Pedagogic practices in the family socialising context
and children's school achievement

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INTRODUCTION

This study is focused on the relations which characterise the socialising family context and it aims at analysing the extent to which these relations interfere on children’s answer to school socialisation contexts. Theoretically is based on Bernstein's model of pedagogic discourse (Bernstein, 1990, 2000) which gives the possibility of establishing parallels between the pedagogic processes occurring in the family and in the school.

There are many studies centred on the family context. Most of them have a psychological or psycho-sociological basis (e.g. Marjoribanks, 1979; Maccoby, & Martin, 1983; Ochoa, Sanchez, & Fuster, 1988) and describe family sets or parents’ educational practices to find out reasons for specific children’s behaviours in the school. The studies of a sociological character (e.g. Walkerdine, & Lucey, 1989) and, in particular, based on Bernstein’s theory (e.g., Hill, & Varenne, 1981; Hasan, & Cloran, 1990; Hasan, 2001; Williams, 2001) are specifically centred on social interactions which characterise family contexts to understand how social class or gender interfere on these interactions. The early research based on Bernstein's theory about the processes of family socialisation explores the relation between social class and sociolinguistic codes (Bernstein, 1973; Cook-Gumperz, 1973) and is mainly focused on the coding orientation and on the modality of control which characterise the form of communication between mothers and children in the regulative context.

In our study, the analysis of the family takes into account both the regulative and the instructional dimensions of the family pedagogic code. We intend to develop a deeper and more detailed analysis of the family socialising context in order to get a better understanding of the relation usually pointed out between the social background of the children and their school achievement.

We shall start by presenting the model we constructed to analyse the family pedagogic
code. This is followed by the methodology. In the analysis of the data, we present some examples of situations which led to the characterization of the family pedagogic code. We analyse the relation between family and school codes and children's achievement in science. Finally, we point out the most relevant results.

**THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

**THE PEDAGOGIC CODE IN THE FAMILY CONTEXT**

According to Bernstein, any given modality of pedagogic code is a realisation of power and control relations in specific contexts of transmission-acquisition, namely the instructional and regulative contexts. The modalities of pedagogic code in the school are different contextual realisations of the elaborated code in which the school is predicated. They are given by the formulae

\[ O^E_{ic} \frac{a}{C} F_{ie}^{a} \]

in which \( O^E \) represents the school’s elaborated orientation and \( C \) and \( F \) indicate the principles of classification and framing, whose strong or weak values (±) represent variations in the power and control relations at the level of the pedagogic contexts. The symbols \( i \) and \( e \) refer to internal relations (relations within the school context, e.g. the classroom) and to external relations (relations between the school context and other contexts, e.g. the family). There is a variety of modalities of pedagogic practice representing specific realisations of the school’s elaborated code, consequence of different values of classification and framing. This variety arises also from the fact that the pedagogic discourse refers to a set of knowledges (instructional discourse) and norms of social conduct (regulative discourse) and that their transmission-acquisition is regulated in the instructional practice by discursive rules (selection, sequence, pacing, evaluation criteria) and in the regulative practice by hierarchical rules, which vary according to the control that the transmitter and the acquirer have in the pedagogic relation.

When we use in the analysis of the family socialising context, the same conceptual framework used for the school context, the process of family socialisation may be viewed as a specific modality of pedagogic code. However, since the code culturally acquired in the family may translate a restricted or elaborated orientation, the modalities of the family
pedagogic code correspond to processes whose differences are present not only at the level of the specific form of contextual realisation of meanings but also at the level of the meanings themselves, particularistic or universalistic. Thus the family’s pedagogic codes, may be represented by the formulae referred above in which $O^E$ is replaced by $O^{E/R}$ (family’s elaborated or restricted orientation).

**MODEL OF ANALYSIS**

The model contains the two dimensions of the code – the coding orientation and the realisation of meanings in the family socialising context. The development of this model is part of another article (Morais, & Neves, 1993) which presents in detail the theoretical assumptions, the objectives and the dimensions of analysis for its application to the study of the family. Space limitations led us to present here only the diagram containing the relations established by the model (figure 1), with some references to their meaning for the study.

Figure 1 – *Model of analysis of the family’s pedagogic code*
In this model, the family’s pedagogic code is analysed at two levels which, although interlinked, are taken as separate components of the realisation of the code at discursive and transmission levels. The discursive level, which includes both family instructional discourse (FID) and family regulative discourse (FRD), refers to the knowledges/activities and norms of social conduct present in the family. Through an indirect pedagogic practice (IPP), children, as spectators of the discursive universes of the families, learn (in a non-evaluative context) to value the meanings transmitted by parents’ instructional and regulative discourses. The transmission level, which focuses on the realisation of families’ pedagogic discourses, that is, on the instructional and regulative practices of families, refers to the process of transmission-acquisition used by parents in pedagogic interaction with their children. Through a direct pedagogic practice (DPP), children, as active participants in the learning process, acquire (in an evaluative context) specific skills and norms of social conduct which determine their answers in other learning contexts.

The model considers the contextual realisation of meanings by using the values of classification and framing which define the discursive and transmission components of the pedagogic code and it also considers the coding orientation, that is the meanings which are present in the family’s discourses and practices. The analysis of this dimension of the code is made according to the particularistic/universalistic nature of meanings contained in the instructional and regulative discourses and according to the meanings transmitted through the instructional and regulative practices.

**METHODOLOGY**

**SAMPLE**

The study refers to five families (5 fathers and 5 mothers), distinct in social class (understood as a nominal concept) and race, and whose children had showed to be particular cases within particular social groups, relatively to their science school achievement. These children, were part of two school classes of the 5th and 6th years of schooling (10−12+). Each school class was socially heterogeneous (social class, race, gender) and received in sciences, during two school academic years, one of two distinct
modalities of pedagogic practice (P₁ and P₂). These were implemented by the same teacher (female).

The pedagogic practices differed in terms of power and control relations between spaces, discourses and subjects. One of the practices (P₂) was characterised by strong framings at the level of the discursive rules (greater teacher’s control over the selection, sequence, pacing and evaluation criteria) and the hierarchical rules (modalities of control fundamentally imperative or positional). The other practice (P₁) was characterised by weak framings (lesser teacher’s control over the discursive rules and fundamentally inter-personal modes of control in the teacher-children communicative relations). The organization of spaces in the classroom was characterised in P₂ by a strong classification between teacher’s and children’s spaces and between children’s spaces (particularly in terms of social class and school achievement) and in P₁ by a weak classification between spaces.

Given the importance attributed in the research to the general failure of the social disadvantaged children, four families (two black and two white) were part of the lower social groups. The fifth family was selected among the highest social class. Within the lower social groups, we selected two families whose children’s cognitive achievement was above the average of his/her group and two families whose children’s achievement was below the average. Two children were part of P₁ and two of P₂. In the highest social group, we studied a family whose child had shown low achievement, constituting a discrepant case within her group. This was a child from P₁.

The level of achievement refers to the mean obtained by children in the two science school tests done in the first term of the 5th year (the initial stage of the research). The tests were the same for all children and assessed two types of cognitive competencies, simple (SC) and complex (CC). The table of figure 2 presents the distribution of the children, according to the characteristics referred. It shows the achievement in sciences in SC and in CC and also the global achievement, when both are joined together. Achievement was measured in a 0-100 scale.
Figure 2 - Selected children, according to gender, race, social class, school pedagogic practice and relative cognitive achievement in science.

INSTRUMENT OF ANALYSIS

On the basis of the model referred above (figure 1), we defined the following dimensions of analysis to characterise the family’s pedagogic codes:

1. The knowledges/activities and norms of social conduct which are present in families everyday lives.

2. The principles adduced by parents as underlying the knowledges/activities and norms of social conduct they value.

3. The form used by parents to transmit their knowledges and norms of social conduct and to explain tasks to children.

4. The modality of social control used by parents in their communicative relations with children.

5. The principles adduced by parents as underlying the ways they teach their children.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHILD/ SCHOOL PRACTICE</th>
<th>RACE</th>
<th>SOCIAL CLASS</th>
<th>STUDENTS’ ACHIEVEMENT (%)</th>
<th>SOCIAL GROUPS’ ACHIEVEMENT (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>SC</td>
<td>CC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nuno  P2</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>57.0</td>
<td>25.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ana  P1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>21.0</td>
<td>21.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rui  P2</td>
<td>W</td>
<td></td>
<td>80.0</td>
<td>83.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David  P1</td>
<td></td>
<td>High</td>
<td>53.0</td>
<td>23.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sara  P1</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>73.0</td>
<td>36.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

SC – Simple cognitive competences
CC – Complex cognitive competences
We constructed an instrument\(^4\) which contained, for each dimension of analysis, some premises and a set of questions and objectives to orientate the empirical research. On the basis of these premises, questions and objectives, we constructed a guide\(^5\) to orientate a semi-structured interview. We separated, in the interview’s guide, the dimension designated by indirect pedagogic practice from the dimension designated by direct pedagogic practice. To obtain data about the indirect practice we introduced questions related to parents' occupations and free time activities (TV programs, reading, outside leisure activities like cinema, football, trips) and related to child’s school life. To obtain data about the direct pedagogic practice, the questions were centred on aspects related to the talk between father/mother and child (e.g. questions the child asks) and related to the child's control on his/her activities (school homework, help in home tasks and in father/mother's work and also free time occupation like reading, extra-school activities).

**DATA ANALYSIS**

The table of figure 3 summarises the fundamental characteristics of the pedagogic codes of the five families. The relations between the local pedagogic discourse (LPD) and the official pedagogic discourse (OPD) and the relations which characterise the family pedagogic practice (instructional and regulative) were translated respectively in a four point scale for classification and a six point scale for framing. Classification and framing scales were constructed in function of the situations analysed and as such they should be taken in relative and not absolute terms. The table also includes data related to the families’ social background and to the school pedagogic codes children received in their science classes.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RACE</th>
<th>SOCIAL CLASS</th>
<th>CHILD/ SCHOOL CLASS</th>
<th>FAMILY</th>
<th>RELATION BETWEEN LP/DOPD</th>
<th>FAMILY’S PEDAGOGIC PRACTICE</th>
<th>SCHOOL PEDAGOGIC PRACTICE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>INSTRUCTIONAL</td>
<td>REGULATIVE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BLACK</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Nuno</td>
<td>Father</td>
<td>C_e^+</td>
<td>Selection - Fi^+</td>
<td>Imperative and positional control (Fi^{++})</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>C_e^-</td>
<td>Selection - Fi^-</td>
<td>Imperative control (Fi^{++})</td>
<td>R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Ana</td>
<td>Father</td>
<td>C_e^-</td>
<td>Selection - Fi^-</td>
<td>Imperative and positional control (Fi^{++})</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>C_e^-</td>
<td>Selection - Fi^-</td>
<td>Imperative control (Fi^{++})</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Rui</td>
<td>Father</td>
<td>C_e^{++}</td>
<td>Selection - Fi^+</td>
<td>Interpersonal and positional control (Fi^{++})</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>C_e^+</td>
<td>Selection - Fi^+</td>
<td>Positional and interpersonal control (Fi^{++})</td>
<td>E</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>David</td>
<td>Father</td>
<td>C_e^-</td>
<td>Selection - Fi^-</td>
<td>Imperative and positional control (Fi^{++})</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>C_e^-</td>
<td>Selection - Fi^-</td>
<td>Imperative control (Fi^{++})</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WHITE</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Sara</td>
<td>Father</td>
<td>C_e^{++}</td>
<td>Selection - Fi^+ (LP) - Fi^+ (OP) - Fi^- (LP) - Fi^- (OP)</td>
<td>Positional and interpersonal control (Fi^{++})</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>C_e^{++}</td>
<td>Selection - Fi^+ (LP) - Fi^+ (OP) - Fi^- (LP) - Fi^- (OP)</td>
<td>Interpersonal control (Fi^{++})</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

LPD - Local pedagogic discourse  
OPD - Official pedagogic discourse  
LP - Local practice  
OP - Official practice

Figure 3 - *Family’s and science classroom’s modalities of pedagogic code.*
Let us first consider the *coding orientation* of the families. The interview’s data suggested that Nuno’s and Ana’s parents tend to use preferably particularistic meanings, context dependent (O\(^R\)), whereas Rui’s and Sara’s parents tend to use universalistic meanings, relatively context independent (O\(^E\)). In the case of David’s family, the father showed an elaborated orientation whereas the mother showed a restricted orientation. The following extracts of the interviews with Nuno’s and Rui’s mothers, related to the reason why they like to watch a given TV serial and to the talk they have with their children about that serial, are examples which illustrate differences in coding orientation.

*Nuno’s mother* - I enjoy watching... things of Raquel, things the daughter does to her mother [...]. I just ask Nuno what happened... He said “everything went well and then Fátima went there to argue with her mother and after the mother does not want”... He says lots of things [...].

*Rui’s mother* - Because I find in it [the serial]... gives some ideas to... therefore one watches the serial and sometimes draws conclusions from it [...]. Sometimes, in the moment something is happening, I say “see, look at that example, she looks so intimate, it looks such a good thing... and she is false after all” [...].

Nuno’s mother refers to the serial emphasising its immediate and local meaning, as the talk is focused on concrete situations which take place in the serial, whereas Rui’s mother emphasises specific general principles which can be drawn from the concrete situations of the serial.

If we now take the *relation between the local pedagogic discourse and the official pedagogic discourse*, the data shows that in Sara’s family and with Rui’s father the official pedagogic discourse tend to be strongly embedded in their respective local pedagogic discourses, showing the high status given to the OPD (C\(^{++}\)). The relation between these discourses seems also to characterise the pedagogic code of Nuno’s and David’s fathers and of Rui’s mother, although the embedding of the OPD in the LPD is smaller (C\(^+\)). In Ana’s and Nuno’s families, the official pedagogic discourse is totally absent of mothers’ local pedagogic discourse, which means that the OPD is not embedded in their LPD (C\(^-\)). For Ana’s father and David’s mother, the OPD is relatively absent from their LPD (C\(^-\)).

The difference at the level of the relation between the LPD and the OPD reflects, in part, the degree of fathers/mothers schooling. For example, the fact that Nuno’s and Ana’s...
mothers are illiterate is by itself a reason for their discourse to be characterised by common sense knowledges and manual activities, without an OPD being present. On the contrary, parents who had access to the school show discursive patterns which reflect the higher status given to the OPD relatively to the LPD. The difference between C⁺ and C⁺⁺ translates, in the second case (C⁺⁺), the presence at home of subjects and activities usually characteristic of the official pedagogic discourse (e.g. reading, helping children with their school homework) and, in the first case (C⁺), that presence but in a smaller degree (e.g. fathers/mothers give some help with children's school tasks or seek help from others and show some interest in academic subjects).

The analysis of the characteristics of the instructional practice suggests a trend in Nuno’s, Ana’s and David’s families to value a didactic theory of instruction, essentially centred on the transmitter. Rui’s and Sara’s families show a relative similarity at the level of the transmission of everyday knowledge (local practice). The theory of instruction seems to be, for these families, more centred on the acquirer (i.e. more self-regulated), this meaning that, in some aspects, it is given to the child greater control on his/her learning. This situation is particularly evident in the local pedagogic practice of Sara’s mother whose selection and evaluation criteria are regulated by weak framings (Fi⁻). It is interesting to note that, in Sara’s family, where some difference seems to exist at the level of the theory of instruction underlying the learning of home tasks (LP) and the learning of school tasks (OP), the daughter has lesser control on the learning related to school tasks (selection and criteria regulated by strong framing - Fi⁺⁺), i.e. there is, in this case, a trend for a theory of instruction more transmitter centred.

The transcripts which follow are examples from interviews with David’s and Sara’s mothers and Rui’s father, related to control over selection of home activities done by children:

*David’s mother* - [...] he likes painting [the house walls] very much but cannot be allowed to do so ... I don't let him [the son] paint.

*Sara’s mother* - She [the daughter] was still very little and I think it had some relation with her enjoying to play with water... Thus one day... she washed up a few things... but mostly by the enjoyment of playing with water [...]. Now that she has grown up she asks for and enjoys [speaking about the daughter asking for do the washing].
**Rui’s father** - He [the son] tried to make an omelette his way... we even thought it was good he had initiative... Because I think he should also take initiatives [...].

Whereas David’s mother answer illustrates a situation where the selection is explicitly controlled by the transmitter (Fi++), Sara’s mother and Rui’s father answers show situations where the child’s activities are selected in function of the acquirer (Fi−).

Differences at the level of the evaluation criteria are exemplified by Rui’s and Sara’s fathers texts, when talking of home tasks:

**Rui’s father** - I taught him... the fork should be placed on this side, the knife on this side outside the plate, the bread is placed in the saucer... It must be laid in this way according to hotel service standards [speaking about the form he teaches the son to lay the table].

**Sara’s father** - [...] the way she [the daughter] tidies up [the toys] for me is not important... The way she tidies up is something personal...

Rui’s father gives more emphasis to explicit evaluation criteria, defined by the transmitter (Fi+), and Sara’s father seems to legitimate implicit evaluation criteria (Fi−).

The following example evidences differences shown by Sara’s father of the control of evaluation criteria at the level of school tasks when compared to home tasks.

**Sara’s father** - For example... sometimes she [the daughter] comes “oh daddy give me a clue for an essay or see how it is”... And I give!... Or I change the form of a sentence [...].

In this case, the father intervenes directly, giving his criteria to the production of the text he considers adequate for an essay (Fi+).

Finally let us consider the characteristics related with the regulative practice. The analysis suggested a general trend by all families studied to use positional modalities of control. However, whereas Nuno’s, Ana’s and David’s families also used imperative modalities, Rui’s and Sara’s families also used inter-personal modalities of control. In general, we can say that the hierarchical rules which regulate the regulative practice of Nuno’s, Ana’s and David’s families are characterised by strong framing values: Fi+++ when the control is essentially imperative, Fi++ when the control, essentially positional, is associated to forms of imperative control and Fi+ when the control is essentially positional. In any of these situations, the regulative practice of the family celebrates hierarchy, making explicit
authority relations. The hierarchical rules which regulate the regulative practice of Rui’s and Sara’s families are regulated by weak framing values: Fi when the control, essentially inter-personal, is associated to forms of positional control and Fi when the control is essentially personal. In the regulative practice of these families, the hierarchy, although present, is somehow implicit, the relations of authority being blurred through the frequent use of appeals of an inter-personal nature.

These differences are evidenced by the following examples:

Ana’s mother - Sometimes, afterwards, I reprimand her [the daughter]... Says “oh Ana do this, if you are not going to do this... you’ll ‘levas porrada’” [speaking about home tasks]. I beat her up and say she must pay more attention... if I am not to beat her up again [speaking about school tasks].

Sara’s mother - No, no [she does not get angry with her daughter]... I explain to her that if in fact somebody comes in it is a bit unnice to enter in the bedroom and not be neat... But alright... that’s her problem... if she likes that way…” Sara it's your bedroom, therefore if somebody comes it's you that after all will suffer the shame of the people who enter and see your room unneat... because if they go to mum's bedroom, the bedroom is neat” [speaking about home tasks]. [...] Usually I do not get angry with her... Although she had a bad mark in the school test... And afterwards of course I called her attention ”if you had studied a bit every day... because you let many things to the end... and then you are uncapable” [...]. If she has a good mark I praise her, that I liked... I am pleased with her... [speaking of school tasks].

Rui’s father - [...] Whenever you are everything must... either studying, working must be done willingly. And if he was told to do, he must do... he cannot desobey... [speaking of home tasks]. [...] For I tell him that I... daddy likes the fact that she has passed the year and has good results, that is good for him and I am pleased [speaking of school tasks].

Ana’s mother uses orders and sometimes physical coercion, features which illustrate frequent modes of imperative control. Sara’s mother emphasises interpersonal relations in her regulative practice, as she appeals to the attributes of her daughter as a person and not to her attributes based on status of gender, age or parental relation. In the case of Rui’s father, the use of positional appeals is evidenced by the transcript about home tasks and the use of personal appeals is also evident in the same text and in the transcript about school tasks. The association of these distinct control modalities, showing greater emphasis in personal modes of control, led us to characterise the regulative practice of this father by weak framing, although less weak than in the case of Sara’s mother.
According to the dimensions of analysis derived from the model, many other aspects of the primary socialising context were used to characterise the pedagogic code of the five families. An important aspect refers to the *norms of social conduct* to be followed at home, and so we obtained information about the attitudes/social norms present in the family's regulative discourse and practice. The following examples evidence differences at this level.

*Rui’s father* - Sometimes the sister, the sister herself "today it's you who lay the table" [...] They agree... it was agreed between... I myself have already laid the table [...] The school is like any occupation, be waiter, be doctor, be... it is to be done willingly and at 100%... It is what I tell them [...].

*David’s mother* - I tell him [the son] that he should have done what I ordered [to do the bed]. [...] I tell him that he should have studied... if I work, if I sacrifice myself and his father, he should also sacrifice himself [...].

*Sara’s father* - Look this, during ten years [referring to his adolescence] I did my bed everyday [...] No, it is not a division of tasks... If she is the one [the daughter] who sleeps in her bed, why should not be her who does it? [...] I ask her... if she wants me to do her bed... or if she wants me to study in her place or if she wants me to do her bedroom [...].

Whereas Rui’s father seems to value attitudes of cooperation and responsibility, these being reasons to lead his son to do the tasks, David’s mother and Sara’s father show to value attitudes of obedience and respect.

If we analyse the relation of (des)continuity between family’s and school’s pedagogic codes, we can discuss the extent to which children’s differential achievement may be influenced by that relation.

In the case of Nuno’s and Ana’s families (black lower working class), there is a discontinuity (more marked for Ana) between the family and the school pedagogic discourses. The official instructional discourse is not embedded in their mothers’ local instructional discourse. If we consider both the family and the school pedagogic practices, it is Ana who initially finds herself, in the science classroom, in a situation of more marked discontinuity. Whereas for Nuno, the theory of instruction and the communicative relations transmitter-acquirer, which characterise the science pedagogic practice he received, approximate to the characteristics of the family instructional and regulative
contexts, for Ana the school pedagogic practice was opposite to her family pedagogic practice. Since Nuno had a fair achievement in simple cognitive competencies and had a better global achievement than Ana, we can give as an explanatory hypothesis for the differential achievement of these children the interactive relation of family and school pedagogic practices. The fact that both children failed in the complex cognitive competencies can be a consequence of the restricted orientation underlying the pedagogic code of their families.

David (white working class), who receives the same science pedagogic practice of Ana, showed like her a low global cognitive achievement. However, the fact that David has access, through his father, to an elaborated orientation (the father participates actively in a trade union) and also the fact that the official instructional discourse is relatively embedded in the father's local instructional discourse can constitute reasons to justify his better achievement (fair in the simple competencies) relative to Ana. One can think that his failure in complex competencies is partly a consequence of the socialising process used by his mother, who has a restricted orientation.

When we compare Ana’s, David’s and Nuno’s achievement, according to the distinctive characteristics of the respective family and school contexts, we can discuss the meaning of the school achievement of these lower working class children. The relative similarity of David’s and Nuno’s achievement suggests that the effect of the favourable characteristics of David’s family context (particularly father's elaborated orientation) parallels the effect of the relation of continuity between the family and school pedagogic practices in Nuno’s family. For Ana, the cumulative effect of the unfavourable characteristics of the family context (e.g. parents’ restricted orientation) may justify her lowest achievement when compared with David and Nuno.

Rui’s family departed from the pattern of primary socialisation found in the other working class families. His father (with only primary schooling) showed to possess some knowledge of English and Latin and he learned to play music. His interests (reading, TV programs) are particularly centred on the area of scientific and musical knowledge (classical music) and through his occupation (waiter in a restaurant of the high-middle class) he has contact with the high social classes. Rui’s mother (also with only primary schooling) joins her husband in part of his cultural activities (visits to museums, concerts)
and she is a close friend of the family of a secondary school teacher (female) of whose baby she takes care. This is a family that values the pedagogic principles legitimised by the agents of symbolic control and seems to have a class consciousness fundamentally regulated by the values of education. The father's cultural interests and the communicative social relations which father and mother have with middle class, particularly from the field of symbolic control, are aspects which can justify the characteristics of the pedagogic context of Rui’s family and which may have contributed to the high achievement of their child. In this family, similarly to the higher social class family, the official pedagogic discourse is embedded in the local pedagogic discourse (particularly father's) and both father and mother showed an elaborated orientation. The father's fundamentally interpersonal form of control, tend to reproduce principles of social relations legitimised by the agents of symbolic control. However, since in the family’s regulative context the child is more socialised by the mother (who uses mainly a positional control), it is possible to think that Rui’s good achievement is also partly reflecting the relation of continuity between the regulative practices of mother and school. In the instructional context, the continuity at the level of the family and school discourses and practices may justify the good science achievement of this child. The great interest of the father for the area of scientific knowledge and the fact that he legitimises a theory of instruction relatively centred on the transmitter, in which there are explicit evaluation criteria, led the son to acquire recognition and realisation rules appropriated to the instructional context of a school practice with characteristics near to the family practice. For this child there is a double continuity between the family and school contexts, since he has access at home to the elaborated orientation of the school and he is also socialised in a modality of pedagogic code which is near to the form of realisation of the elaborated code present in his science class.

Another interesting case is Sara’s family who is part of the high middle social class. This family possess an elaborated orientation and, at home, modalities of control are mainly personal in the case of the mother and positional in the case of the father. We think that, at the level of the regulative context, the father's preference for a positional control (not only between him and his daughter but also between him and his wife) may be a consequence of a class consciousness essentially regulated by the relations of production (he directs a large industrial enterprise). Furthermore, in the regulative context of the family, it seems to
exist a relation between father and daughter (as between father and mother) in which attitudes of obedience and respect are more valued than, for example, cooperation, suggesting that the child is socialised in forms of communication in which her social role is more attributed than acquired. Sara has, at home, the official pedagogic discourse embedded in the local pedagogic discourse. Her mother, who has more contact with her daughter, uses an instructional practice characterised by discursive rules of relatively strong framing, particularly at the level of the transmission of science knowledge. Her father showed also to value a theory of instruction relatively centred on the transmitter, with respect to the learning of school knowledge. In the particular case of science, he perceives the learning of this school subject as based on memorization.

Although submitted in the family to a process of socialisation favourable to school success (elaborated orientation and official pedagogic discourse), there is for Sara a certain descontinuity between family and school instructional practices. If we consider the characteristics of her family’s instructional practice (with respect to the official discourses), the data suggests that the success in science of Sara may be limited, to a certain extent, by that descontinuity. The fact that this child obtained a good global achievement in science shows how school success may be a function of the relation between social class and family socialisation. However, her difficulties in developing complex competencies may reflect the lack of recognition and realisation rules for the competencies required in the specific instructional practice of her science class. The fact that socio-affective dispositions required by the family and the fact that the family form of control were inconsistent and not always in accordance with the regulative context of her school practice may also explain Sara’s low achievement.

CONCLUSIONS

We saw that, in general, it seems to exist a relation between social class and the general coding orientation of families. Although this confirmed the data of other studies (e.g. Bernstein, 1973; Cook-Gumperz, 1973; Adlam et al., 1977; Fontinhas et al., 1995), the qualitative analysis of the family pedagogic context provided data which show the importance of mediating factors on that relation. For example, the active participation in
social agencies and the access to middle class cultural contexts constitute sociological factors which may explain departing situations related to the coding orientation we found in some members of the working class families.

Furthermore, the study suggests a relation pattern between the social group and the form of the realisation of the code (restricted/elaborated) in the pedagogic context of transmission-acquisition of knowledge and norms of social conduct, which constitute the instructional and regulative discourses of the family. The data showed that, in the working class families, the father/mother-child relations were regulated by strong values of framing and by a relation between discourses in which the official pedagogic discourse was excluded from the family discourses. In the middle class family the relations transmitter-acquirer were, in general, regulated by weak values of framing and by a relation between discourses in which the official pedagogic discourse was present in the family discourses. However, the data suggest situations which depart from the pattern referred. The most discrepant case is Rui’s family whose pedagogic code, particularly of the father, has characteristics closer to the middle class family than to the other working class families.

When we see that the children who received the science pedagogic practice of weak framings (Ana, David, Sara) had school results which, contrary to the children who received the practice of strong framings (Nuno, Rui), are below the mean achievement of the respective social groups, we could be led to think that the former pedagogic practice is less favourable than the later to children's learning. However, we should not forget that the data refer only to five children and that since they are centred on school science results obtained in the beginning of the research they may not yet show the influence of the school pedagogic practice. In fact, other data obtained during the broader research (Morais et al, 1993) of which this study is part showed that, after two years of schooling (submitted to the same pedagogic practice in science), the children showed a differential evolution according to the school practice. If we consider the specific case of the working class children object of this study, we saw that Ana and David improved their achievement whereas the opposite happened with Nuno. The comparison of the initial and final results of these three children raises the possibility of a specific school pedagogic practice, although with opposite characteristics of their families practices, having, in the long run, a beneficial effect on the learning of disadvantaged children. The fact that a school
pedagogic practice characterised by general weak framings favours the exchange of ideas and experiences between children from different cultural universes and opens up interaction relations teacher-child and child-child which facilitate the acquisition of a higher positioning and of an elaborated orientation by the socially disadvantaged children, may constitute an explanatory hypothesis for the improvement on their achievement within that school pedagogic practice. On the contrary, a pedagogic practice characterised by strong framings, although it can be initially better for socially disadvantaged children (given the family practice in which they were primarily socialised) will reinforce the low positioning assumed by these children in the school and will also make more difficult their access to the school elaborated orientation.

For middle class children or working class children who have access, through their parents, to an elaborated orientation, the school success seems not to be so problematic, since those children acquire easily the recognition and realisation rules of a given practice.

The five cases studied do not certainly provide data for generalisations, either about the family pedagogic practices, or about its relation with children's achievement in school. However, they showed clearly that families differ in their coding orientation and in their power and control relations, i.e., they differ in their pedagogic codes. They also showed that pedagogic codes are not necessarily a function of the social group of the family. This points out to the importance of analyses which are not limited to the simplistic and reductionist relation of school achievement and social group.

From the point of view of educational research, our study may contribute to get a better understanding of family factors which explain the general failure of socially disadvantaged children. While suggesting that there are fundamental differences within the working class which are reflected in children’s primary socialisation and which, in turn, reflect on their school achievement, the study can lead schools and teachers to understand how some children succeed and others fail. These considerations may reinforce the relevant role that the school/teacher can have in changing childrens’ differential achievement. Teacher's work in the classroom requires the awareness of factors which intervene in child's primary socialisation and also the understanding of the possibilities offered by specific school practices in creating conditions to reduce the gap between distinct groups of children. We believe that teachers’ knowledge of primary socialisation discourses and practices may
give them a clear vision of the causes of success and failure of children from lower social backgrounds and enable teachers to act in a more explicit and efficient way in classroom contexts to improve these children’s learning.

An important aspect of the study concerns the model constructed to analyse family pedagogic codes. This model opens up new ways to explore the meaning of differential achievement in terms of the family-school relation. This is possible by the strong conceptual structure and explanatory power of the theory on which our research is based. The explanatory power of Bernstein’s internal language of description allowed us to use the same concepts in family and school contexts to broaden the relationships studied and conceptualise the results at a higher level. The application of the model in the analyses we carried out required an operationalisation of its concepts, through a language of description which was adequate to each of the relations under analysis. This methodological aspect constitutes, in terms of the model’s application, a fundamental dimension of the research, given the potentialities revealed in the analysis and interpretation of the results obtained.

NOTES

1. In Morais et al (1993) is given a detailed description of the pedagogic practices.

2. Lower social class refers to degrees 1 and 2 (academic qualifications not above primary schooling and manual occupations) within a scale 1-6 (composite of father's and mother's occupations and academic qualifications). Higher social class refers to degree 6 (university degree or equivalent and high non-manual occupations).

3. Simple cognitive competencies refer to memorisation and understanding of primary concepts at the lowest level. Complex cognitive competencies refer to the understanding of concepts at the highest level and the application of concepts to new situations (involving complex cognitive processes).

4. A detailed description of the instrument is in Morais and Neves (1993).

5. A detailed description of the interview’s guide can be seen in Morais and Neves (1993).

6. Jargon used by lower working class to refer to beating.

7. We considered that active work in agencies of challenge, opposition and resistance (e.g. unions, political parties) and in agencies of cultural reproduction (e.g. cultural and recreative associations) gives access of
lower working class to an elaborated orientation and to a distinct status in the social hierarchy regulated by the class structure.

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REFERENCES


Pedagogic practices in the family socialising context 
and children’s school achievement

Abstract

This paper describes a qualitative study about pedagogic practices in the family. The pedagogic code underlying family practices is characterised and related to specific social groups. Students’ achievement is discussed in relation to family and school pedagogic practices. The analysis of family pedagogic practice was based on a model derived from Bernstein’s theory. The model considers two main dimensions, the coding orientation and its specific realisations in both the instructional and regulative contexts. It provided indicators of the family discursive context and the form in which knowledges and values are transmitted.

The model developed allowed a deep and delicate analysis of the family socialising context. The study showed that families differ in their coding orientation and pedagogic practices and suggested that there are factors other than social groups to determine family’s pedagogic practice. It also suggested that specific familial practices may explain children’s differential achievement at school.