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Chapter

**PARENTS' REPRESENTATIONS
AND PRACTICES ABOUT CHILDCARE
WITHIN ITALIAN FAMILIES**

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ABSTRACT

This chapter aims to analyze the educational representations and practices of Italian parents about childrearing. Since most of the available studies focusing on parents' perceptions and theories about children's education are exclusively based on interviews and questionnaires, an orientation to the social desirability can produce that parents' answers tend to be divergent from the educational practices they act within family. For this reason, we intend to compare what parents say and what they do within family interactions through the ethnographic observation of their everyday lives. Our idea is to highlight some relevant implicit and explicit aspects of the educational process that parents declare and show in their interactions with children. The methodology we have adopted includes parents' individual semi-structured interviews and video

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recordings of family interactions at home. The purpose is to consider discourses and practices as instances that belong to interpretative sets used by family members to give sense to their own interactions. Data are examined according to the principles of discursive and conversational analyses. The findings show relevant differences between mothers' and fathers' representations about educational matters, as well as divergences between what parents declare during the interviews and the direct observation of their home interactions with children. Both parents indeed express an own ideology about educational matters, although they continuously re-define and re-negotiate within the context of their everyday family interactions.

INTRODUCTION

An increasing number of studies and research in different fields of human sciences have devoted a specific attention to the complexity of parents' processes of childrearing. This chapter aims to contribute to this field by an explorative work on some issues regarding the adults' representation of children's education. In particular, we intend to examine how representations about childrearing are revealed by parents and to what extent they are coherently performed during everyday family interactions at home. In the first part of the chapter a short review of some theoretical concepts connected to childrearing will be presented. The field of educational psychology will be assumed as the framework to understand which are the main research elements on the topic. Afterwards, the specific design of the research will be presented, as well as the qualitative model of analysis. The findings will be discussed in terms of dynamic processes that families act and show during their everyday lives. A concluding section will highlight the main implications of the present study.

Childrearing in Educational Psychology

Most studies focusing on parents' theories about children's education are based on interviews and questionnaires (Holden and Edwards 1989; Emiliani, Gelati and Molinari 1989; McNally, Eisenberg and Harris 1991; Holden 1995). These works have pointed out the representations of adults related to the processes of childrearing in relation to different dimensions. As highlighted by Scott (2000), main concerns about the idea of society for our

children are not just an image created by policy makers, because people, regardless of whether they have children or not, have always views about the way society is changing: the study of beliefs as social representations (Kochanska, Kuczynski and Radke-Yarrow 1989; Fraser and Gaskell 1990) seems, in this sense, a useful approach for bridging social factors and personal experiences. In fact, representations can conventionalize people and can be prescriptive by imposing a structure on what is perceived and on what we should think (Moscovici 1984). In the case of families, the interest is not only in what parents believe but also how their representations relate to prescriptions about the appropriate values to inculcate in children to prepare them for their lives. This is connected, to some extent, to the theory of anticipatory socialization (Merton 1957) that implies that people's perceptions of how the future will be will affect their conceptions of appropriate socialization strategies (cf. also Alwin and Scott 1996; Scott et al. 1998). In this vein, Hofman (1987, 1988) proposed a theory to explain cross-cultural differences in childrearing orientations that suggests that the value of children to parents affects parenting attitudes and behavior. These aspects mainly relate to cultural expectations about fathers' and mothers' involvement in childrearing that may have changed more rapidly than parents' behaviors, creating discrepancies between parenting ideals and realities. In a study done by Milkie et al. (2002), both mothers and fathers expressed strongly egalitarian ideals that fathers should be equally involved in childrearing. In contrast, mothers perceived much less father involvement in actual parenting than fathers perceived. This opens a more general discussion concerning the fact that ideals about parents' proper roles in family life have shifted over the past half century toward more gender neutral, egalitarian views alongside the massive movement of mothers into the paid labor force (Thornton 1989; Spain and Bianchi 1996; Brewster and Padavic 2000). Some relevant findings in this respect have been presented in previous works (Arcidiacono 2010; Arcidiacono and Pontecorvo 2010a; Arcidiacono et al. 2010), highlighting that families are most successful in contending with the routine tasks of everyday life when family members are active contributors to these activities rather than passive, entitled recipients of others' contributions.

As we are interested in describing the nature of the gap between the ideal division of childrearing and the perceptions of what actually occurs, a series of studies about childrearing have been considered as milestones in considering the topic of the study. A relevant research has been done by Hochschild (1989), showing that husbands' and wives' beliefs and practices about housework and childcare often diverge, leading families to create myths in

order to sustain illusions about why gaps between gendered meanings and behaviors exist and continue to persist. Other studies of discrepancies in ideal versus actual parental involvement usually focused on tasks of elementary caregiving to young children. We think that more qualitative research is needed to point out the complex ways parents deal with gaps between beliefs and behaviors about childrearing. In fact, the understanding of the ideal versus actual division of childrearing and its effects requires an examination of specific dimensions of parents' attention to the nature of dissonance between the involvement and views of what is ideal. This is because discrepancies may be due either to parents holding egalitarian involvement as ideal, but experiencing less than ideal parent involvement, or holding a traditional view, but experiencing more parent involvement than desired in actual nurturing practices (Cabrera et al. 2000; Palkovitz 1997). However, it remains partially unclear whether fathers and mothers hold different views about the ideal or actual division of childrearing (Pleck 1997). In fact, some family research suggests that fathers and mothers might not differ in the level of dissonance between ideal and actual father involvement, although feminist researchers have pointed out why mothers should perceive greater discrepancies than fathers between ideal and actual father involvement. In this sense, a gender perspective can provide a framework for the problem of mismatches between cultural behaviors in families. Other aspects concern the fact that issues of childrearing that are more social in nature have a positive effect on family stability (Kalmijn 1999) and require time and energy in deciding who will do what. Traditionally, mothers contribute most to childrearing, but with the rapid rise in the paid work such a distribution of effort is not taken for granted anymore. Harris and Morgan (1991) have shown that there is a strong correlation between wives' reports of marital satisfaction and paternal involvement in child care. As consequence, childrearing orientations represent an area where the values of the parents may or may not converge (Block, Block and Morrison 1981).

Research reviews of parent-child relations (Walters and Stinnett 1971; Roberts, Block and Block 1984) suggest an increasing emphasis on parents' responsibility and achievement as the child moves from childhood to adolescence. Maccoby (1980) discussed the child's age as one of the factors that influences the strategies parents use in childrearing: "*changes in parents' behavior reflect changes in the child's needs and competencies as well as changes in the parents' expectations*" (Maccoby 1980, 395). In this sense, behavior is seen primarily as a response to, rather than a cause of, developmental change in the child. In contrast, a social learning perspective

would emphasize the effects of the parents' behavior on the child wherein reinforcements will contribute to shape the child's development. However, neither of these views adequately takes into account the reciprocal influences of the child on parents and the parents on the child. Other issues are related to the correspondence between representations and behaviors that has been considered with respect to the parental feelings about childrearing in relation to parents' social cognition (Dix and Grusec 1985), children's outcomes (Maccoby and Martin 1983), and family social status (Kohn 1969). Although these aspects are very relevant, due the limited nature of this chapter they will be not specifically discussed. The reader can find more in the literature that has been cited.

We believe that by examining families' daily routines in order to document their actions and the resources they invest in children's education, their attitudes about this investment, and the meanings they assign to childrearing will open a space to analyze the inter-relationship between perceptions of education across families and their routine practices. Consequently, we approach this chapter with the idea that the analysis of the processes of parents' childrearing will illuminate the complexity of family lives and will allow us to understand positions and responsibilities in everyday activities. Through the study of family representations and interactions about childrearing, we will explore how practices of socialization are processes in which both caregivers and children acquire different levels of competence and of knowledge.

A Research Project on the Everyday Lives of Families: Methodological Aspects

The study presented in this chapter is part of an international collaborative project¹ jointly developed by three Centers on Everyday Lives of Families: one based in the United States (at UCLA, Los Angeles), one located at the "Sapienza" University of Rome (Italy) and another one based at the University of Linköping (Sweden). The primary goal of the research project is to conduct an extensive ethnographic fieldwork in the domestic spaces of families in

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order to undertake qualitative analyses of their everyday lives and to examine their challenges.

The three centers shared similar goals and criteria for the selection of participants. To be eligible to participate in the study, families were required to be homeowners with a monthly mortgage or with a monthly rent and they had to have at least two children living at home, with at least one child between 8-12 years of age. Families were recruited through fliers in schools, and on occasion through teachers who were personally acquainted with the research team. After an initial meeting with the research team, both parents (and children over eight years of age) signed consent forms of participation and have received the instructions concerning the timing and procedures of the study in their own houses. In order to achieve the research goals, we have taken an approach that integrates perspectives from cultural and linguistic anthropology, psychology, applied linguistics, and education. We have employed a range of data collection methodologies, including semi-structured interviews and questionnaires, mapping and photographing the families' homes and belongings, tracking of family members' activities and uses of home-space, but mainly the video-recording of daily activities (Arcidiacono and Pontecorvo 2004).

.	falling intonation	< >	lower speech
?	rising intonation	* *	reported speech
!	exclaiming intonation	=	contiguous utterances
,	continuing intonation	° °	quiet speech
↑	rise in intonation	↓	drop in intonation
-	abrupt cut-off	[]	simultaneous, overlapping speech
:	prolonging of sounds	(2.0)	pause (2 seconds)
_	stressed syllable	()	non-transcribing segment of talk
(()) segments added by the transcriber in order to clarify some elements of the situation			

Figure 1. Transcription symbols (cf. Jefferson 1985).

Each family was recorded over the course of a week for approximately a total of 20-25 hours per family.

Three researchers were engaged in four days of videotaping and tracking of family members inside their homes. Interviews and field observations were then transcribed integrally (cf. Figure 1); we also made use of ethnographic

field-notes in order to mark the activities carried out in the settings (Ochs et al. 2006; Arcidiacono and Pontecorvo 2010b).

Diverse features of everyday family life were studied in order to document how working parents and their children manage and collaborate with each other in and across a spectrum of activities. The team has employed discourse analytic methods to closely examine participants' interactions following the prescriptions of Conversation Analysis (Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson 1974) and Discourse Analysis (Edwards, Potter and Middleton 1992; Antaki 1994). The specific study presented in this chapter draws on data exclusively collected at the Italian Center on Everyday Lives of Families which has documented a week in the life of eight middle-class dual-income families in Rome.

The data are considered as *capta* in the naturalistic setting of family home, which allow in-depth analyses of the positions and representations expressed by the participant family members.

The main part of the analysis we present in this chapter was carried out on the transcripts; where relevant passages were identified, they were further examined by going back to the original audio and/or video data, in order to be discussed analytically by the research group as a whole until a high consent degree was reached. More specifically, in this study we intend to compare what parents said in the interviews and what they were doing within family interactions through the ethnographic observation of their everyday lives. Our idea is to highlight some relevant implicit and explicit aspects of the educational process that parents declare and show in their interactions with children.

We analyze how family members discursively construct their positions in relation to childrearing practices and representations, according to the "participant categories" perspective suggested by Sacks (1992) and elaborated by Edwards and Stokoe (2004). Consequently, we look at the categories that participants suggest as resources for their discursive activities in the everyday family interactions at home. In our idea, discourses and practices are instances that belong to interpretative sets used by family members to give sense to their own interactions.

More specifically, we intend to answer to the following research questions:

- What are the representations that parents offer about childrearing within their family?

- Which are the practices we can observe during the everyday lives of families that reveal some relevant implicit and explicit aspects of the educational process declared by parents?

Qualitative Analytical Approach

Our focus of analysis concerns two different instruments of data collection: parents' individual semi-structured interviews; and video-recordings of family everyday interactions at home. The data have been submitted to two independent judges with high level of consent (agreement rate: 80%) that were coding the interviews and the video-recorded interactions according to aspects about educational topics (e.g., "Who takes care of children?" and "Who takes decisions about children educational process?"). Our study involves a little number of participant families and it is based on a descriptive-qualitative analysis, without any pretention of generalizing the results. However, in our opinion this inductive approach of analysis can offer useful starting points for a better understanding of parents' representations about childrearing, both at declarative (interviews) and interactive (observations) levels. Basically, the ethnographic orientation of our study intends to highlight the value of actions and discourses about specific educational practices that parents express during their family everyday lives.

Excerpts of interviews and family interactions at home will be presented in the following part of this chapter. We will conventionally refer to "father" and "mother" to indicate the adult members of the families. Although we recognize that adults can play different roles, such as father/mother as parents, and husband/wife as a couple, we do not discuss here the distinction about different possible cultural and social roles that participants can play during their everyday activities and interactions. In order to ensure the anonymity of the participant families, all names indicated in the excerpts are fictitious names.

Representations and Practices: Convergences and Divergences

Interviews and observational data are used in this study to consider the ideas, representations and practices of family's routines, as well as the resources participants use and the attitudes they show toward childrearing. Although childrearing covers different domains (physical care, school activities, leisure activities), as well as less tangible aspects (emotional support, affection, socialization), in this chapter we are primarily interested in

the representation of childrearing that concern the parents' educational views and family practices. Our idea here is not to generalize about family representations but rather to give glimpses of what parents believe meaningful to their lives and to the education of their children. In the present section of the chapter, we firstly address some of the central themes gleaned from the interview data with participant families. We are aware that parents' representations and the way in which actual everyday interactions unfold can affect many critical experiences and ideologies of family lives: through the individual interviews with the parents we have tried to open a space in order to access to the expectations and representations of mothers and fathers. The excerpts we will propose have been selected to frame each situation in its context of production, avoiding the use of pre-established categories. According to the ethnomethodological approach we have followed, the process of analysis has been conducted in order to recognize what interactants say, do, refrain from doing, and realize as a given course of action (Maynard and Clayman, 2003). Thus, we have tried to avoid general or ideal-typical characterizations of representations and conducts in favor of attending to specific instances as they are shaped by and in turn organize concrete circumstances through participants' discourses and actions. The first part of this section will include excerpts in which parents offer their points of view on childrearing; the second part will present excerpts of situations in which parents act as childrearer during everyday activities at home.

Who Takes Care of Children? Who Takes Decisions about Children's Educational Process?

In the course of individual interviews, a first general question about the organization of activities of taking care of children was addressed to the parents. In the excerpt 1 an example is offered: it is an interview with the father of a participant family, at the beginning of the family participation in the project. The question concerns the person that is in charge of taking care of children.

Excerpt 1: CILO family, audio recorded interview. Participants: father, researcher (res)

297. Res.: who usually takes care of children?

298. Father: well, children: Donatella (*the mother*) takes care of them. but, (0.5) I do something as well. every morning I drive them to school, oh: (0.5) it would be nice if my workplace was a bit nearer so I could drive them back home
299. Res: mhm=mhm.
300. Father: when I have some vacancy days: I do drive them back home

In excerpt 1, the researcher asks the father about who takes care of children. The father indicates the mother as the person in charge of it, although he is immediately adding some elements about his personal role and contribution. In fact, in turn 298, after the first sentence, the father uses the marker “*but*” to announce that something else (with respect to the previous indication, about the mother’s role) will be added. He is providing arguments for his contribution in taking care of children through evidences that are situated in space and times: “*I do something...every morning*”. What is reported by the father demonstrates that he is playing an active role in childrearing, a complementary role to the mother’s one. As the interventions of the researcher are minimal, after a short pause, the father’s indication is completed by the formulation of a kind of wish (“*it would be nice if...I could drive them back home*”) and by an additional element (“*when I have some vacancy days...*”) that contributes (in the father’s intention) to highlight his active role in the process of taking care of children.

During the interview with the mother of this family, the same question has been asked. Excerpt 2 concerns this part of the interview about the mother’s indications of who is in charge of taking care of children.

Excerpt 2: CILO family, audio recorded interview. Participants: mother, researcher (res)

221. Res: you said that you mainly take care of children,
222. Mother: oh yes.
223. Res: have you always been taking care of them?
224. Mother: oh yes. (1.0) yes. because I told you he usually works! (*referring to her husband*)
225. (1.0)
226. Mother: [only on Saturday and Sunday,
227. Res: [no. mhm it was mainly to-

228. Mother: he stays-, well, today he gave a lift to the girls- they go to the Trullo, (*a region of Rome, where the family lives*) usually they go out with their friends, and then we drive them back home

The researcher is insisting on the issue of taking care of children, although the mother already declared that she is mainly the person in charge of this process. After a first confirmation (turn 222), the researcher is interested in understanding whether this role has been always assumed by the mother or whether it is the effect of a new parental organization and evolution over time. However, the mother, while confirming her role, is referring to the father in order to justify why she is the person in charge of taking care of children. In fact, she says that it is “*because he (the father) usually works*”. In this way, she is assuming that the division of roles is the consequence of other external aspects, for instance the fact to work outside home and the lack of time. In the meantime, it seems that a possible misunderstanding between the researcher and the participant is at stake. In fact, after a pause, the mother adds some indication about temporality (“*only on Saturday and Sunday*”) and the researcher overlaps her starting to say something about the intention of the question. The mother reacts by adding some further details related to the father’s involvement (“*today he gave a lift to the girls...usually they go to the Trullo*”). What is particularly interesting, apart the fact that she is recognizing the role of the father according to his availability, is the fact that she is also speaking on behalf of the partner (cf. the use of the plural at the end: “*we drive them back home*”) and presents the answer as a couple’s issue. The possibility of collaboration in taking care of children is a relevant aspect that parents underline during the interviews: for our participants it is important to recognize the leadership of the mother, but at the same time to admit the partner’s contributions.

Below, other excerpts concerning another family (PICO) will be presented. The questions of the interviews concern the persons taking decisions about children’s education.

Excerpt 3: PICO family, audio recorded interview. Participants: father, researcher (res)

797. Res: who takes decisions about children's education in your family?
798. Father: no: we do it together. we have always been oh:: even when they were very young, we avoided to have a little scolding by the father and a consolatory action by the mother, this never happened here. black is black and white is white.
799. Res: you did not separate your [roles]
800. Father: [no:::] no=no. (1.0) ↑on the contrary. maybe a little bit of <moderation> it is required >since dad is always more impetuous. isn't it?<
801. Res: uh.
802. Father: a little bit (). (0.5) but behind closed doors. *↓Giorgio ((his name)) you have been too inflexible, you have used too many strong words, you have spoken too aloud*, ((imitating the mother's voice)) but children never listen to our discussions.

What is declared by the father of PICO family represents a shared intention of both parents in addressing the issue of children's education within this family. In his answer, the father is making explicit that they (the parents) have always done everything together about educational issue. The father (in turn 798) is referring to stereotyped views of gender-related roles (“*a little scolding by the father and a consolatory action by the mother*”) in order to underline how this kind of functioning “*never happened*” in their case. Instead, the father's arguments are attempting at offering the opposite view (turn 800, “*on the contrary*”), although some elements of mitigation are offered at the end (cf. turn 802).

The same question has been asked to the mother, as showed in the next excerpt.

Excerpt 4: PICO family, audio recorded interview. Participants: mother, researcher (res)

641. Res: in your family who usually takes the most important decisions I mean decisions about

- ohm:- everyday decisions about children's education?
642. Mother: bah, [let's say,]
643. Res: [also the] most important ones. not only those ones, I was [wrong.]
644. Mother: [we can] say that,
645. Res: who takes,
646. Mother: together- generally we discuss about them. yes. generally we discuss and decide ohm: it depends on- it depends. sometimes one of us, who is more obstinate, prevails on the other one. on the contrary sometimes the other one prevails. but usually there is not- there is not a parent who is more influential than the other one. (let's say:) it is due to chance °I mean°.

The answers offered by the mother confirm the fact that PICO parents are equally involved in the issue of taking decisions about children's education. Although the researcher was stressing on the specific "important" decisions, the mother declared that these are generally assumed together. This is a sign of equal sharing of responsibility, as indicated in turn 646: "*there is not a parent who is more influential*".

In the case of CILO family, the mother was declaring a difference in sharing responsibilities about children's education, as illustrated in excerpt 5.

Excerpt 5: CILO family, audio recorded interview. Participants: mother, researcher (res)

390. Res: and: who takes decisions about the educational process?
391. Mother: hh: ((she laughs)) ah=ah=ah ((she laughs)) I do it mostly. ((laughing))
392. Res: ah.
393. (0.5)
394. Mother: I am a bit more inflexible.
395. (3.0)
396. Res: so you mainly take decisions [about that.
397. Mother: [yes. because

- I told you that it is quite normal:, it becomes quite spontaneous, because he never is at home!
398. Res: of course.
399. Mother: he goes out in the morning and comes back in the evening. it is quite obvious that:- (0.5) things that they (*referring to girls*) for example- such as some days ago they wanted to go to Eur (*a big Luna park in Rome*) I answered *no* without telling it to him. I answered *no* (0.5) and that's it. (0.5) because *today there are too much attacks by terrorists, because you are still too young. You won't go there alone!* so I explained these things and: I didn't tell that to him because I thought it was not necessary I mean. but ohm: we could say that I mostly take decisions.

The mother of CILO family assumes a clear position about the issue of who is taking decisions about educational processes. In saying that she is in charge of taking decision, the mother presents it as “*normal*” and “*spontaneous*” issue (turn 397), offering the same argument she was using to answer the previous question (the fact that the father is spending a lot of time outside home).

The excerpts we have presented in this section are representative of how the management of some activities related to childrearing is presented by parents through different and complementary attitudes in front of the researchers. The set of various modalities announced by the participants is particularly relevant to understand typical ways of functioning that characterize them.

The analysis of the situations presented in the interviews performed by CILO family suggests the existence of some relevant differences between mother's and father's representations about general educational matters. In fact, from one side the mother takes a position at the level of inflexibility and decision-making (turn 394, “*I am a bit more inflexible*”; turn 399, “*we could say that I mostly take decisions*”), while the father is presenting himself as more flexible. However, elements of convergence between their representations on partner's educational role were also observed, especially concerning who is in charge of taking care of children.

The interviews of PICO family suggest that mother and father agree about the importance of discussing together on educational matters. However, some differences emerge in their discourses. In fact, following the words of the mother, a separation of views is advanced: “*sometimes one of us prevails on the other because is more obstinate, sometimes the other one prevails*”, although “*there is not a parent who is more influential than the other one*”. In the same vein, the father was affirming the following opinion: “*we avoided to have little scolding by the father and consolatory action by the mother*”, “*maybe a little bit of moderation is required, since dad is always more impetuous*”.

“Well Girls, Now I’m Going to Explain Something to You”

On the basis of the representations parents have offered about childrearing, we would like to analyze the relationships between the declared representations and the real management of these aspects during everyday activities. For this reason, in this section we present two excerpts of video recorded interactions at home of the two families we have introduced above. The observation of different situations related to interactions among family members suggests a variety of ways to display collaboration, similarities and divergence about educational issues.

Excerpt 6: CILO family, video recorded interaction (XXXX).
 Participants: mother, father, child 1 (Samantha, 13 years old), child 2 (Federica, 11 years old), researcher

- 840. Father: well [girls
- 841. Samantha: [EH::!]
- 842. Father: now I am going to explain something to you.
(0.2) you are free to do what you want. [but (.)
- 843. Federica: [eh right!]
- 844. Father: sometime I keep you under control, it is ok (0.2)
isn't it?
- 845. Federica: but you call me
- 846. (1.5)
- 847. Samantha: [(no:)]
- 848. Father: [right] as I said last time, call Sama:ntha,
- 849. (2.0)
- 850. Father: Samantha was near you?

851. Samantha: look *((going towards the window))*
 852. Father: [eh you see (.)
 853. Mother: [() (0.2) he is diabolic!
 854. (0.2)
 855. Father: no!
 856. Samantha: but do you think I am leaving, leaving her alone?
 857. Federica: today you were calling me all the time ah
 858. Mother: but you are giving audience to your dad who is
 always behind you? he sees you at the Trullo *((a
 city area))*, he is in the car, are you giving
 audience to him?
 859. Federica: he is visible
 860. Mother: visible, visible,
 861. Father: may I be bit jealous? *((laughs))*

The excerpt presents a situation in which the interaction is characterized by the father's parental discursive action (turns 840-842, "*well girls, now I'm going to explain something to you*"), which partially disconfirms what he says during his interview. From one hand, mother's and daughters' talks (turn 858, "*but are you giving audience to your dad who is always behind you?*") seems to be expressed in order to refuse the father's opinion; from the other hand, the father's intervention has an educational meaning (turn 844, "*sometimes I keep you under control, it is ok, isn't it?*"), mixed to an affective one (turn 861, "*may I be bit jealous?*"). The mother's position looks really close to her daughters' ideas showing a discursive alliance between mother and daughters.

There are other cases in which, trying to coordinate their efforts together, partners have to explicitly declare how to collaborate or at least to share tasks. The following excerpt concerns a situation in which the father of PICO family is assigning tasks to the partner while he is organizing the time schedule for all the family members.

Excerpt 7: PICO family, video recorded interaction (Wednesday evening). Participants: mother, father, child 1 (Daniela, 12 years old), child 2 (Serena, 10 years old), researcher

407. Father: >we have to repeat (those)< things OK? *((referring to Serena's homework))*
 408. Serena: yes! (even though:) ()
 409. Father: then >we give them< a little reading, even in the car, a little repeating

410. (1.5)
 411. Father: while I drive, (0.2) you repeat the lesson with mom.

The excerpt shows the strong presence of the father's role within this family. For instance, he is usually the person checking that children have done all what is necessary to do before going out in the morning ("*Your teeth, did you clean them?*", "*Did we put the padlock inside the swimming bag?*") and, for this reason, during everyday interactions the mother's role is often marginal. While the father's position is strongly characterized in a organizational sense, the mother seems to completely delegate the "checking task" to her partner, who appears as the parent mostly involved in the "general check activities".

These excerpts suggest the presence of different modalities of collaboration and sharing of responsibilities among the observed families. In fact, participants choose their forms of management of childrearing in relation to specific situations in which they interact, the value of the activity, their expectations and representations.

In the last part of this chapter, we will discuss these findings, trying to highlight some implications within the education field we have chosen as approach for our study.

CONCLUSION

In presenting this chapter we have underlined the relevance of paying attention to ways family members declare, negotiate and enact effective strategies for childrearing in the course of their family lives. By asking questions to parents and by observing them during everyday routines and activities in managing their home lives we have obtained some insights into the large organization and dynamics of families. This way to proceed has constituted an access to the interactional work that parents (and children) are required to do in order to run different family duties.

Looking at the interviews' excerpts, we have identified how mothers and fathers define individuals' responsibilities and involvement, and how they position themselves in relation to the partner. Participants have expressed no overt complaints but mainly a sense of togetherness in the organization of childrearing. Then, these representations have been observed within a variety of forms during the direct observation of activities at participants' homes. It seems that families are most successful in childrearing issues when parents are active contributors to these tasks rather than passive, entitled recipients of

others' contributions. However, other components have emerged: for example, the success in childrearing is connected to family members' acknowledgment of the contributions that others make, to a consensual established arrangement, and to the flexibility rather than rigidity in fulfilling usual responsibilities. These would seem to be the conditions most likely to promote shared engagement in childrearing, and to promote a coherent view of what parents believe and what they do during their participation within different interactive family frameworks.

Our analyses, although limited by the size of the samples studied here, can be considered as suggestive of other analytic avenues that might be pursued about representations and processes of childrearing in families. As we have found that both fathers and mothers are able to align in childrearing duties, as a sign of parental complex and multi-faceted organization, a more in-depths research would lead to a better understanding of the parents' positioning with respect to the analyzed topic. Although both parents have their own ideology about educational matters, within the interactions they have continuously the possibility to re-define and to re-negotiate it, taking into account the real contexts and situations of the everyday routines, the children's age and gender, as well as specific family issues. All these elements contribute to understand that the significance of the present study is in the idea that this kind of research can be useful in exploring specific aspects of the family life, even though without any possibility of generalization. The analysis of the interviews and observed interactions provide crucial information about parents' representations and actions that contribute to a more complete vision of family lives. Both these levels offer a view of how participant parents practice education through discourse and action, in a retroactive and prospective view. We are aware that parents' ideas and beliefs are structured, in part, according to the experiences they had in the years of childhood. We also recognized that social changes in mothers' and fathers' work and family lives may have produced discrepancies between what parents see as ideal and what actually occurs in families. These gaps across childrearing domains are an arena of family functioning that deserves greater attention, as well as the attention to aspects of continuity in the general attitudes, values, and goals of the parents. Further research is needed across many areas in order to study the achievement, behaviors and expressions of physical affection between parents and children from early childhood to early adolescence.

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