is necessary for the parents' feeling of being informed about and involved in their children's learning processes.

Although the new homework regulation basically indicates that children don't have to accomplish formal learning matter at home, some tasks are still expected to be executed at home, for example vocabulary of a foreign language or preparation for examinations and presentation on a subject. This notion however remains imprecise and vague. Several parents express misunderstanding with the consequence of increased parental engagement regarding general formal learning, as one mother expressed:

P1: One day I got feedback from a teacher, so I started to train the math basics with her. (…) There are learning matters which can be learned only by squeezing them in.
(SH C, EL1)

She assumed that several topics must be learned by heart ("squeezing them in"). Depending on the child, the subject or the class, these tasks have to be fulfilled elsewhere if they are not done at school. It becomes obvious that such support depends heavily on the family resources. We conclude that in this case, school and home are overlapping spheres with unclear boundaries, sharing responsibility over formal learning. Instead of a differentiation of the two spheres, an alignment takes place where parents adapt to fulfill the school's expectations.

3. Relational mistrust with increase of parental control

As seen above in the case of students' poor performance parents extend formal learning at home and increase their control and need for communication, as shown in the following statement of a father:

P2: We still must have an eye on the learning and observe it, because we got the feeling that our daughter wasn't performing well in all the school subjects, only the favorable subjects like drawing. A clever girl (laughing). Then we said: That's not how it's going to work. We want you to do more. I personally think it's a mistake of the teachers that they aren't intensely controlling the individual level of the children. (…) So that's why we said: We want you to take your math tasks at home, so we can see what you've done so far and how you performed. I'm really not happy, because like that we're back in the old system and that's a pity. But I don't take a risk in the education of my daughter. (SH D, EL2)

The delegation of former parental responsibility – controlling the individual learning process through homework – is believed not to be adequately fulfilled by teachers, whose professional acting is described as a "mistake". The loss of trust combined with a reduction of parental engagement

is perceived in an overall loss of control and a mistrust in the professional acting of teachers. To gain back control parents find ways for parental engagement by extending and increasing formal learning opportunities at home. The father is aware of his dilemma, welcoming the new system but he pities the fallback to the former system. His ambivalence is explicit in the expression of "having an eye on" the learning of his daughter: The school is officially in charge for formal learning, while he is supervising.

Mistrust appears even stronger in another father's perception:

P2: The major problem is the complete delegation to the school. Well, my son leaves in the morning, checks in to this black box, and in the evening he checks out and comes home. And what he's done and learned or not learned becomes apparent with the grades he gets. (…) He doesn't have to take his school stuff home, because he should be finished with work and can chill out in the evening. Of course, that doesn't work, right. (…) We don't delegate the whole responsibility for his success to the school "apparatus", this would be grossly negligent. (…) The teachers do something, we don't see what, we don't see books, we don't know what they are doing during the day, then our son comes home and we have no clue, what he did, and he can't really explain us what he did the whole day. So we decided to track them. And the teacher wasn't allowed to give us the material, but in third grade, we increased pressure to get all the school material, and we said: we want it now and you give it to us. (…) Some well-educated people have created a concept, but at the end of the day you must beat in the learning matter.

(SH D, EL1)

Calling the school system a "black box"[4], he tags the students' learning processes (formal learning) between input (learning matters) and output (educational success) as invisible for him as a parent. The former regulation with homework offered a slight possibility to get insight into the school system – or, as he calls it in a technical

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[4] The term "black box" is generally used for a "device, process, or system, whose inputs and outputs (and the relationships between them) are known, but whose internal structure or working is (1) not well, or at all, understood, (2) not necessary to be understood for the job or purpose at hand, or (3) not supposed to be known because of its confidential nature" (see http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/black-box.html).

term, into the "apparatus" – and the learning process of the child. The "black box" can be interpreted as an expression of the total loss of control. Mentioning that responsibility is shared, he takes over a dominant role who is in power of "tracking them" and "increasing pressure" to get all the school material. He emphasizes his mistrust towards the professionals when portraying them as somehow naive and unworldly ("some well-educated people") creating a learning concept that, in his point of view, doesn't work appropriately.

Discussion and Conclusion

The integration of homework into the all-day schedule is one modification for an integrated all-day school. Most formal learning matters shall be executed during the day when children are at school. This meets the family expectations for improved compatibility with their working schedules and at the same time increased educational equity for all children regardless of their social background (Holtappels, 2009). At first sight this new regulation seems to draw a clearer boundary between the two spheres of school and family than in a traditional school model where teachers assign homework. However, a deeper view in the data shows that certain formal learning matters still are expected to be conducted outside of lesson time, which can lead to a blurred overlapping of these two spheres and to diffuse responsibilities.

According to literature and our data, homework is a form of communication between school and family which also allows parental engagement (Epstein, 1988, 1995; Goodall & Montgomery, 2014). Integrating homework into the students' daily schedule can be perceived as a loss. With such an omission newly developed ways of communication and exchange have to be announced, clarified and applied carefully. If another form of communication such as a leaflet with learning achievement or a plan of learning content is sent home instead, this shift from parental engagement to communication with the parents has to be introduced.

We also suggest analyzing parents' needs in terms of their engagement in their children's learning. If vague expectations about certain formal learning that has to be conducted at home remain, overlapping responsibilities between school and home emerge. It could be helpful if parents and teachers further explore their expectations and then address the needs on both sides with various formats of parental engagement.

In this study the perception of parental engagement is connected to the degree of parents' relational trust. Higher trust enables full delegation of formal learning from family to school; little trust goes along with the need for increased parental control over formal learning. Relational trust seems to be the key factor that allows families to delegate formal learning to the professionals to a higher extent (Seashore Louis, Murphy, & Smylie, 2016).

Our data indicate that parental engagement in children's learning at home depends highly on individual parents' attitudes, resources and trust in the school as well as the student's academic success. It can be seen as critical that these negotiations about shared responsibilities over children's formal learning happen individually between school and family. This fact does not meet the claim of increased educational equity by all-day schooling (Holtappels, 2009) as the cultural distance between school and family plays a crucial role in social and cultural reproduction (see Silva, 2016). At the same time, this is an aspect of promoting educational equity alongside others, such as attending extra-curricular activities or outreached family work (Chiapparini, Scholian, Schuler Braunschweig, & Kappler, 2018). One imminent challenge newly built all-day schools are facing is an adapted arrangement that respects the parents' need for engagement in children's learning at home and at the same time keeps in mind the ideal of equal educational opportunities for every child.

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