

COMMUNICATING WITH QUALITY, PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN SCHOOL LIFE

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<https://doi.org/10.54922/IJEHSS.2025.1059>

Received: 27 June 2025/Published: 03 August 2025

ABSTRACT

In his ecological theory, Bronfenbrenner emphasises that the stronger the connection between school and family, the greater the child's well-being and academic success. In turn, co responsibility and educational dialogue between school and family represent a fundamental prerequisite for meaningful and effective educational action. Despite the efforts of many scholars to highlight the predominant role of the family in children's cognitive and social development, a growing separation between the two main educational agents is evident.

To explore and assess the quality of communication between teachers and parents and the participatory modes that emerge between school and family, a mixed methods study was conducted in an Italian primary school setting (ages 6-11). The research involved 472 teachers, 1885 parents, and 180 students. Findings revealed coherence in opinions across teachers, parents, and pupils. As the data show, parental participation in school life depends more on parental interest and children's attitudes than on school led initiatives.

Keywords: School-Family Partnership, Participation, Teachers, Parents, Students.

1. INTRODUCTION

From a socio-political-cultural perspective, the family assumes a central role in the education of children and is configured as a bearer of specific responsibilities for growth and development. The family context is recognized as having educational primacy for new generations, guaranteed both by the Constitutional Charter and by pedagogical-educational foundations. As Epstein (2018) emphasizes, the behaviours, constraints, and resources of the family have a decisive impact on the individual's growth process. School, on the other hand, carries out a predominantly formal and explicit educational action, with the aim of promoting the cognitive and social development of each student. It is not recognized only as a "simple place of cultural reproduction, but as a context in which knowledge, culture, and sociality are built" (Bryk & Schneider, 2002, p. 15).

Bronfenbrenner (1979; 2005) states that the stronger the connection between these two microsystems, the more the child's well-being, school success, and developmental potential are promoted. Therefore, it is fundamental to construct an interactive context, in which parental participation in children's school life, continuity between the two environments, and the use of common educational and didactic methodologies occur.

Co-responsibility and educational dialogue between school and family represent a fundamental prerequisite for significant and effective educational and formative action. According to Nordahl (2006), two of the main factors that influence students' school success are the parents' level of

education and the quality of the school-family relationship. Therefore, it is essential to create a climate of trust and collaboration and to build stable and deep relationships between parents, students, and teachers. Indeed, Epstein and Salinas (2004) highlight the possibility of developing partnerships with parents, maintaining quality communication and involving families in the school's learning community.

Nowadays, however, communication between the two educational institutions appears increasingly delicate, complex, and articulated. It is possible to observe an increased complexity in the relationships between teachers and parents, accompanied by an increasingly clear separation between the two main contexts of child development.

Recent research by Boonk et al. (2018) further emphasizes the importance of parental involvement in children's academic achievement. Their meta-analysis of studies from the past decade confirms that certain types of parental involvement, such as reading with children, communicating high expectations, and creating a stimulating home environment for learning, are strongly associated with academic success. However, they also note that the effectiveness of parental involvement can vary depending on the child's age, socioeconomic status, and the specific type of involvement, highlighting the need for tailored approaches in school-family partnerships.

As Goodall (2017) states, the educational action between school and family benefits if it rests on a symbolic universe shared between them. In line with what emerges from recent educational policies, there is an urgency for a new encounter between the parties and the need for a renewal of the role exercised by families within the school.

2. METHODS

The fast pace of today's society, parents' full-time employment, the lack of institutional support, bureaucracy, new technologies, and the recent pandemic have all contributed to complicating the school-family relationship, making it increasingly difficult for parents to actively participate in their children's school life.

The study presented in this paper was carried out during the 2022–2023 school year and originated from the intention to explore the forms of communication and parental involvement that develop between schools and families in the Veneto region (Italy). The goal was to enhance observation and reflection on the challenges mentioned above.

This is a theoretical, descriptive study based on a subjective approach (Benvenuto, 2015), aimed at promoting change and transformation, with the ultimate purpose of improving actions related to everyday practices and problems.

The context played a crucial role in the development of the research, as all participants - teachers, parents, and students - actively contributed to the process.

Two research questions were identified to guide the investigation:

RQ1: What are the current methods of family involvement and participation in teaching and learning processes?

RQ2: How can educational communication be improved by identifying effective strategies that promote the well-being of all stakeholders and support the academic success of all students? Through both quantitative and qualitative analysis of the collected data, it was possible to assess the quality of the school-family relationship, identifying strengths and weaknesses in communication between the two systems.

The mixed-methods research design included the development of two questionnaires: one addressed to teachers and the other to the parents of pupils attending primary schools in the Veneto

region. To explore the research topic from a descriptive and qualitative perspective, the questionnaires included both closed-ended items on a Likert scale (1 = not at all; 4 = very much) and other types of structured questions. The tools were created and administered using Google Forms, which enabled the distribution of self-administered surveys. A non-probability, convenience sampling method was used. An email invitation was sent to each school in the region, and participation was voluntary. Schools that chose to join the study then forwarded the participation request to teachers and parents, inviting them to complete the questionnaires. In addition, group interviews were conducted with students from the fourth and fifth grades in the participating schools, in order to gather their perspectives. Each session, lasting approximately one hour, involved six randomly selected pupils. Finally, the views of teachers, families, and students were compared and interpreted by the research team, with the aim of understanding the challenges involved and identifying effective strategies to promote meaningful and constructive communication between all parties.

3. RESULTS

Teachers

A total of 472 primary school teachers employed in public schools in the Veneto region (Italy) participated in the study (96% female and 4% male). Demographic data collected through the questionnaires show that most participating teachers (78%) are over the age of 40, while only 22% are between 20 and 40 years old.

Despite the relatively high average age of respondents, teaching experience in primary education does not fully correspond. Specifically, 16% of participants have less than five years of teaching experience, 26% have between 6 and 15 years, another 26% between 16 and 25 years, and the remaining 32% have been teaching in primary schools for over 26 years.

Data analysis also focused on school-family meetings, particularly on the level of parental participation in these occasions. With regard to class assemblies, 33% of teachers reported low parental attendance, 47% considered it fairly good, 19% not very good, and only 1% rated it negatively. The content discussed during these meetings appeared relatively consistent across the schools involved: topics included local field trips and projects (22%), the child's academic performance (20%), educational planning (17%), behaviour (8%), school regulations (7%), learning objectives and methodologies (6%), classroom activities (5%), school-family collaboration (4%), assessment criteria, class issues, group dynamics (3%), and homework (2%). Teachers reported that they primarily communicate updates on class performance, subject-specific planning, local excursions, and annual projects. Far fewer teachers reported sharing learning objectives, teaching strategies, assessment criteria, or insights into the social dynamics within the classroom - whether between peers or between students and teachers. Similarly, few teachers used these meetings as opportunities to actively build a cooperative alliance with parents, or to foster mutual dialogue and collaboration.

Parental participation appears to be much higher during individual parent-teacher conferences. Most teachers stated that parents are almost always present at such meetings, with 97% of responses falling within the top two categories on the scale. Regarding the duration of these meetings, most teachers reported allocating between 10 and 15 minutes per conference (61%). Only 11% stated that meetings lasted between 20 and 30 minutes, while 6% indicated meetings shorter than 10 minutes. Several teachers noted that meeting duration often depends on the child:

brief conversations are held for students without any major concerns, whereas longer discussions are reserved for those with learning or behavioural difficulties.

Responses were much more consistent regarding the number of individual meetings scheduled throughout the school year: 38% of teachers reported holding one meeting per term, while 42% highlighted the option of arranging additional conferences if needed by either parents or teachers. Teacher satisfaction with the amount of time allocated to school-family meetings was moderate, with fewer than 50% expressing high satisfaction. When asked to explain their answers, 38% of teachers emphasized the flexibility to schedule additional meetings, when necessary, which they saw as compensating for the limited time allocated.

Those who felt the allotted time was inadequate cited the insufficient number of scheduled meetings and the short duration available for each family. Finally, 15% of respondents did not take a clear position but referred instead to the varying needs of individual students.

Overall, regarding the quality of school-family communication, 59% of teachers reported being satisfied, while 14% described their relationship with parents as excellent. Although almost no one gave the lowest possible rating, 26% still expressed low levels of satisfaction with their interactions with parents.

Another aspect explored was the degree to which parents are involved in school and classroom projects. The highest percentage of responses (38%) was recorded at the third level of the scale ("fairly involved"), but many teachers indicated that parents were only marginally engaged in this type of activity. Nineteen percent stated they collaborate extensively with families, while 9% reported no collaboration at all.

The main occasions when parents are involved include civic education projects addressing sensitive or development-related topics closely tied to the child's family context. In other cases, parents help organize local outings or collaborate in planning events, celebrations, and holidays. Finally, a significant number of teachers stated they involve parents in reading projects in partnership with libraries or invite them to school as external experts.

Parents

A total of 1,885 parents living in the Veneto Region (Italy) participated in the study, of whom 88.5% were women and 11.5% men.

Demographic data show that 56% of parents were aged between 41 and 50, while 37% were between 31 and 40. Very few were under 30 (2%) or over 50 (5%).

Regarding parental participation in school-organised meetings, 63% stated they always attended these gatherings, 20% considered themselves fairly involved, and 10% only somewhat involved. Additionally, 6% reported never attending collective meetings.

The principal topics addressed during class assemblies were the child's academic progress (26%), class educational planning (22%), projects and local excursions (22%), and pupil behaviour (15%). Other topics included group-class issues (6%) and learning objectives and teaching methods implemented by staff (5%).

Concerning individual parent-teacher meetings, parental involvement was very high, with 88% reporting they always attended. Again, 97% of responses fell within the top two categories of the scale.

Opinions on the adequacy of time allocated to school-family meetings were less uniform. Twelve percent considered the allotted time completely inadequate, 24% were somewhat dissatisfied, while 37% found it adequate. Overall, only 27% of respondents considered the organisation of

school-family meetings effective. Twenty-five percent felt meetings were insufficient for fostering dialogue and monitoring their child's learning, and 24% felt the time per meeting (usually 10–15 minutes) was insufficient. Furthermore, 4% stated that the topics discussed felt superficial and lacked depth. A further 4% emphasised the importance of ongoing collaboration and dialogue with teachers, while another 4% requested new methods and tools to build quality communicative exchange.

Of those who answered positively regarding meeting timeliness, many reiterated the possibility of organising additional meetings if needed or noted that the length of the meeting depends on the child's individual circumstances.

Overall, regarding school-family communication quality, most parents rated their experience in the second and third levels of the scale: 31% labelled it as somewhat unsatisfactory, 46% as fairly satisfactory. Only 5% reported total ineffectiveness of communication, while 19% rated it as excellent.

Another investigated topic was parental involvement in their child's school life. Thirty percent stated they were minimally involved by teachers, while 12% stated they were not involved at all. Thirty-five percent said they collaborated in educational interventions and projects; and 23% considered themselves very involved.

Adopting a broader perspective, parents' perceptions of their overall involvement were also examined. Here, 81% rated their involvement at the upper levels of the scale, while only 4% said they felt not involved at all in school life.

Satisfied parents grounded this feeling in a positive and proactive attitude. Sixteen percent felt involved because they attended their children's school life, demonstrating particular interest; 10% felt involved mainly because their children informed them about school activities. Another 10% reported constant, rapid and transparent communication with the school, which made them feel informed and involved by teachers. Eight percent had served as class representatives and maintained direct contact with teachers, becoming important points of reference for the school community.

Some parents requested greater dialogue and regular communication, and others wished for more frequent sharing from the school. Five percent considered themselves involved because they attended school-family meetings, while 3% collaborated in school initiatives and activities. Another 5% stated that busy work commitments prevented full participation in school life; 4% declared their willingness to collaborate.

Finally, only 2% of parents felt involved and engaged due to the parent community, even though there exists, at least in theory, the potential to collaborate and form a large mutual support network—such as a parents' Committee.

Students

Thirty classes from five schools in the region were involved in the study through group interviews, for a total of approximately 180 pupils.

Some of the questions asked were related to the family context, with the aim of analysing the nature of dialogue between parents and children regarding school life.

The first question asked was:

Do you tell your parents what happened at school and what you did? Do you do it spontaneously or do they ask you?

The responses collected were highly varied and heterogeneous, often linked to the pupils' personalities - whether introverted and reserved, or outgoing and expressive.

Many students reported that they spontaneously share some aspects of their school day with their parents. Others admitted that it is mainly their family members who initiate such conversations by asking questions.

Almost all interviewees, however, stated that they talk with their parents about school and regularly recount the most significant events of the day.

Some of the pupils' remarks were particularly thought-provoking:

If we spend the whole day writing in our exercise books, I don't feel like talking about it. But if something fun happens, then I do.

I talk to them spontaneously, but I don't really say much about what we did in the subjects. I tell them what games we played or if someone bothered me.

Only if it's something exciting or fun. If it's just a normal lesson... then no, it's the usual.

These responses highlight children's inclination towards a particular type of communicative exchange. They are, in fact, motivated to talk about only those aspects of school life that they find meaningful and emotionally engaging. Play activities and everything perceived as fun, as well as conflicts with peers, are considered important events to be shared with their trusted adults.

The children's words also reveal a certain lack of motivation regarding written tasks and predominantly teacher-centred lessons, suggesting a limited interest in discussing their learning process with their parents.

Overall, however, adults appear to be present and engaged in their children's daily school life.

The next question aimed to explore school-family dialogue in greater depth, particularly to understand the extent of parents' interest in their children's educational journey.

Pupils were asked:

Apart from what you tell them yourselves; how do your parents find out what you do at school?

Many pupils immediately mentioned the online school register, where teachers record what has been done in class, assign homework, and enter each pupil's marks.

With similar frequency, individual parent-teacher meetings were also mentioned, although these are held only a few times per year.

Another form of communication frequently mentioned by the interviewees concerned dialogue between parents, particularly among mothers:

My classmates tell their mums, and then their mums tell mine.

The mums write everything that happens—and even the homework - in the WhatsApp group!

The responses collected suggest the existence of an informal information and discussion network among parents within the class group, who communicate at school pick-up, via phone calls, through family WhatsApp groups, or during other encounters outside the school environment.

In describing this, some children expressed a degree of annoyance. This informal dialogue—sometimes unclear and lacking awareness—can be bothersome for pupils. Some reported disliking when classmates share events that do not concern them directly with their own parents; others pointed out that the accounts passed on are often inaccurate or not entirely truthful.

A smaller number of students said that adults monitor the school communication booklet and check the activities completed in exercise books and textbooks.

Nevertheless, some children stated that their parents are unaware of what happens at school.

Regarding meetings between teachers and parents, pupils were first asked the following question: ***What do your parents tell you about the meetings and interviews they attend?***

Almost all the interviewees reported having some form of dialogue—even if brief—with their caregivers following a parent-teacher meeting. Parents generally shared some basic information about how the meeting went and what was discussed.

However, only 15 pupils stated that they were given specific suggestions on areas for improvement or effective strategies to adopt. Most families seemed to limit themselves to providing a simple summary of the meeting.

Interestingly, many children said that they were the first to ask how the meeting went and showed genuine interest in what the teachers had communicated.

A significant number of pupils also reported being reprimanded or punished by their parents when the outcome of the meeting was not a positive one.

When the question was asked, all pupils referred exclusively to individual meetings, never mentioning other types of meetings such as class assemblies. When specifically prompted by the interviewer, all of them responded that they never discuss or reflect with their parents on what takes place during collective meetings.

Pupils were then asked:

Do your teachers tell you how the meetings with your parents went?

The responses were remarkably consistent. Most participants said they receive no feedback from their teachers regarding individual parent-teacher meetings. Children do not usually discuss these meetings with their teachers; they talk only with their parents about what was said.

Very few teachers take time to speak with pupils about how the meetings went. Some teachers may provide a brief, general comment to the whole class without going into detail. Others may ask pupils how the meeting went or what their parents shared with them.

However, almost none engage in individual conversations with students to share reflections, opinions, advice, or strategies.

The final questions aimed to explore the participation and involvement of parents in school life with and for their children. First question asked was:

Are there any moments when you, your parents, and your teachers meet together?

Most of the interviewees - very frequently - identified informal encounters, such as those at school pick-up or outside the school environment, as moments of shared interaction with both teachers and parents. Many children said they often see their teachers at local festivals, community events, supermarkets, or sports fields, where, occasionally, a few minutes can be dedicated to conversation with pupils and their parents.

Other students referred to end-of-year gatherings, such as having a pizza or an ice cream together with families, classmates, and teachers, to share convivial time outside the school setting. Only a few responses mentioned structured projects or activities involving all three stakeholders. These included school plays or educational outings to family-run businesses of the pupils. Particularly noteworthy were the statements linked to individual meetings, such as:

There was a time when, if we wanted, we could go into the meetings. But now we're not allowed anymore. The teachers don't want us to hear what they say about us; they say our parents will tell us later. Maybe they don't want to upset us..."
If we try to attend the meetings, they don't let us in. They leave us outside, because otherwise we might say that what they're saying isn't true.

The children, reflecting on the meetings between teachers and parents, particularly mentioned the individual parent-teacher interviews, which pupils themselves are not allowed to attend. Analysing their words, a certain disapproval towards this school practice becomes evident.

Subsequently, the students were asked an additional question:

Are parents involved in any school projects or outings?

In this case, the responses were not very varied; indeed, the vast majority of those interviewed answered negatively, stating that parents are only informed about trips or other planned projects, or invited to make payments.

Among the few positive responses, many referred to Christmas or end-of-year plays, where parents are involved solely as spectators, or to the organisation of fundraising fairs.

Some also mentioned concrete help; for example, during swimming lessons, available adults go to the pool to assist teachers in preparing the children for their return.

Finally, a few students stated that some parents are invited to school as external experts, due to their specific professional activities.

Last question was:

Would you like to participate in meetings between parents and teachers? Why?

All students, when faced with this question, immediately referred to individual interviews, without considering other types of meetings such as class assemblies.

About 20% of the respondents said they would not attend such dialogue and discussion opportunities for various reasons. Some said they wished to avoid boredom and wasting precious time for playing, others would feel embarrassed, while some feared parental reprimands.

The remaining 80% would gladly participate in individual meetings. Among the main reasons for this positive response was the desire to express their own opinions, to defend themselves, and to explain things as they really are.

Yes, to say what the teachers don't see and to explain what I think.
Yes, to confirm or better explain to the teacher, rather than having them say untrue things about me and my classmates.

There therefore seems to be a lack of trust towards the teachers, who might report facts or behaviours to parents that do not correspond to reality.

Some pupils would like to attend the meetings themselves to hear everything that is said, as they believe that adults do not fully relay the entire conversation with the teachers.

Another reason encouraging participation in the meetings is the opportunity to hear directly from the teachers about strategies and ways to improve. Furthermore, some would appreciate being present during discussions about themselves:

I would like that! But it depends on the kind of person you are: if you're good and hear compliments, you feel happy too; however, if you're someone who doesn't listen and doesn't do anything, it's not nice to hear that you're not doing well.

Finally, some pupils reveal a strong bond within the class group, stating that they would attend the individual meetings as an additional opportunity to meet up with their classmates. They emphasise that they would take part in the meetings in order to then play in the park or chat with their friends. Regarding school trips and educational outings, few pupils have considered the possibility of involving parents in these activities. Among them, many prefer to stay just with their classmates and spend time independently, while others believe that parents would get bored and keep reprimanding their child. However, there are also those who would like to involve families in some activities, so as to receive extra help and allow adults to relive their childhood.

4. DISCUSSION

RQ1: What are the current methods of family involvement and participation in teaching and learning processes?

The data collected through self-completed questionnaires and mini focus groups revealed the practices and differing perspectives of the three actors involved in the educational process.

Regarding class assemblies, teachers and parents report uneven levels of participation. Teachers highlight a significant absence of many families at collective meetings. In contrast, when it comes to parent-teacher interviews, there is greater agreement among respondents: the vast majority of parents almost always attend individual meetings. The pupils themselves, when responding to questions about school-family interactions, refer almost exclusively to individual interviews, overlooking class assemblies.

This notable difference in participation levels between the two types of meetings can be explained by various factors. Firstly, information shared during assemblies can be easily passed on to absent families through the class representative or other adult contacts. Conversely, individual interviews are reserved for the parents of each pupil, so absence means losing out on an exchange of information that cannot be recovered by third parties.

Secondly, the topics discussed in the two types of meetings differ. During individual interviews, teachers outline the student's learning progress, difficulties encountered, and strategies for improvement. This results in a constructive dialogue between school and family. Class assemblies, on the other hand, mainly address the academic progress of the class as a whole, the educational planning of individual subjects, projects to broaden the curriculum offer, and educational outings planned for the school year. Very little attention is given to the importance and effectiveness of collaboration between school and family; for example, the Educational Responsibility Agreement is never mentioned. This implies that no meaningful, shared pathway is created between the two main educational contexts.

Regarding individual interviews, the main issues identified concern the limited number of meetings and their short duration, which do not allow for extensive and in-depth dialogue. Teachers and families therefore express the desire for more individual meetings and longer, more relaxed sessions.

To promote collaboration and dialogue between school and family, meetings need to be organised more effectively, with attention also given to the content. Focusing on significant topics fosters parental interest and participation, who recognise the quality of the communicative exchange.

RQ2: How can educational communication be improved by identifying effective strategies that promote the well-being of all stakeholders and support the academic success of all students? Despite the limitations imposed by school bureaucracy that reduce the time available for teachers and dialogue with families, it is possible to identify some effective strategies to improve communication between the two educational institutions. First and foremost, it is essential to dedicate adequate space to collective assemblies, as the pupil constructs their educational journey within a group. In these meetings, it could be effective to jointly draft the rules for co-education and the Educational Responsibility Agreement. This document defines the rights and duties of all school stakeholders in order to ensure the wellbeing of everyone involved in the students' educational process. With the aim of strengthening the alliance between school and family and enhancing the sharing of educational priorities, the Agreement could be collaboratively developed by teachers and parents, to emphasise the importance and responsibility they assume in caring for the education of new generations (Capperucci et al., 2018).

Class assemblies can represent a fruitful opportunity to lay solid foundations for a meaningful alliance between school and family. Therefore, the communicative exchange should address deep and truly relevant themes for the students' school journey. In this way, collective meetings become moments of mutual dialogue and sharing of a coherent and effective didactic-educational process. Regarding individual interviews, to address the shortage and limited duration of meetings, the school could reconsider their organisation, allowing teachers to dedicate one hour per week to dialogue with families.

As established by teachers' employment contracts, the modalities and timing of individual relationships between teachers and parents are defined at the institutional level, which enjoys considerable autonomy, and are included among activities functional to teaching.

In line with the views expressed by many respondents, the length and frequency of interviews should be flexible, according to the needs of the school, family, and pupil. They represent a space in which to jointly reflect on how to enhance the child's resources and support parents in their educational role.

The pupils interviewed declared that only parents share with them what was discussed regarding the didactic-educational path after the school meetings. However, strategies for improvement and academic success are never shared with the students.

This results in the individual interviews losing value, as they appear to be ends in themselves. These meetings could prove useful tools for creating a co-educational pathway and promoting the development of each pupil's potential, supporting them both at home and at school. Teachers and parents are therefore called to give space to communication with students, fostering awareness of their strengths and weaknesses, and identifying possible strategies for improvement.

To make the child the protagonist of their own growth journey, one could consider involving them personally in some individual meetings between school and family.

As emphasised by Epstein (1995), it is fundamental to promote the development of self-awareness in students, both from a learning and behavioural perspective. By participating in targeted interviews, pupils would have the opportunity to understand how to improve their results, see themselves as “communicators” between school and family, and remain constantly informed about activities and initiatives proposed.

Regarding parents’ participation in their children’s school life, the data collected show heterogeneous opinions among the three main actors involved in the educational context.

From a didactic perspective, related to activities and projects to broaden the curriculum offer, parents are mainly involved in organising educational interventions on environmental, emotional, dietary, and civic issues, addressing topics that concern various areas of the child’s development. However, according to students, this participation does not appear to be active on the part of families but limited to sharing proposals and requests for authorisation and financial support from the school.

From the students’ accounts, it emerges that parents mainly participate in celebrations, parties, and school plays, and in some cases are involved in setting up spaces, managing sales at charity fairs, etc.

However, in most cases, involvement is passive or active only for a few adults, such as the class representative or members of the Parents’ Committee.

In any case, from a general perspective, families perceive themselves as highly involved in school life, as testified by responses in which they affirm to be always present and interested in their children’s educational journey, considering themselves as participants.

Many respondents refer to dialogue with their children, who tell them about what happens at school, involving them in their educational process. Analysis of the focus groups with students shows that the majority communicate with adults regarding the most significant events of the school day.

Furthermore, students report how parents themselves share school episodes experienced by their children among each other, creating a communication network among adults that, however, can sometimes generate misunderstandings between the three main components of the school.

Students and parents affirm that families also feel involved through viewing school materials, such as pupils’ exercise books and activities uploaded online.

In conclusion, parental participation seems to depend mainly on personal interest and the children’s attitude, rather than on school initiatives. Most of the reasons given relate to families’ desire to talk with their children and be present in their educational journey; only a few responses refer to specific initiatives by the school.

The commitment of some parents to school life is reflected in their availability towards the institution, through candidacy as class representatives or joining the Parents’ Committee.

This latter aspect can represent a useful strategy to strengthen the school-family alliance, as the group of active parents assumes significant importance within the institution. In addition to organising support initiatives, this group can become a point of reference for the school community, fostering collaboration among families and improving various aspects of children’s and adolescents’ lives. Its main objective should be to create social support networks, contributing to dialogue and social cohesion.

As suggested by Epstein (1995), the school institution could promote such initiatives by creating a dedicated space or centre.

Regarding family involvement in didactic activities and proposals, it could be useful to design parallel courses and workshops for students and parents on various topics. At the end of these courses, shared activities could be organised between the two groups to encourage dialogue, reflection, and sharing of experiences. In this way, the school would offer parents the opportunity to experience school life and become co-protagonists in the pupils' educational path.

Finally, among the main occasions for meeting for all three actors involved in the educational process are school plays and parties organised on special events.

Given the educational and formative value of these moments, the school should encourage active participation by parents, offering them the opportunity to share moments of gathering and mutual relationship.

The proactive involvement of parents and the promotion of constructive dialogue between school and family strengthen the alliance between the parties. As Gordon (2010) emphasises, effective feedback requires active listening, realised through silence, attention, and acceptance.

Analysis of the data shows that communication between school and family is generally satisfactory, both for teachers and parents. However, as Storai, Morini and Greco (2018) affirm, school-family dialogue is continuous but often limited to an exchange of information, without real active participation by families.

To achieve quality communication, a continuous evaluation process is necessary, since the needs of the school and families change over time and vary depending on the social context.

5. CONCLUSIONS

In recent years, there has been a growing awareness that family and school are the primary settings for the growth and development of new generations. As highlighted by the Italian Society of Pedagogy (2014), the school is a fundamental meeting place for children, young people, parents, teachers, and other adults, representing one of the main contexts in which children spend the majority of their time and which significantly contributes to their overall education. Indeed, at school, human potential is developed through the relationships that are formed. The family, on the other hand, is recognised as the primary agent in the informal education of children and young people. For this reason, it is essential that these two educational contexts do not operate in complete isolation but rather promote a network of quality communication and coherent, meaningful, and effective collaboration between educational actions in both the school and family environments.

The research undertaken aimed to identify the ways in which families participate in and are involved in the teaching and learning process, and to reflect on the quality of school-family communication, with the goal of identifying strategies to improve dialogue between adults and promote the well-being of all those involved.

The data analysis revealed a certain consistency in the opinions of the three main actors involved in the educational process of children and young people. The challenges, potentials, and needs that emerged are closely interconnected, creating a cycle of problems and solutions. Regarding school-family meetings, both teachers and parents appear to agree on recognising existing issues and on effective actions to improve their relationship and mutual exchange. However, during class assemblies, only superficial and lightly explored topics are addressed, which do not stimulate parents' interest or participation, nor do they contribute to creating quality communication. Collective meetings, however, could serve as a useful opportunity to lay the foundations for a lasting alliance between the school and family environments by establishing shared rules for co-education and drafting the Educational Co-responsibility Agreement.

As stated by the Authority for Children and Adolescents' Rights, education must be conceived as a "dynamic, participatory, inclusive, intersectoral and interdisciplinary process, rather than predominantly transmissive, one-way, and hierarchical" (AGIA, 2022, p. 45). Communication should therefore address relevant and significant themes concerning the students' educational journey, providing spaces for dialogue and sharing a coherent and effective educational process between school and family.

Regarding individual meetings, families feel that the number and duration of the scheduled encounters are insufficient for effective dialogue. However, teachers express their willingness to hold additional meetings beyond those established by the institution. Some teachers also point out that the format of meetings varies according to the specific needs of each pupil. To make the most of these opportunities for dialogue, it is necessary to make the child the protagonist and fully aware of their educational journey. Teachers and parents are called upon to encourage dialogue with students, fostering awareness of their strengths and weaknesses and identifying possible strategies for improvement.

The data indicate that parental participation in school life depends more on the parents' own interest and their children's attitudes than on school initiatives. Many parents feel involved through conversations with their children and by their desire to be present and engaged in the educational process.

In most cases, however, parental involvement in school life is passive, or active participation is limited to a small number of adults, such as members of the Parent Committee. This latter group can represent an effective strategy to strengthen the school-family alliance, as the group of actively engaged parents within the school environment holds significant importance for both the institution and the peer group.

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