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“Don’t complain and do it properly”: ‘Pedagogicalized parents’ and the morality of doing homework

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Abstract

In the last decades, pedagogical studies and policies in western countries have proposed parental involvement in education as the formula for maximizing students’ success and increasing social equality. In the building of the family-school partnership, a crucial role is commonly attributed to parent-assisted homework. Therefore, parental involvement in homework has increased and the model of the “involved” and “pedagogically competent” parent has become common. Analyzing video-recorded parent-child interactions during homework, this paper illustrates how parents make relevant and educate their children to moral horizons concerning homework, education, and schooling. The moral beliefs evoked by the parents in the study are significantly aligned with the school culture. Parent-assisted homework therefore becomes a particularly relevant arena for children’s socialization into the cultural and moral horizons of the school system. Yet a socio-pedagogical issue emerges: if the school relies heavily on the family for homework activities, what happens to those children who cannot rely on school-aligned, pedagogically competent parents?

Keywords: parent-assisted homework, family-school partnership, pedagogicalized parents, parent-child interactions, morality

Abstract

Negli ultimi decenni, numerose ricerche e politiche educative nei paesi occidentali hanno proposto il coinvolgimento dei genitori nell’educazione scolastica dei figli come formula per promuovere il successo scolastico e l’inclusione sociale. Nella costruzione dell’alleanza scuola-famiglia, un ruolo fondamentale viene tipicamente attribuito alla realizzazione dei compiti a casa insieme ai genitori. Il coinvolgimento dei genitori nei compiti è quindi aumentato e il modello del genitore “coinvolto” e “pedagogicamente competente” è sempre più diffuso. Attraverso l’analisi di conversazioni video-registrate tra genitori e figli durante i compiti, l’articolo mostra come i genitori fanno riferimento e educano i propri figli a specifici orizzonti

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morali riguardanti i compiti, l'apprendimento e l'educazione. I valori morali evocati dai genitori in questo studio sono considerevolmente allineati alla cultura scolastica. Lo svolgimento dei compiti a casa insieme ai genitori diventa così un'arena per l'educazione dei bambini agli orizzonti culturali e morali che sono propri del sistema scolastico. Emerge dunque una questione socio-pedagogica particolarmente rilevante: se la scuola fa affidamento sulla famiglia per la realizzazione delle attività scolastiche, che cosa accade a quei bambini che non possono contare su genitori pedagogicamente competenti e allineati alla cultura scolastica?

Parole chiave: compiti a casa con i genitori, alleanza scuola-famiglia, genitori pedagogizzati, interazioni genitori-figli, orizzonti morali

Introduction

In the last decades, many pedagogical studies and policies in western countries have concurred in proposing parental involvement in education as the formula for maximizing students' success and increasing social equality (see among others, Bolognesi, 2016; Capperucci *et al.*, 2018; Dusi, 2006; Epstein, 1990, 2001; Gigli, 2012; Milani, 2012; Pati, 2019). In the building of the family-school partnership, a crucial role is commonly attributed to parent-teacher conferences (Amadini, 2019; Caronia, Dalledonne Vandini, 2019) and parent-assisted homework (Caronia, Colla, 2021; Colla, 2020; Colla, Caronia, 2020; Bolognesi, Dalledonne Vandini, 2020). In particular, being a school activity carried out in the domestic space, parent-assisted homework is considered a fundamental accomplishment for bridging family and school on a daily basis (Montalbetti, Lisimberti, 2020).

For this reason, much pedagogical research has focused on this activity and provided guidelines and 'good practices' to achieve effective parental involvement (see among others, Epstein, 1986, 1995; Meirieu, 2000, trad. it. 2002; Walker *et al.*, 2004). For example, Epstein (1995) suggests that parental participation in homework should encompass not only the creation of home environments supporting children as students, but also the active monitoring of homework. Parents should assist their children, discuss what they are learning in the classroom, and help them acquire new skills. In a few words, parents are expected to make their homes «school-like» (Epstein, 1995, p. 83), that is «duplicate the school in ways that increase the probability of students' school success» (*Ibidem*). In school-like families, parents know how to help their children with schoolwork and take every opportunity to do so. The model of "good parent" emerging from these guidelines is what Popkewitz calls a «pedagogicalized parent» (2003, p. 37). When dealing with homework, the pedagogicalized parent is not only available and willing to assist the child, but also fully competent in providing help in ways that are aligned with the school culture. In Epstein's words (1986), the parents building school-like families are able to translate the curriculum of the school into home tasks and, more importantly, apply the principles of effective organization, teaching, and learning in the home context.

In sum, pedagogicalized parents act like competent 'surrogate teachers': they reproduce the cultural and pedagogical patterns of the school inside the home, thus maximizing children's school-aligned learning (Popkewitz, 2003). Consistently with this long-standing pedagogical discourse on parental involvement in education, parents' participation in homework has increased in recent years. In Italy, parents spend a considerable amount of time (i.e., about seven hours per week) doing homework with their kids (Di Cristofaro, 2018; Kremer-Sadlik,

Fatigante, 2015). Homework has thus become a family accomplishment and, as such, a particularly morally dense educational site where formal and informal learning practices coexist (Pontecorvo *et al.*, 2013).

Considering parent-assisted homework as an arena for children's socialization into «moral life-worlds» (Ochs, Kremer-Sadlik, 2007, p. 5), this video-based study illustrates how moral and cultural horizons concerning the accomplishment of homework as well as education and schooling more in general are assumed, evoked, and conveyed in the unfolding of naturally occurring parent-child interactions.

1. Parent-assisted homework as a socializing moral accomplishment

As much research has emphasized, homework constitutes a significant component of family routines (Kremer-Sadlik, Fatigante, 2015; Kremer-Sadlik, Gutierrez, 2013; Wingard, 2006a, 2006b). Like other activities entailing interactions between parents and children², homework constitutes an opportunity for family members to locally (re)affirm and negotiate «implicit and explicit messages about right and wrong, better and worse, rules, norms, obligations, duties, etiquette, moral reasoning, virtue, character, and other dimensions on how to lead a moral life» (Ochs, Kremer-Sadlik, 2007, p. 5). In and through conversations during homework, parents and children socialize each other into the micro culture of the family (Formenti, 2000; Holliday, 1999) and the larger cultures of the communities it belongs to.

Yet, as Pontecorvo and colleagues (2013) point out, parent-assisted homework is more than a family activity: it is a “crossroad” between family and school. Being located at the intersection between the family life managed by parents and the institutional world organized by the school, parent-assisted homework provides parents and children with unique occasions for making explicit and negotiating moral standards, beliefs, rules, and expectations concerning not only the ongoing homework activity, but also broader concepts that are more or less directly related to homework, such as learning, studying, and schooling.

The next section describes the data and methodology of this study, which aims at illustrating *how*, i.e., through what linguistic and interactional practices, parents and children make relevant and educate each other to specific learning- and education-related moral horizons in the unfolding of homework interactions.

2. Data and methodology

The data presented in this study are drawn from a corpus of 60 video-recorded homework sessions totaling 2440 minutes. The 19 families involved in the project live in two regions in the north of Italy and are composed of two working parents and at least one child aged six-nine years, i.e., attending primary school³. Participants were recruited by the author and her

² Longstanding research has illustrated how children are educated to culture-specific ways of thinking and acting in and through everyday interactions with caregivers during various family activities, such as dinner (see among others, Blum-Kulka, 1997; Caronia *et al.*, 2021; Galatolo, Caronia, 2018; Ochs *et al.*, 1996; Ochs, Shohet, 2006; Pontecorvo, Arcidiacono, 2007), sports activities (Gottzén, Kremer-Sadlik, 2012; Kremer-Sadlik, Kim, 2007), reading and watching tv (Caronia, 2002, 2012). *From now on, unless otherwise noted, all footnotes and translations are the Author's.*

³ Among the nineteen families involved, sixteen are from Italy, one from North Africa, and two from Eastern Europe. In all families, parents and children master the Italian language and use this language when doing homework.

colleagues through their personal and work connections and were first contacted by phone or e-mail to explore their willingness to participate in the study. To reduce the potential impact of the researcher and the video-recording tools, the video-tape recording was self-administered by the parents in compliance with the researcher's guidelines. The participants' consent was obtained according to Italian law n. 196/2003 and EU Regulation n. 2016/679 (GDPR), which regulate the handling of personal and sensitive data. For the sake of anonymity, all names have been fictionalized.

For the aims of the analysis, data have been transcribed and analyzed adopting a conversation analysis informed approach (Sacks *et al.*, 1974; Sidnell, Stivers, 2013; for transcription conventions, see the *Appendix*)⁴. In line with the multimodal approach to social interaction (Goodwin, 2000), transcripts have been enriched with notations for gaze, gestures, body movements, and orientations to objects when treated as relevant by the participants. Transcripts are presented in two lines: the original Italian transcript is followed by an idiomatic translation in American English.

Data were first observed on the basis of a broad definition of “moral talk”, i.e., any instance of implicit and explicit messages about good and bad, appropriate and inappropriate, virtues, values, obligations, prohibitions, general principles, duties, and etiquette (Ochs, Kremer-Sadlik, 2007). After repeated observation, we identified 34 sequences of “homework morality”, i.e., interactional exchanges where parents and children evoke moral messages concerning the accomplishment of the ongoing homework activity and, relatedly, learning, schooling, and education. Focusing specifically on parents' discursive practices⁵, we have then regrouped the sequences into different clusters according to the types of moral messages evoked. The examples presented in the next sections illustrate how parents evoked the moral belief that doing homework is the child's *duty* (section n. 3) and the moral imperative of doing homework *properly* (section n. 4). Interestingly, these messages of *homework morality* are deeply related to models and moral expectations concerning “good parenting”, childhood, and family life (Gigli, 2007, 2016; Harkness, Super, 1996; Ochs, Kremer-Sadlik, 2015).

3. *Doing homework as the child's “duty”*

Sequences of children's negative evaluations and complaints about homework constitute a particularly interesting arena for the local negotiation of the value and meaning of homework and school-related activities. In the following excerpt, the mother rejects and problematizes the child's complaint about the amount of homework and explicitly frames homework as the child's duty.

Ex. 1 – F3H6 (43.10 – 43.45)

⁴ The theoretical and methodological approach of Conversation Analysis allows to identify and analyze the micro and multimodal details of parent-child conversations. Indeed, we assume that it is through such micro details of interaction that participants demonstrate their orientation and give relevance to macro dimensions of social life, like cultural and moral beliefs, ideologies concerning parenthood, childhood, education, etc.

⁵ We decided to focus on parents' moral messages in order to illustrate how the children were educated to specific moral ideologies in and through homework interactions. However, the analyses also illustrate how children actively contributed to the interaction and paved the way to parents' moral intervention.

M = Mother

B = Benedetta (seven years old, second grade)

- 1 B oh dobbiam colorare anche le maschere (.)
oh we have to color the masks too (.)
- 2 B ma perché la maestra ci ha dato così tanti compiti?
but why did the teacher give us so much homework? ((*whining*))
- 3 M ma dai che non è vero=
but come on that’s not true=
- 4 B =son tantissimi:
=it’s a lot: ((*whining*))
- 5 M ma va là (.) tu non hai mai visto come sono tanti compiti
come on (.) you have never seen what a lot of homework is
- 6 (2.0)
- 7 B c’ho da fare quarantamila operazioni cioè
I have to do forty thousand calculations, I mean ((*in an irritated tone*))
- 8 (3.0)
- 9 **M è il tuo dovere eh.
it’s your duty eh.**
- 10 (3.0)
- 11 **M mica lamentarti
don’t complain**
- 12 B scherzavo.
I was kidding. ((*taking the pencil case*))
- 13 M eh sarà meglio.
eh you better have been.
- 14 B ((*opens her pencil case, takes a pen and starts doing the exercise*))

After reading the title on the homework page (not transcribed), B suddenly remembers (see the change of state token “oh” in the turn at line 1, Heritage, 1984⁶) an additional assignment (“we have to color the masks *too*”, line 1). At this point, she produces a complaint concerning the teacher’s behavior in the form of a request for an account (Sterponi, 2003) (“but why did the teacher give us so much homework?”, line 2). Through this turn, B does several things. First, by prefacing the request for an account with the contrastive connective maker “but” (“ma” in Italian), B conveys that her expectations concerning homework have not been met,

⁶ Heritage (1984) defines the particle “oh” occurring in natural conversation as a “change of state token”. According to Heritage, “oh” marks a sudden recollection or the receipt of new information.

thus projecting a negative shadow on what is upcoming (Sterponi, 2003). Second, through the very format of the request for an account, B presents the teacher's behavior as inexplicable, thus questioning its moral appropriateness (*Ibidem*). In addition, by characterizing homework as "so much", the child unequivocally presents the amount of homework as exaggerate. Finally, note that B explicitly refers to the teacher as the *subject* of the sentence, thus attributing her the full agency, and therefore responsibility, in the problematized action of giving "so much" homework. In this way, and by means of resorting to a whiny tone (line 2), B conveys her turn as a complaint about the amount of homework assigned by the teacher.

In her reply (line 3), M clearly disaffiliates with B's complaint. She urges the child to abandon the complaint ("come on") and bluntly denies the child's characterization of homework as "so much" ("that's not true"). However, in the following turn, B maintains the whiny tone and even increases the characterization of the homework quantity as exaggerate by describing it as "a lot" (line 4). In this way, the child legitimizes her complaint and seeks the mother's affiliation. However, M rejects the child's complaint again ("come on", line 5) and then disaffiliates with her by delegitimizing the child as a complainer on the basis of her scarce experience ("you have never seen what a lot of homework is", line 5).

After a two-second gap (line 6), B continues complaining, this time in an irritated tone. She reports the assignments by resorting to an extreme case formulation (Pomerantz, 1986)⁷ to emphasize their quantity ("I have to do *forty thousand* calculations, I mean", line 7). By shifting from generic descriptions of the complainable ("so much", line 2, and "a lot", line 4) to a detailed, albeit still exaggerated, description of it ("forty thousand calculations", line 7), B provides a more accurate recount of her grievance, which makes M's affiliation even more sequentially relevant (Drew, 1998; Drew, Holt, 1988).

At this point, the mother explicitly formulates the moral belief that homework is the child's duty ("it's your duty eh", line 9) and issues a negative directive problematizing the child's complaint and ordering to stop it ("don't complain", line 11). Through these turns (lines 9 and 11), M abandons the discussion on the amount of homework (too much *vs* not too much), treating it as irrelevant. Furthermore, she conveys the child's moral obligation to do the homework, regardless of its amount. M's characterization of homework as the child's "duty" resonates with the idea of «homework as the job of childhood» (Corno, Xu, 2004; Qvortrup, 2001). Doing homework is thus framed as a moral obligation, which the child must carry out without complaining.

After M's call to duty, B acknowledges her behavior as deviant from the moral norm and tries to neutralize its inappropriateness by retrospectively defining her complaint sequence as "kidding" (line 12). Concurrently, she starts multimodally aligning with M's directive: she takes the school equipment (line 12) and starts doing the assignments (line 14). Confronted with the child's description of the complaint as a joke, the mother maintains a serious attitude by issuing a veiled threat ("eh you better have been", line 13). Through this severe turn, M further constructs B's complaining behavior as inappropriate and conveys the importance of the moral beliefs and obligations emerged in interaction.

In a similar fashion, the mother in the following excerpt makes relevant the idea that completing all the assignments is a moral obligation for the child. We join the interaction when Ludovico has just finished doing a math exercise.

⁷ Pomerantz (1986) coined the expression "Extreme Case Formulation" to indicate verbal formulations that describe facts in an exaggerate ("extreme") way.

Ex. 2 - F2H6 (07.45 - 08.20)

M = Mother

L = Ludovico (seven years old, second grade)

- 1 L fatto. (.) li ho fatti tutti
done. (.) I finished them all
- 2 M >vai.< quelli di sotto? devi scriverli nel quaderno,
>ok.< the ones below? you have to write them in the notebook,
- 3 M guardando la figura.
by looking at the image.
- 4 L la maestra non mi ha detto di far[li
the teacher didn’t tell me to [do them
- 5 M **[LUDO, HAI PAGINA TRENTUNO
[LUDO, YOU HAVE TO DO PAGE**
- 6 M **E HAI PAGINA VENTINOVE DA FARE (.) POCHE STORIE. AVANTI.
THIRTY-ONE AND PAGE TWENTY-NINE (.) NO EXCUSES. GET GOING.**
- 7 L °m:....↑°
- 8 L ((*leafs through the book, takes the notebook and opens it*))
- 9 (11.0)
- 10 M **a me non piace mica quando si fanno delle storie.
I don’t like it when one makes excuses.**
- 11 M **son da far tutti, si fanno tutti (.) eh
they all have to be done, one does them all (.) eh**

In line 1, L declares he has finished the exercise he was doing (“done”) and, therefore, all the assigned exercises (“I finished them all”). M quickly acknowledges L’s statement (“ok”, line 2), then produces an interrogative turn concerning other exercises that are located at the bottom of the page (“the ones below?”, line 2). Despite prosodically constituting her utterance as a question (see the rising intonation), M gives L no time to reply and immediately issues a directive concerning the exercises (“you have to write them on the notebook by looking at the image”, lines 2 and 3). By straightforwardly instructing L on how to carry out “the exercises below”, M demonstrates she believes that the following exercises are to be done and conveys doing *all* the assigned exercises as a straightforward and unquestionable obligation for the child.

However, instead of aligning with M’s directive, L reports the teacher’s claim (line 4), specifically what the teacher *did not* say (“the teacher didn’t tell me to do them”), thus treating M’s previous directive (line 2) as beyond the teacher’s request and therefore overzealous and illegitimate. Even if L’s turn (line 4) is constructed more as an information giving than as an explicit challenge to M’s directive, M reacts immediately (see the overlapping). First, she raises her voice, thus communicating her exasperation. In addition, she opens her turn by calling

the child by his (nick)name (“Ludo”). Since L is the only potential interlocutor for M, the use of the child’s (nick)name is marked and does more than just addressing (Lerner, 2003): it is oriented to the child’s lack of compliance and emphasizes his personal responsibility (Galeano, Fasulo, 2009; Pauletto *et al.*, 2017). Then, the mother makes explicit the assignments that L has to do (“you have to do page thirty-one and page twenty-nine”, lines 5 and 6), orders L to stop his behavior, which is categorized as “making excuses” (“no excuses”, line 6), and finally urges him to continue doing homework (“get going”, line 7). Through this turn (lines 5 and 6), not only does M convey the child’s obligation to do *all* the exercises, but she also treats the child’s resistance as problematic and unacceptable. After expressing his annoyance in a soft voice (°m:::↑°, line 7), L visibly displays his incipient compliance with M’s directives (line 8).

After 11 seconds of silence, the mother produces a negative evaluation, once again categorizing L’s behavior as “making excuses” (“I don’t like it when one makes excuses”, line 10). By further problematizing L’s conduct, even after 11 seconds and despite the child’s visible incipient compliance, M emphasizes the seriousness of his behavior. Then, she issues a general rule (line 11). The impersonal deontic declarative (“si fanno tutti” in Italian, see Rossi, Zinken, 2016) and the logical construction “X (then) Y” (“they all have to be done, (then) one does them all”) generalize M’s statement, thus further presenting doing all the assignments as the obvious, morally appropriate behavior the child should adopt. In other words, throughout the excerpt and particularly through the final rule statement, M ‘naturalizes’ the belief that the child should do all the exercises, thus (re)creating and sharing this culture-specific moral expectation as taken for granted.

As the next section illustrates, children in the study were not only expected to do all the assignments without complaining, but also to do them neatly.

4. *Doing homework “properly” as a moral imperative*

In an ethnographic study on parental involvement in education in Italy and the U.S., Kremer-Sadlik and Fatigante (2015) reported that parents (especially American ones) insisted that their children met high standards in doing homework. During supervision, the parents adopted a «teacher-like evaluative eye» (p. 75) and exercised their authority to make sure that their children did homework neatly.

In a similar fashion, parents in this study urged their children to do homework “properly” and strive for excellence. Evidently, what constitutes “proper work” and “excellence” is not pre-determined, but rather locally constituted in and through the conversation. As the examples in this section illustrate, parents frequently took for granted and made explicit the obligation to be tidy as well as to write and color neatly as an essential requirement in doing homework. The brief example below shows how the mother strongly problematizes the child’s sloppy handwriting.

Ex. 3 – F2H2 (37.37 – 37.47)

M = Mother

L = Ludovico (seven years old, second grade)

- 1 L *((writes the word "rosa" on his notebook))*
- 2 M **scrivi per bene quella R LUDOVICO:
write well that R LUDOVICO:**
- 3 M **^MA DAI MO' DUNQUE:
^COME ON NO:W**
- 4 M **^((moves her open left hand outward))^[fig. 3a]**
- 5 L *((erases))*
- 6 L *((rewrites))*



Figure 3a

In line 2, M firmly reproaches L for the “r” he has just written (see line 1). The use of the child’s proper name in turn-final position (“Ludovico”, line 2) intensifies the directive, increasing the constraints posed on him to comply (Galeano, Fasulo, 2009; Pauletto, Aronsson, Galeano, 2017). M further conveys the problematic nature of L’s writing through the following exhortation (“come on now”, line 3), which is issued at a higher volume and accompanied by a gesture conveying M’s exasperation (line 4, fig. 3a).

Through this brief yet strong reproach (lines 2-4), M discursively constructs L’s handwriting as sloppy, treats it as an unacceptable moral breach, and holds the child accountable for it.

In the next example, another mother problematizes the child’s untidiness and bad handwriting by urging her to critically observe the work she has done. In other words, the mother prompts the child to examine and reflect on the quality of her own homework, specifically her handwriting. Thus doing, the mother educates her child to self-evaluation as an essential skill and moral obligation in order to do homework appropriately.

Ex. 4 – F15H1 v. 4 (02.00 – 02.25)

M = Mother

R = Roberta (seven years old, second grade)

1 M mamma mia Roberta guarda <come hai scritto>

oh my goodness Roberta look <how you have been writing>

2 R ((looks at the written page))

3 M Guarda. ^lo vedi gli spazi dei quadretti come li utilizzi?

Look. ^have you noticed how you have been using the spaces of the squares?

4 M ^((points to a line on the page))

5 M ^O è tutto appiccicato ^^o è tutto staccato

^it* is either too close ^^or too far apart

6 M ^((brings her palms together))^[fig. 4a]

7 M ^^((puts her hands apart))^[fig. 4b]

8 (2.0) ((M looks at the written page))

9 M ^Ma questa ti sembra una A?

^does this one look like an A to you?

10 M ^((points to a letter on the page))

11 (1.5)

12 M dai impégnati per favore.

come on apply yourself please.

*i.e. the words/letters



Figure 3a



Figure 3b

As soon as M approaches the child and looks at the notebook (not transcribed), she strongly problematizes her handwriting (line 1). In opening with an exclamation conveying disappointment (“oh my goodness”), M treats R’s handwriting as shocking and prompts the child to examine it (“look how you have been writing”). After R looks at the written page (line 2), the mother starts guiding her observation by multimodally indicating the problematic aspect of her writing, i.e., the spacing between the words/letters (“have you noticed how you have been using the spaces of the squares?”, line 3; she points to a line on the page, line 4). Then, the mother makes clear what is wrong with the use of space by describing R’s writing as “either too close or too far apart” (line 5). M’s concurrent hand movements (lines 6 and 7, fig. 4a and 4b) visually represent and intensify the concepts being uttered (Kendon, 2009). In this way, the child’s writing is constructed as doubly wrong: not only is it excessively close or far apart, but it is also irregular.

After two seconds of silence (line 8), M makes relevant another problematic aspect in R’s writing. She points to a letter on the page (line 10) and addresses a rhetorical question to R (“does this one look like an A to you?”, line 9). M’s question treats the child as already knowing the answer, i.e., that the letter does not look like an A. In this way, the mother holds R accountable for knowing that the letter is badly written and not having corrected it. M’s concluding remark (“come on apply yourself please”, line 12) retrospectively ascribes R’s messy handwriting to her lack of application and makes relevant the obligation for the child to concentrate on homework.

The next example illustrates how the mother evokes an obligation that goes beyond doing homework ‘neatly’. In fact, she pushes her child to strive for excellence by improving her work as much as possible. The mother also prompts the child’s capacity to see her work from the point of view of an Other (Duranti, 2015; Galatolo, Caronia, 2018), i.e., a competent observer like the teacher. We join the conversation when the mother is checking the child’s homework.

Ex. 5 – F1H1 v.2 (08.45 – 10.35)

M = Mother

V = Vale (six years old, first grade)

- 1 M Qui hai colorato abbastanza bene, qua:, ^secondo me:,
Here you have colored quite well, he:re, ^in my opinio:n,
- 2 M ^((turns the page and points to an image))
- 3 V Ihiih[ihihih]
- 4 M [puoi colorare un po' me:glia. Mi sbaglio?
[you can color a bit be:tter. Am I wrong?
- 5 V ((takes a crayon))
- 6 M Fai a modo.
Do it properly.
- 7 14 seconds omitted: V colors the image requested by M. M looks at V.
- 8 V ((takes another color and starts coloring another image))
- 9 M Quello va già bene
That one is already ok
- 10 V No no meglio
No no better ((coloring))
- 11 M ((smiles))
- 12 30 seconds omitted: V colors all the images on the page
- 13 V ((places the crayon on the table))
- 14 **M secondo te, se uno vede un compito fatto così**
In your opinion, if one sees homework done like this
- 15 **M (.) o uno fatto tutto- colorato un po' male, cosa dice?**
(.) or homework done all- colored a bit badly, what does one say?
- 16 **M C'è differenza o è uguale?**
Is there a difference or is it the same?
- 17 V Differenza
Difference
- 18 M Eh sì. Adesso va mo:lto meglio brava.
Right. Now it's mu:ch better well done.

M has just finished checking V's homework when she issues a negative evaluation of the child's coloring (lines 1 and 4). It is interesting to note that she does this in a very indirect way: she begins by positively evaluating an image colored by the child ("here you have colored quite well", line 1), then she makes relevant another image through the deictic "here" uttered in a continuing intonation (line 1). However, before saying anything about this second image,

M frames what she is about to say as her personal opinion (“in my opinion”, line 2) and then finally produces a very mitigated and indirect negative evaluation by emphasizing the child’s ability to slightly improve her work and asking for the child’s confirmation (“you can color a bit better. Am I wrong?”, line 4). By producing a mitigated negative evaluation of V’s work, M demonstrates her orientation toward protecting the child’s face and, therefore, her self-esteem and confidence. In addition, and more importantly, by stressing that the child could improve her work by coloring “a bit better”, M demonstrates to presuppose and conveys the importance of striving for excellence in doing homework. When V displays her intention to start coloring (she takes a crayon, line 5), M issues a directive (“do it properly”, line 6). Through the adverb “properly”, M communicates that there is a ‘proper’ way to do homework: that ‘proper way’ is the one that meets school-like standards and even aims to the excellence.

After coloring the image requested by M (line 7), V takes another crayon thus conveying that she is about to start coloring another image (line 8). At this point, M communicates that there is no need for V to color that picture since it is “already ok” (line 9). However, V expresses her disagreement with M’s assessment by saying that it can be improved (“no no better”, line 10) and concurrently starts coloring. By improving her work, V demonstrates her own orientation toward doing her best: she is not satisfied with her homework being “ok” and works to make it “better”. In a few words, V demonstrates to have been educated to striving for excellence.

When V finishes coloring all the images on the page (lines 12 and 13), M opens a sequence of reflexive moral talk (Kremer-Sadlik, 2019). After framing her turn as a request for the child’s opinion (“in your opinion”, line 14), M asks V what anyone would say about her (well-colored) work compared to work “all colored a bit badly” (lines 14-16). By asking the child to see her work from the perspective of an Other (“one”) (Duranti, 2015; Galatolo, Caronia, 2018), M prompts the child’s capacity to evaluate her own work in a detached, unbiased way. The invoked Other is evidently the teacher: by making relevant the assessment of this competent Other, M educates V to keeping in mind the teacher’s standards, expectations, and future evaluation. Interestingly, M’s question (lines 14-16) turns out to be less a genuine request for an opinion than a rhetorical question (see M’s positive evaluation of V’s answer, line 18). In other words, M is not asking for V’s opinion, but she is verifying if the child can make the correct, teacher-like judgment. Through her correct answer (line 17), V demonstrates that she can evaluate her own work on the basis of school-like, teacher-oriented standards.

5. Discussion

Being at the intersection between family and school, parent-assisted homework provides parents and children with precious occasions for making explicit and negotiating moral principles concerning education, schooling, and learning. As the analysis has shown, the parents in this study demonstrated to assume and made relevant the beliefs according to which homework is the child’s duty (ex. 1 and 2) and the child is morally required to do their best when doing homework (ex. 3, 4, 5).

The idea that homework is the child’s duty was evoked particularly in response to children’s complaints about homework and/or the teacher’s conduct. If children’s complaints were not infrequent in the data, parents always rejected them and made relevant the child’s obligation to do all homework exercises. By ordering the children not to complain (line 11, ex. 1) and framing their attempts to skip homework exercises as “making excuses” (lines 6 and 10, ex. 2), parents strongly problematized children’s complaining behavior and conveyed doing all the homework as an unquestionable duty for the child (Corno, Xu, 2004; Qvortrup, 2001).

Completing the assignments, however, was not enough. As illustrated in the analysis, parents checked children's homework and assessed its quality according to 'teacher-like' standards. In particular, they reproached their children whenever their writing and coloring was not neat (ex. 3, 4, 5). In so doing, parents discursively constructed children's obligation to do homework properly (see ex. 3 and 4) and even strive for excellence (ex. 5). Through such evaluative sequences, parents also urged their children to self-evaluate their work (lines 1, 3, 9, ex. 4) and adopt the gaze of an Other (evidently, the teacher) when assessing their own homework (lines 14-16, ex. 5). In so doing, parents educated their child to adopting the «professional vision» of the school community when doing homework (Goodwin, 1994), that is an evaluative gaze aligned with school- and teacher-like standards.

Even though the analysis mainly focused on the moral messages evoked by the parents, it is worth stressing that children actively contributed to homework interactions and paved the way to parents' formulation of school-like rules, standards, and expectations. Indeed, through their deviant behavior (e.g., complaining and writing in sloppy ways), children made relevant parental intervention, thus becoming active agents of their own education (Ochs, Schieffelin, 1984; Pontecorvo *et al.*, 2001).

'Pedagogicalized parents' raising 'good pupils': Concluding remarks

As illustrated in this study, parental assistance with homework entails far more than teaching school subjects. While helping children with homework, the parents in the study carried out a remarkable *moral work*: they demonstrated their orientation and socialized their children to culture-specific obligations, beliefs, and expectations. The moral rules and assumptions made relevant by the parents during homework concur in delineating a specific model of «good pupil» (Thornberg, 2009). The «good pupil» presupposed in parents' talk is one that gives importance to learning and schooling and does not complain about homework, whatever is its amount. In addition, the «good pupil» strives to do their best in school-related activities, such as homework, and can self-evaluate their own work in ways that are consistent with the teacher's evaluative eye.

Interestingly, the model of the «good pupil» made relevant by the parents appears to be in line with the moral system proposed by the school. According to Thornberg (2009), «the rule of doing one's best is a basic rule that teachers occasionally draw students' attention to» (p. 29). Similarly, doing all the homework exercises without complaining is a moral obligation consistent with the school and classroom culture (Boostrom, 1991; Thornberg, 2008, 2009). Furthermore, some practices deployed by the parents such as evaluating the child's work with a 'teacher-like gaze' appear significantly aligned with the school culture. In a few words, the parents in this study acted like «pedagogicalized parents» (Popkewitz, 2003, p. 37): they demonstrated to know, relied upon, and reproduced the school culture within the family. In behaving like 'surrogate teachers', parents demonstrated their orientation to the family-school alliance (Contini, 2012) and locally (re)built it on a daily basis. In such «school-like families» (Epstein, 1995, p. 83) where parents comply with the model of the 'involved parent' proposed by policies and guidelines, parent-assisted homework constitutes a particularly relevant arena for children's socialization into the cultural and moral horizons of the school system. A disturbing socio-pedagogical issue therefore emerges: if the school relies heavily on the family for homework activities, what happens to those children who do not have «school-like families» and cannot be educated to school-like standards inside the home?

Appendix: Transcription conventions

WORD	louder talk
°word°	talk at lower volume
[word]	overlapping talk
(.)	pause shorter than 0.2 seconds
(1.5)	pause measured in seconds and tenths of a second
=	absence of any discernable silence between two turns
>word<	rushed talk
<word>	slow talk
((word))	description of nonverbal events (e.g. gestures)
wo:rd	prolongation of the sound
^	point where nonverbal event begins
<u>word</u>	talk uttered with emphasis
.	falling intonation
,	slightly rising intonation
?	strongly rising intonation (typical of questions)
↑	rising tone
*	translator’s note

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