

## Relationships Between School and Family: The Adolescents' Perspective

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**Abstract:** The study describes, conceptualizes and tries to explain the present status of the school-family relationships from the adolescents' perspective. It is a part of the research carried out within the grant entitled *Partnerships School-Family-Community. A Case Study in the County of Alba* project which is in the process of development. Our purpose was to find out what perceptions, representations and behavioral patterns the adolescents have towards their parents' involvement in education and towards the relationships between school and family, in the political and socio-economical context of Romania during the transition period to a democratic society.

The specificity of the proposed theme employs mainly interpretative research principles and the research design clearly shows details from the participants' perspective. I used the focus group technique, recommended for obtaining substantial data from teenagers. The collected data was analyzed using the techniques and procedures of Grounded Theory and the software package ATLAS.ti 5.0.

The research confirms that adolescents have a different perspective than their parents on the family's style of education, on the attitudes and behaviors in school-family-community relations; all these influence their reactions and ultimately, their psycho-social development. Considering the overlapping spheres of influence theory, the representations that the student has acquired in high school

overlap with the representations of his/her family experience, thus providing him/her with a new and broader horizon of understanding of the family microcosm in relation to the school and community environment.

**Key words:** *adolescent, school, family, community, partnership, Grounded Theory*

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## 1. A Short Overview of the Romanian School System

Romania, which until 1989 had been led by Ceausescu's communist regime, had had a European-type system of education ensuring a series of primary objectives characterizing this system: "the high degree of inclusion of school age population in the education system, the duration of the compulsory education, the process of gradually extending pre-school and pre-university education etc." (A. MIROIU, PASTI, CODIȚĂ, IVAN & M. MIROIU, 1998, p.17). Yet, the Romanian education was essentially conceived to prepare the manpower which was necessary for the socialist industry, and by means of distinct forms to ensure staff for the communist party. Within the limits of the realities of a totalitarian social and political system, the functioning of the Romanian education system as ideological and administrative project suffered some changes as a response to the pressure of the society's elite for the development of Information Technology (IT) and for the study of foreign languages. Besides this, as it was considered unproductive, education was underfinanced, the infrastructure was thus outdated and deteriorated and the teaching staff was undervalued and underpaid. [1]

After 1989 the institutional structure of education in the Romanian society as inherited from the communist regime underwent many changes. This problem is consistently analyzed in many empirical research works as well as in diagnoses which manage to outline the current situation of the Romanian education system. Such a study is "The Romanian Education Today" (MIROIU et al., 1998) which among others analyzes the features and the tendencies of Western forms of education introduced in Romania during the eight years of transition. The authors of the study found the following features characterizing this process:

"a) The organization of the education according to the needs of the education system and not according to society's needs. [...] b) The tendencies of reducing the period of schooling are situated towards an anti-European streamline. [...] c) Last but not least, the rigidity of the system is non-European in character" (pp.33-35). [2]

This part of the analysis of the institutional transformations ends with the following words:

"Institutional changes will be foreseen in the future, but they are not welcome until they are based on a modern conception referring to the role and aim of the education system, and until the reformation of the system is reconsidered from the perspective of the society without being considered as it has happened so far, from the perspective of the system interests and of the bureaucracy inside the system" (p.35). [3]

Eight years later, in a different study (STOICA, 2006, p.245), the changes produced in the education are evaluated as follows:

"... In Romania the field of education is probably one which has undergone as many changes as possible during the last 15 years. The structure of the education system has gone through many changes, creating chaos for the students in the final grades of school cycles, because of the changes brought to graduation exams and to the content of the education grid." [4]

In an important study on the "Social Policies in Romania during the Transition Period" ZAMFIR (2000) pertinently analyzes "a series of critical points which can turn themselves in a similar number of crises" in the education system. Among them, the author quotes: "The relationship between school and society remains critical. The capacity of the school to establish integrated relationships with the students' families remains severely underdeveloped" (p.28). [5]

Rural education represents the most vulnerable part of the system. If I take into account the fact that 40% of the population lives in rural areas, then I can talk about a real crisis. The study "Rural Education in Romania" (JIGAU et al., 2002) published the results of the investigation: "The Diagnosis of the State of Education in Rural Areas. Causes and Malfunctions." Within the proposed work frames, the relationships between school, family and community were approached in a different way in the rural environment. The research considered the fact that decentralization and the autonomy of educational institutions represent one of the main objectives of the reformation of Romanian education. Starting from this assumption, the partnership between school, family and community must become an important instrument in the efficient functioning of the educational institutions. Thus, the new regulations stress the necessity of parents' active involvement in the school activity. [6]

In the research it was found out that the statements of the interviewed parents are characterized by a "conformist character," they are reduced to simply mentioning the cooperation with school, without mentioning "the actual ways and means through which this cooperation is achieved." The investigation identified the fact that the main field of cooperation between school and family is represented by "solving the school's material and administrative problems," and in the second place there is "the problem of children's participation at the schooling process" understood as an improvement of school attendance, fighting against the phenomenon of absenteeism and school abandonment. This situation is far from what ideally characterizes a functional relationship between school and family. [7]

All the attempts at reforming the education system have been so far the result of political decisions. Yet, I deal with a paradox, as one realizes that while the politicians in power strongly state that the reformation represents a priority for them, the political sphere remained indifferent towards the content of this reformation and left it to the education institutions and to the teachers. But it is impossible to make a reformation without a financial support, and this is

why November 2005 saw the longest strike of the Romanian teachers so far, and it was mainly the result of the fact that the government did not respect the law stating the gradual allocation, until 2008 of a 6% of the GDP for education, and thus the promises of granting salary raises for teachers were not respected. Mircea MICLEA—the minister of Education and Research during that period gave up his position because of this, but not before sending to the Romanian Parliament "A Report on the State of the National Education System" (2005). Among the problems which the national education system is confronted with, as it is shown in this report, the following are of utmost importance:

1. Chronic under financing: Although the European average in financing education represents 5,22% of the GDP and in case of the newly entered states this percent is 5,31%, in Romania the financing of education has remained of 4%.
2. The quality of education: The results at the international tests (PISA, TIMSS, and PIRLS) show that the Romanian education system is situated at the median level or below the average of the OECD countries. These results tell even more about the intrinsic functioning of the system than the Olympics' exceptional results do. The latter are largely the result of personal qualities and not of the system performances. In such circumstances, it becomes a necessity to implement mechanisms which ensure the quality at the system and at the institution level.
3. Decentralization of the pre-university system of education: The decentralization process which was started must be continued resolutely, by means of a coherent strategy. All important decisions regarding the personnel, as well as regarding obtaining and spending the budget *must reach* the level of the school and the level of the local council. This is the main way of rationalizing the school network (which in the rural areas is of 10 students/1 teacher) and of reducing the costs. [8]

The report is the first one in Romania to make a detailed analysis on the grounds of a system of educational indicators, drawn up according to international systems (OECD, EUROSTAT). The author of the report considers that the successful implementation of the measures and of the action plans deriving from the report involves two conditions: political and financial support. [9]

## 2. The Theoretical and Empirical Support of the Research

*Theoretical development and recent research demonstrate that the organizations based on communities, such as schools, serve the social strategy of the organization and mobilization of the groups of people in order to achieve actions with specific objectives.* They embody their members' ideals and they give value to the public debate and to the decisions of social politics. These kinds of organizations represent *democracy in action to solve the local problems.* [10]

Schools are the key of the communities' welfare and the future prosperity of nations. Their health is a barometer of the democratic way of life and, that is why, one of the important problems during the transition period is represented by the *school transformation into centers of the community life.* This social change is being built on people's desire to make the schools become better and better for all the children. I state that for the Romanian society, trapped into a too long and difficult transition, *the partnerships centered on schools represent an important dimension of the civil society's construction.* [11]

Schools of all kinds are organizations which are responsible for children and adolescents' formal education. The schools which successfully and more efficiently carry out this responsibility consider themselves and their students as part of the social system which includes families and communities. The research developed in the USA and in some European countries shows that when schools, families and communities work together as partners, the beneficiaries are the students. The partnerships between schools, families and communities can: (a) help teachers with their work; (b) improve students' scholarly abilities; (c) improve the curriculum and the school environment; (d) improve parents' educational abilities; (e) develop parents' leadership abilities; (f) connect families to school and community members; (g) stimulate community's service to the use of schools; (h) offer services and support to families; (i) create a safer environment in schools. [12]

The main reason for the creation of such partnerships is the desire to help students be successful at school and later in life. When parents, students and other members of a community consider each other as partners in education, a support network for students starts to function. [13]

Recent syntheses of several studies indicate the fact that since the first years of childhood, *the family, the school and the community influence simultaneously the children's growth and development*. The continuous importance of these contexts in each stage of the child's development is minutely described by a number of theoretical connected perspectives. These include *the paradigm of the social network* (BARNES, 1972), *the concept of social capital* of COLEMAN (1987) and *the theory of the intersection of influence spheres* of EPSTEIN (1992). [14]

*The paradigm of the social network* refers to the connections between individuals, the groups and the institutions with which a person has contact and of whose support is dependent. The capacity of sharing values and common interests enables a community to develop strong feelings of loyalty and a high level of trust among individuals. Social networks create a strong community affiliation which creates a system of safety, of belonging which restates our existence as social beings. They generate the feeling of responsibility for the entire group, which goes beyond the individual interest. Strong social networks also lead to the understanding of the community ego and they successfully contribute to community adjustment and support. Thus the community forms a network of trust like a social support which is an imperative necessity in a transition society with sudden changes. [15]

Research conducted in the educational domain discovered an essential aspect: the children who are included into well-developed social networks have much better educational results than the children who do not have the benefit of such a network. CLARK (1991, p.45) writes that the social networks provide social support (defined as "the availability of people we can rely on, people that we know can take care of us and love us"). She sustains that the bigger the social support during adolescence is, the bigger the probability for a student to be successful in school. CLARK suggests that schools can strengthen the support systems for young people, especially for the poor or for minorities, through guiding, tutoring and instructional programs led by responsible adults. [16]

COLEMAN refers to the social networks as an integral component of the social capital, which designates the abilities of knowledge, the attitudinal and behavioral patterns which the individuals can spend or invest in order to raise their success chances in social institutions, such as school. The social capital represents individual resources, values and advantages which the individuals earn as active participants in the community. From here starts the idea that a community, rather than an individual, has a certain amount of social capital. The communities "build" the social capital by developing active relationships, by democratic participation, by strengthening the common property and by social trust. PUTNAM (1993, 1995) refers to the strong social networks and a high level in the active relationships between individuals with different roles that tend to support the fixed norms of generalized mutuality and to encourage the emergence of social trust. This is why, in every community there is the need for social trust, norms and networks which the people can rely on in order to solve common issues. [17]

The importance of school led to the re-emergence of the term "social capital" as a concept with strong relevance for educators' community. Because of its axiological nucleus in the field of school the concept of social capital is approached with the same priority as the human and financial capital. One gave up the common idea that it is enough for a school to have adequate financing and a professional management. "Finance the system and we will make schools better" represents the argument used in order to convince the state institutions that have this responsibility as well as the people that adequate funds are needed. The message of the social capital is almost opposite. It states that: "We work hard to make schools better, now offer us your money." In other words, before the social capital it is first necessary that institutions and the community support education. [18]

*The theory of the intersection of the influence spheres* of EPSTEIN emphasizes the importance of mutual action of schools, families and communities in order to assure children's needs. The recognition as main principle of this theory of "the history of tight connections be-

tween major institutions which socialize and educate children" (EPSTEIN, 1992, pp.1140-41), determines certain objectives, such as scholar success, to be of mutual interest for each institution's people, objectives which are reached through action and their cooperative support. This perspective is graphically represented under the shape of three spheres which intersect and symbolize the school, the family and the community. In her theory, based on the data of several research studies, EPSTEIN sustains that:

"The status variables are not the most important measures towards understanding the parents' involvement. At all level classes, the evidence suggests that the school policies, the teacher and family's activities are more important than race, parents' education, family size, marital status and even the degree of determination if the parents continue to be part of their children education" (p.109). [19]

From here appears the option for a *qualitative approach* of the research theme and the use of *the study case* which ensures the work background for the profound understanding of social processes. [20]

EPSTEIN and her colleagues have conceptualized the relationships among school-family-community as action strategies of parents, of the school and of the community that efficiently support the students' success in school, their satisfaction and welfare in the family and school environment as well as in the wider frame of the community in which they live. A framework of six major types of involvement has evolved from many studies and from many years of work by educators and families in elementary, middle and high schools<sup>1</sup>.

"The six types of involvement can guide the development of a balanced, comprehensive program of partnerships, including opportunities for family involvement at school and at home, with potentially important results for students, parents, and teachers. The results for students, parents and teachers will depend on the particular types of involvement that are implemented, as well as on the quality of the implementation" (EPSTEIN et al., 2002, p.17). [21]

Figure 1 presents a comprehensive chart of the six types (strategies) of parents' involvement in education, which are produced by EPSTEIN and her cooperators' research (AGABRIAN & MILLEA, 2005, p.19).

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<sup>1</sup> Starting with the school-year 2003-2004, a new structure of the Romanian education and training system was implemented.

*Pre-school education* (ISCED level 0) is organized for children aged 3-6, in kindergartens with standard, extended or weekly program. Children participation in preschool education is optional.

*Compulsory education* is organized in schools as full-time education, lasts 10 grades and includes: primary education (grades 1-4, ISCED level 1) and lower secondary education (ISCED level 2), comprising two phases: "gymnasiums" (grades 5-8) and the second phase of lower secondary education (grades 9-10, the lower cycle of the lyceum or Arts and Crafts School).

*Upper secondary education* (grades 11-12/13, ISCED 3) is organized in high schools (4-5 years) or in Arts and Crafts Schools (2-3 years).

*Post-high school education* (1-3 years, ISCED 4) comprises tertiary education, non-university level, organized in post-high school and trade schools.

*University and post-university education* (ISCED 5 and 6). University education includes: short-cycle university education (3 years, it is organized in colleges) and long-cycle university education (4-6 years, depending on the field of study, organized in universities, institutes, academies). Post-university education includes: advanced studies in the specialization certified by the diploma (2-3 semesters); master studies, the integration of several domains of specialization (2-4 semesters); doctoral studies and post-university courses. Beginning with 2005, the structure of the higher education is revised in the framework of the Bologna process.

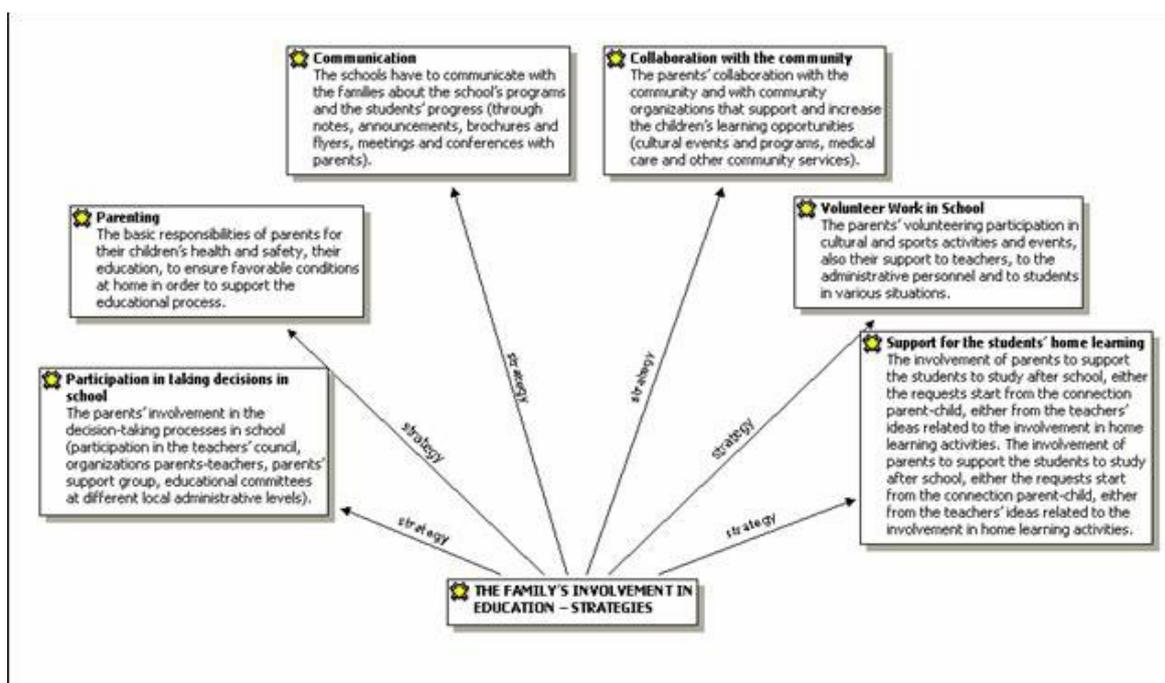


Figure 1: Strategies to involve the family in education [22]

Each strategy has its specific objectives and its own activities to achieve the objectives, but the integration and implementation of standards must be based on the local needs and particularities. In order to fulfill this requirement, besides the focus group used by adolescents, the case study also includes the following research activities:

- in-depth interview with principals, teachers, chairmen and members in the Parents' Representatives Council;
- in-depth interview with the students' parents;
- investigation based on a questionnaire filled out by parents and students. [23]

I used qualitative research methods to find out the perceptions, faiths, attitudes, opinions and meanings that students, parents and teachers attribute to their experiences in the relationships with school, family and community and, thus to build a theory and a project of implementing partnerships which fit to the particular social context in which they live. [24]

### 3. Research Design

The research strategy: Since the subject involves the principles of the interpretive perspective research, I used the abductive research strategy. BLAIKIE (2000, p.25) mentioned the following about this strategy:

"The starting-point is the social world of social actors being investigated their construction of reality, their way of conceptualizing and giving meaning to their social world, their tacit knowledge. This can only be discovered from the accounts which social actors provide. Their reality, the way they have constructed and interpreted their activities together, is embedded in their language." [25]

The questions and objectives of the research: According to the abductive strategy, instead of using the hypotheses, a range of questions are used which are subject to further development and refining. Through the selection of questions and the attention given to their order, I can determine *what is studied, to what degree and how it will be studied*. Therefore, the following questions were formulated:

- What are the concepts, attitudes and behaviors of adolescents towards the parents' involvement in home studying activities?
- What are the students' knowledge, attitudes and behaviors towards the relationships school-family?
- What kind of social processes do these behaviors produce?
- What are the patterns of the relationships between characteristic behaviors?
- Why do the identified patterns manifest themselves in a particular way? [26]

*The objectives* aimed in the research are:

- *the description*, in order to provide rich details about the studied phenomenon;
- *the understanding*, to identify the rationale of the involved people's actions;
- *the explanation*, to determine the elements, the factors and the mechanisms responsible for the production of the relationships between school-family. [27]

The method, the selection of the participants and the collection of the data: The focus group technique has become one of the most attractive and efficient investigation methods, being the most utilized qualitative method for approaching some varied social domains, such as education. Also, the focus group is one of the few available techniques used to obtain consistent data from children and adolescents. The participants were selected in order to obtain a wide array of different opinions. I took into consideration that they could socialize, that they could talk openly and honestly to each other, so that each group was homogeneous concerning the experience as well as the scholarly environment which they come from. As a result, a diversity of opinion was reached by choosing homogeneous groups where participants could freely interact and not by choosing a heterogeneous human composition that is also less recommended. I held eight focus group sessions with high school students consisting of 51 participants in order to gather their thoughts and opinions about parents' involvement in their education and in school-related activities. In each focus group there were 5 to 8 students from the 10<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup>, 12<sup>th</sup> grade between the ages of 16-18. Generally, each group consisted of students at the same education level, from the same school, but from classes having different profiles: languages, mathematics, IT, social sciences, music and arts, economics, etc. Two of the groups were a bit heterogeneous. A group consisted of students who were living in the village of Ighiu and who were studying in Alba Iulia (main municipal town in the county of Alba) and Blaj and these students were from different grades. Another group consisted of students from different grades and high schools in Alba Iulia. The conversations in these two groups were less consistent. [28]

Data analysis: I specify that the investigation is part of a more elaborate research, which enters both the domain of fundamental research and the applied one. It aims at developing a theory of the partnerships school-family-community, as well as at implementing certain partnership programs in some pre-university education units from the Alba County. The collected data were analyzed with the *Grounded Theory* techniques and procedures using the software program ATLAS.ti 5.0. In this way I achieved the description and the interpretation of the studied phenomenon and, as much as possible, its causal explanation. [29]

The value of truth and confidence of the research: Because "there are no operationally defined tests that can be applied to the qualitative research" (EISNER, 1991, p.53), the pragmatic validation of the research results was achieved by its being judged in terms of its relevance and utility by a numerous group of M.A. students consisting of teachers and secondary or high school principals, as well as several groups of students. They confirmed that the study helped them understand a situation that sometimes seemed "enigmatic or confusing." [30]

## 4. Data Analysis and Interpretation

### 4.1 Parents' involvement in the home studying activities

In the primary group of family the inter-personal relationships are direct; communication is direct as well, which facilitates mutual knowledge, the appearance of affective relationships and specific norms, attitudes and behaviors. Through its actions, the family works as a mediator between the individual and other parts of society, such as the school. That is why it needs to accomplish its educational obligations of transmitting the cultural patterns and social status. From this perspective of the research I proposed to find out how and in which conditions and contexts parents and other members of the family involve themselves in the adolescents' studying activities, which are the routine strategies and tactics through which the involved ones solve the problems and give a shape to the studied phenomenon. At the same time, I tried to identify the effects of the actions/ interactions of the involved actors and the diversity of the generated consequences. [31]

The shapes and the styles of the involvement: Firstly, the analysis revealed a series of shapes of the parents' involvement in the home studying activities, which formed the code family I presented in Figure 2. They resulted from the analysis of the discussions transcript which took place in the focus group sessions, the participants' descriptions being conceptualized under labels almost identical to their own words.

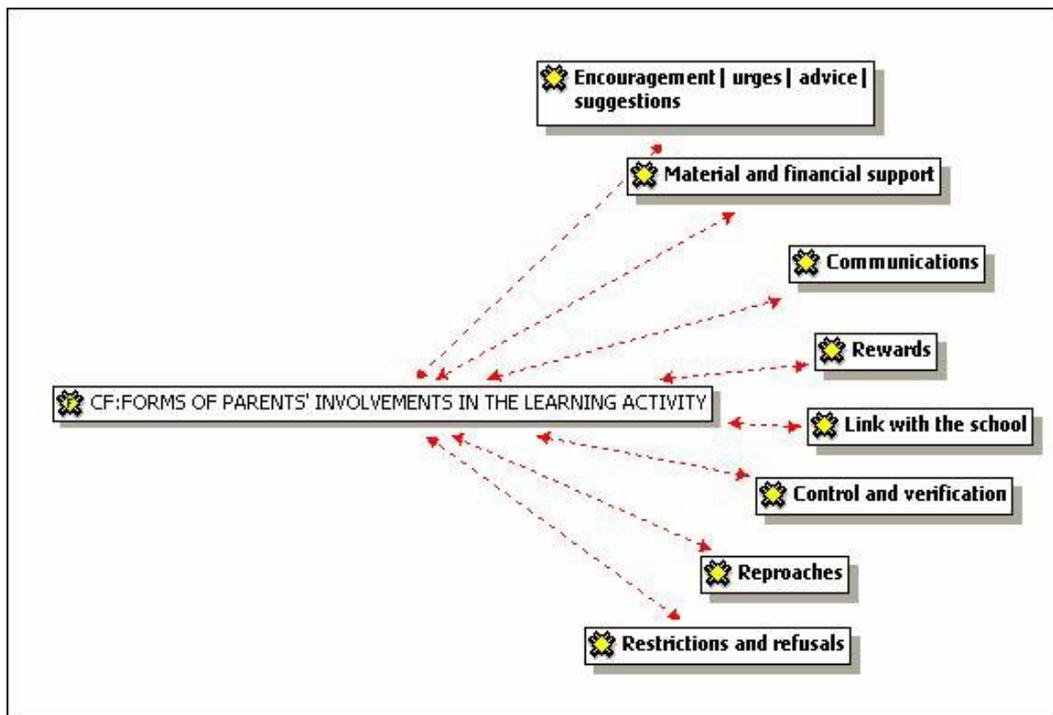


Figure 2: Family code of forms of parents' involvement in the learning activity [32]

The grouping of the involvement according to the criteria of their presence and intensity generates four educational styles used by parents: (a) active and steady, (b) limited, (c) excessive (authoritative) and (d) reduced or "parental rejection." [33]

The style of active and constant parental involvement: This style is characterized by a balanced and flexible combination between the offering of material and financial support, affection and support (guiding, encouraging, advice and reward) of the adolescent's school activity, on the one hand checking and drawing attention and on the other hand exactingness in its evaluation. *The affective, material and financial support, the functional communication and the actions* which are the four properties of this style manifest themselves permanently and in harmony. One of the attributes can be emphasized more, although none can be missing. All these are sustained by the participants' voices who tell about the parents' active and permanent involvement in their education, for example:

"They ask me every day what grades I got, how school was, how I got along with my teachers. My parents told to me about school, they get involved, they come to the school, and they help me with the homework if necessary." [34]

The style of limited parental involvement: From the analysis of the collected data I concluded that this style of "limited," "sporadically," "partial" ("in vivo" categories), seems to be the most common. Here are the adolescents' voices: "From my point of view it is a partial involvement," "My parents get involved only sporadically" or "In my case they get involved to a certain limit." A participant's words accurately describe the limited involvement style:

"From my point of view it is a partial involvement ... I experienced a serious participation from their part only when the problems imperatively demanded solutions, otherwise they seem reserved, almost absent, their daily involvement meaning a few questions which I would name of complaisance." [35]

*Concentrating the interest on the results* is one of the generating causes of the style of parents' limited involvement. It is invoked by the participants in wordings like:

S1<sup>2</sup>: "They are interested in me having good grades, and less in my education."

S2: "They don't want me to run from the classes, nor to fail an examination."

S3: "They ask me if I passed the grade. Rarely do they come to school, only when the teacher or the principal call." [36]

The pattern of this style of parental involvement sometimes has its roots in the extreme situations in which teenagers may find themselves. A participant reports:

"My parents get involved and I involve them only when I find myself in extreme situations and they can stop those getting worse." [37]

I believe that *the lack of time*, considered "limited resource" by students, and the positive evaluation of the situation are causal conditions which interact in many contexts and generate the pattern of the style of limited involvement which, sometimes, has positive consequences, such as gaining the freedom of decision and, implicitly, taking responsibility. Nevertheless, the parental supervision remains, as I can notice from what a student told:

"My parents have a healthy vision on education: "Until now we took care of you, now that you stepped into another world (high school), you will form yourself there on the structure that we offered to you." There is a shade, too: if my behavioral tendencies deviate a lot from what they think is good, they will bring it to my attention. Quite firmly." [38]

The limited time that parents spend with their children, the interest limited to only some aspects, produce effects that teenagers perceive and of which they become aware as frustrations.

"We don't get time for what we think is important, namely they don't support us where we are the best or when we have a problem. I noticed that they like so much the comfort of a 'Did you get good grades? Do you need anything else? When is there another meeting? etc.' and they avoid as much as they can the delicate events that occur to us by invoking, I may say, infantile reasons." [39]

The style of excessive (authoritative) parental involvement: This style of parental involvement in education is more complex than the others because its perception is the least wanted and, at the same time, harder to deal with by the teenagers.

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2 S1, S2, S3, etc. are the participants (the subjects) of the focus groups.

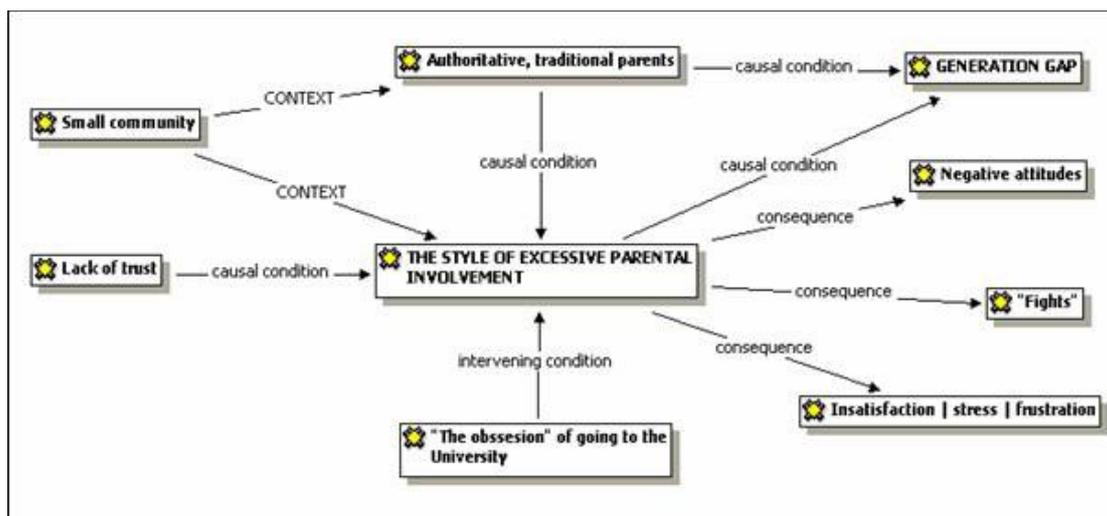


Figure 3: Semantic network of the style of excessive (authoritative) parental involvement [40]

The conceptualizing of the style of involvement as excessive was a consequence of lines like this:

S1: "They get involved more than I have ever wanted."

S2: "They tell me over and over again: "Keep studying, keep studying because you do it for you."

S3: "They tell me all day long: study, study." [41]

Analyzed and visualized, the style finds its major cause in the mistrust of the parents towards the teenagers, plus the authoritarian parents' manifestations like permanent and constant critics. The style, described by the words of a teenager, sounds like this:

"They get involved, even too much. They want to know everything that happens at school, what activities take place, they don't miss any participation. The spare time that I should have, they think it would be indicated to exploit, so there goes the private reading and supplementary classes, therefore I can say that I don't know anymore which one is the family and which the school, they are both suffocating." [42]

The intermediate variables are the mentalities and the behaviors that characterize the life of communities in small towns and/or "the obsession" with college that some parents manifest, especially those who, from one reason or another, didn't get a university education. In the words of a teenage-girl illustrate the analytical approach:

"In my case they get too involved and that's why sometimes we have fights, my folks are so traditional and if I might break the habit, it's wrong ... I must be like everybody else. Maybe they are afraid of what people may say and I think that if we stayed in a big city, this wouldn't happen." [43]

Concerning the mistrust manifested by parents, the teenagers consider it as a cause:

S1: "Nevertheless, they should have more trust in me, I know how to take care of me, and I can make right choices."

S2: "They get involved in any possible way ... my mother just can't wait for a meeting to take place so that she can find out everything that happens in our school; she wants to convince herself that I'm not part of some weird gang with which I may do bad things." [44]

The consequences of the authoritative involvement are various, they begin with dissatisfaction, stress or frustration caused to teenagers, they may go through frequent "quarrels" between parents and teenagers or they can generate negative attitudes. It is not unusual to this style to impose some authoritative decisions that sometimes are taken against the teenagers' desires and aspirations. This is an example:

"... unfortunately, the parents know how to give you advice for what profile you should choose. They forced me to go to computer science and yet I haven't found my place in that class." [45]

"The obsession" with college is invoked by many subjects in different ways:

S1: "My parents didn't have the possibility to go to college and they want me to go there and they are pretty obsessed with this. They make efforts so that I become as best as I can at school, so I can go to a good college and be successful."

S2: "... they keep telling me to study in order to go to college, to make a future, to have a career."

S3: "They wish I studied more, so I can have a better future through school, they wish a higher education for me, so I can make a career and not to end up as a simple worker." [46]

The analysis revealed that the generation gap is an attribute to the style of authoritative involvement and the subjects declared that "there definitely is a conflict between generations." A student talks about this unequivocally:

"I may say that there is a conflict between generations because the parents are losing their authority control over their children, even if it is nothing bad, something that no longer belongs to them, new ideas come up and they are maybe better than theirs. They don't agree with this because of their pride and maybe because of some possession instinct." [47]

The semantic network from Figure 4 presents the conditional structure and the process that explains the generation gap. Its interpretation tells us that the parents' "traditional" behavior represents the generating cause of the specific manifestations of dictatorship in familial education. It is the parents who are animated by "modern ideas" that maintain this conflict.

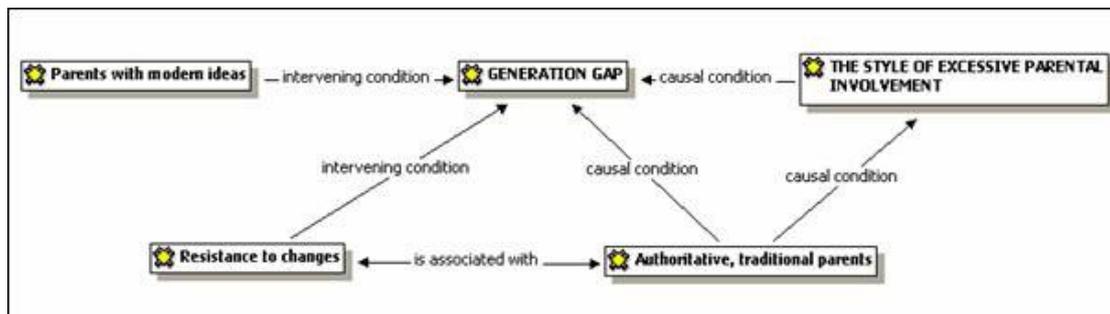


Figure 4: Semantic network of the generation gap [48]

A significant role has the interposed variable of the *resistance to change* that characterizes some parents' behavior. It is known that unlike other domains of the social system, culture is much slower to change because people oppose to it, considering that they lose important values and beliefs. This creates a situation that sociologists call tension or cultural lag. In this situation, a value, a norm or a belief persists even if it became dysfunctional. It continues to exist only because it was sometime functional and many people are still attached to it. [49]

The resistance to change is a significant characteristic of a society in transition, like Romania. Many parents are still attached to the "traditional" values of the authoritarian behavior towards children. That is why, maybe, many teenagers use quite frequently the word "old folks" when talking about their parents, considering that age is responsible for a behavior that no longer resonates with the social changes that were made. This label is used in different ways: "they are too old," "the old folks get involved" or "they are older, they have another mentality, they are surpassed." Talking about the project of the partnership school-family, a participant reasons the parents' resistance to change like this:

"I think that this project won't work; I mean you can't do anything with this generation of parents because they are not able to accept this kind of projects ... maybe when we'll become parents, but now, no way." [50]

The style of reduced involvement, of "parental rejection": The collected data and their analysis with the scheme of Grounded Theory method paradigm put into light the style of reduced parental involvement in education. The analysis of textual data led to the identification of the causal conditions and then allowed us to deepen the analysis by building the matrix from Table 1 that presents the scheme in which I sorted and organized the connections between categories.

Causal conditions	Phenomenon	Context	Action/ interaction strategies	Consequences
Anachronistic conceptions Lack of necessary abilities Lack of interest Family issues	The style of reduced involvement, of "parental rejection"	The socio-economic situation Communitarian life characteristics The structure and the organizing relationships at school Socio-economic and educational variables of the family	Limited communication Lack of participation in high school organized activities	Affective, attitudinal and behavioral, which have a negative impact on the adolescent's school success Adolescents' perception on the need of parental involvement in their education

Table 1: The paradigm of the reduced involvement style [51]

The participants' statements revealed that one of the causes of the manifestation of this style is the anachronistic conceptions. There is a clear voice:

"For my parents school was a necessary evil, so they don't get too involved and they let me in peace. They couldn't help me with anything if they got more involved." [52]

The qualification of school as a "necessary evil" is an unusual thing and it is associated with the *lack of necessary abilities* for the involvement that you can see in the latent message: "They couldn't help me with anything." The teenager adds in the most sincere way what he thinks: "Anyway, a reproach coming from your parents is always welcomed because it makes you think about some things more seriously." Other two opinions are:

S1: "Every time when they are needed at the school they invoke the reason that they can't miss their work for my school that they send me to school in order to study and to get a diploma and that it's enough that they are paying for my education."

S2: "Many parents see the involvement as a punishment, others barely think about it and, like my case, others see the involvement as a way of satisfying their pride." [53]

*The lack of interest* is a factor often mentioned by the participants when they talk about the parents' reduced involvement in their education:

S1: "They don't get involved too much, almost not at all. My mother gets involved a little, and my father is interested neither in my school issues, nor in my personal problems."

S2: "All I can tell you is that my parents have nothing to do with my education."

S3: "I was alone all the time. My father didn't even know what major I chose. They gave me a free hand. So far I managed alone and I'll manage from now on too." [54]

In some cases, they consider the family issues and conflicts as causes that represent bigger obstacles and require greater attention from parents. There are two opinions:

S1: "It is a situation in which lack of interest rules. This situation is due not to their trust in me, but to a family system that is subdued to internal conflicts."

S2: "My folks don't do anything else than having contradictory talks with me and I always discover myself labeled as a "problem child." [55]

*Limited communication* is a strategy action/interaction characteristic to this style, which frequently associates to parents' lack of interest. An adolescent says:

"We don't talk about school almost at all. They are not interested in what I do there, they just want to see good grades and they just can't wait to see that I've finished high school and to get rid of me." [56]

The effects of the involvement styles: The conditions-actions/interactions-consequences paradigm, used in the analysis, prioritized the first two notions: the conditional structure and the process, and the consequences were named only generically. Now I develop the effects of the involvement styles for which I have built the matrix from Table 2.

Consequences	Direct effects	
	Positive effects	Negative effects
Affective	<i>Emotional support.</i> "At home I was always surrounded by warmth; they support me very much in every event which is connected to school."	<i>Frustration.</i> "I resent their involvement in a negative way. The effect of their reproaches is that I start thinking if I am like they say I am."
	<i>The perception of the need of involvement.</i> "Their involvement means allowing the necessary time for discussions and activities with me."	
Attitudinal	<i>The manifestation of trust.</i> "They don't tell me to go study because they trust me."	<i>Revolt.</i> "Have you ever thought that a parent can change, if he wants—and in lack of any discussion—, the course of his child's becoming, on reason that that way is better? Better for who?"
Behavioral	<i>The imposition of dialogue.</i> "My parents would have preferred me to major in a field with a future ... but I talked to them and I explained them that it is better to do something you like."	
	<i>The freedom of decision.</i> "I make the decisions concerning school; they eventually offer suggestions."	
	<i>The assuming of responsibility.</i> "They no longer insist that I study; I am responsible."	

Table 2: Matrix of the effects of the parents' involvement in the adolescent's education [57]

The evaluation of social actors' involvement: In their statements, the adolescents evaluated the behavior and the actions of those involved in their education. The results revealed that there are differences between the modalities and the degree of involvement of the two parents—mother and father—in their children's education. At one point, elder brothers and sisters and other relatives get involved, too. Matrix from Table 3 emphasizes all these aspects.

<b>Mother</b>	+ I can't talk about the family's involvement, but about mother's involvement. My mother just can't wait for another meeting to take place in order to find out everything that happens in school. + My mother helps me with the subject matters I have difficulties with. ...
<b>Father</b>	+ – My father works long hours and I don't see him very often, so he asks me on Sundays how school was. + My father follows everything from the background. – My father doesn't even know at what high school I study and he rarely questions me unless I fail some examination. ...
<b>Brothers and sisters</b>	+ My sister always tells me: "Go study!" + My brother helps me with my homework if I don't understand. He asks me how school was. ...
<b>Other relatives</b>	+ My grandmother always took care of me, she told me "let's study, let's do the homework," she asked me "how school was today?" and, in case of a bad grade, she sent me study. + My uncle gives me more money when I get good grades. ...

Table 3: Matrix of the evaluation of social actors' involvement<sup>3</sup> [58]

One may observe the mother's ascendancy over the involvement of other members of the family in children's education, the father's modest participation, the intervention, in some cases, of elder brothers and sisters and, more rarely, the other relatives' involvement. The analysis does not consider the father's excuse of lack of time as a causal condition for his reduced involvement. I rather believe that the cause is a certain "traditional" mentality like "the father leaves considers this as the mother's job." Conventional wisdom says that the mother takes a greater interest in the children's education, which I think could be a future research topic. [59]

The parental support for studying: A question asked the teenagers to talk about what parents do to help them study. Through it I wanted to obtain details about parents' contribution to the students' scholarly success. The analysis makes a difference between the routine strategies (advice, impulses, the assurance of study conditions etc.) and forms of parental support that encourage children to study. The routine strategies are the same in the majority of cases, and the forms of support are reported to the family's particularities. For example, the rewards and the private tuitions are forms of support which are accessible only to families with financial resources. The strategy of assuring optimal conditions to study clearly predominates. This is an example:

"They give me all the time I need to make my homework and to get thoroughly to the knowledge I acquired in class. They don't give me extra work at home only if I have nothing to study. Recently, they have bought me a computer to help me with my homework and they have connected it to the Internet so I can find the necessary bibliography." [60]

I also emphasize the behavior invoked by many participants that state that their parents stay away from this subject. This is in contradiction with the fact that, one way or another, parents should encourage, support and supervise the children in the process of learning developed at home, this thing being one of the minimal conditions of the family's involvement in the child's education. [61]

The private lessons problem: The private lessons, as a form of parental support, constituted a theme for long discussions, the main approach being critical for some teachers and the system that allows and encourages them. The analysis identified some dimensions of the private tuitions: (a) the development of a true system; (b) their perception as a way of increasing the

3 +, + –, – indicate the attitude towards the involvement (positive, neutral, negative).

teachers' incomes; (c) the existence of the norms that regulate them, but eluded by a part of those who practice them; (d) the overwhelming financial efforts that some parents make. [62]

In one of the focus groups where this problem was consistently discussed, a Romanian born student from Canada also took part. The matrix from Table 4 shows his conception and attitude, generated by a social context that is not familiar with the home tutoring phenomenon, which is also illegal.

	The need for private lessons	The status of private lessons	Consequences
S1	"... teachers don't give their best to their classes; moreover, they say that students can come for private lessons to learn more."	"... teachers should be certified and most of them don't have it."	"... it appears the competition to give your child to the best teacher who, logically, has a proportional price to his value or prestige. This is how parents come to some overwhelming financial efforts."
S2	"Apparently home tutoring has been developed into a wide-spread business; except for a few teachers, they all wait for the students to come to private lessons."		"One way of helping me was that he gave me private lessons that cost me a fortune."
S3	"... it is almost impossible not to give your child private lessons when he is in the 8 <sup>th</sup> or the 12 <sup>th</sup> grade."		"The fact that teachers have learned that there is a new and more advantageous way of teaching, namely private lessons, makes them not share all knowledge at school."
S4	"The private lessons thing is stupid; if the child wants to study, he does it at home, alone."	"I don't need private lessons; there aren't such things in Canada. In their opinion something like this is illegal because if you go to a teacher and you pay him well he may tell you the questions from the test."	"The thing is that here in Romania life is very hard even if many children study very well. In foreign countries those who sweep the streets are paid double what an engineer is paid here."

Table 4: Matrix of the extra-lessons problem [63]

## 4.2 The participation of the family in school activities

### 4.2.1 The students' attitude towards participation

The active report of the family with the school is a recognized, accepted and encouraged phenomenon all over the world. STĂNCIULESCU (2002) emphasizes that most of the parents, including those from the disadvantaged classes prove to be real strategists of the educational action and they are concerned with scholar success of their children, considering that this ensures their economic future and a good social position. From the scholarly institutions' and teachers' perspective, the relationship with the students' families is essential in the daily practice. [64]

The relationships between parents and teachers develop through multiple interactions. There is an aspect of school-family relationship that is less known: the parents and the teachers are "forced" to communicate through the student that plays the role of a messenger. No matter the shape and the content of the message to be sent, it moulds the relationships between adults and the student, who states his status of important actor. From this perspective the investigation becomes interesting regarding students' attitude towards their parents' participation in the activities of the high school where they learn, the knowledge of what parents wish to

accomplish by their participation as well as the identification of the problems that students consider to be of importance concerning the school's improvement. [65]

Data analysis revealed four classes of students' attitudes towards their parents' participation in the activities in their schools: (a) participation in extra-curricular activities only; (b) indifference towards their parents' participation or lack of participation; (c) participation in all activities, including classes; (d) lack of participation in all kind of school activities. [66]

*The parents' participation in extra school activities* is approved, especially by the students from the high schools of arts and sports as well as by the students from other high schools. The explanation is the following: through these activities students can show what abilities they have developed and what works they have done, waiting for social recognition from their parents first. An adolescent states that:

"Except for the daily classes, I think that all students are excited to see their parents participate in school activities. Moreover, if they, the children, initiated these activities, you can imagine how good they would feel in the presence of their parents." [67]

The analysis showed that generally, the explanation for teenagers' indifference towards parents' participation or lack of participation in the high school activities lies in the dissatisfying relationship between them and their parents. For example, the subjects invoked their feeling of being guilty induced by their parents or the lack of interest towards them. Two voices say:

S1: "To participate means for them only to be present; you cannot make them be interested in my school activities and me."

S2: "According to my situation, for me it is the same. I am not afraid that after their dialogue with the teachers they may find out something else that I have done. They have already accused me of everything." [68]

*The students' favorable attitude* towards the parents' participation in different activities from the high school, including their presence in the classroom during the classes represent a causal condition that may produce positive effects for the students. As teenagers say, the parents' participation may ensure: (a) a better training of the students, who fear not to disappoint their parents when they are present; (b) a better school environment and (c) the promotion of parents-teachers dialogue. The implications in the promotion of the parents-teachers dialogue were mainly discussed. The subjects emphasized a few positive consequences of this dialogue.

1. The advantages earned by the communication between the social actors in the educational space.

S1: "You can definitely realize how many communication and understanding barriers can be surpassed."

S2: "...this way it can find a common denominator between my parents and me."

2. The possibility of correcting some teachers' behavior towards students.

S1: "The parents should cooperate with the teachers because sometimes they treat us like objects."

3. The clearing up of some possible negative consequences owed to the parents' participation in the activities.

S1: "It happens that sometimes the parents might say that the teacher is right, to our detriment, because they see in the teacher intelligence and justice, therefore the child is the problem; but things are not always like that."

S2: "It could be vice versa, namely the parents could realize what kind of person the teacher really is, although, at the meetings, parents cannot get to know the teacher, so they leave with the impression that it is only the student's fault." [69]

*The manifestation of the adolescents' negative attitude* towards their parents' participation in different activities that take place in the high school is expressed like this: "I wouldn't like it," "I don't want them to come," "Definitely, no!", "I'd like them to stay at home," "Of course I don't want to. I don't want my folks involved in any school activity," "Simply I don't like my parents to come to my school." I have grouped the participants' arguments in Table 5.

	Themes and arguments	The researcher's explanation
1	Negative conceptions S1: I don't go to their work place, so they shouldn't come to school. S2: I've had enough of my parents at home, why do they have to bother me at school, too. S3: They are older. They should mind their own business and I'll do the same.	The dissatisfying parents-adolescents relationships, the children's need of independence, the lack of knowledge, they all contribute to this kind of conceptions.
2	Discomfort shame and compulsion feelings S1: I am inhibited by their presence and I do not feel at ease. S2: I do not allow them to come so they do not embarrass me. S3: I would not like them to come and give me a kiss and to tell me that my desk is a mess. S4: They scold me in front of my classmates. They embarrass me.	These attitudes are generated by the lack of knowledge and the lack of parents' appropriate intervention abilities.
3	Parents that do not understand the problems S1: My parents were raised in a village and they have a traditional way of thinking. S2: Teachers are teachers and parents are workers.	The cultural discrepancy between teachers and some parents represents a variable of intervention.
4	Dissatisfying relationships and adverse communication S1: The obstacle could be this lack of communication between my family and me. By coming to my school they would get information that they will interpret in their own way, without being interested in my perspective on certain situations; in other words, we would be two mirrors that reflect quite different realities so that we won't be able to find similar solutions.	Various social, cultural and economic factors are involved in this situation.
5	School activities are not interesting S1: In our school, except for the festive activities and the meetings, nothing happens, but if it were, I would like my parents to take part. S2: What happens in our school is not interesting for my folks.	The festivities predominate and there are few interesting activities at school.
6	<i>The students do not realize the importance of their parents' participation</i> S1: There are certain people that take care of this kind of activities, why should my parents get involved, too.	The students do not understand what the parents' participation to the scholar activities means.

Table 5: Arguments against parents' participation in the activities in school [70]

The students' participation in meetings together with the parents: The concepts, the conceptual relationships and the texts from the semantic network from Figure 5 present the students' opinions about their participation in the meetings with the parents, namely their presence where things that directly concern them are discussed. The adolescents talk about the probable reactions of some teachers and parents towards this problem.

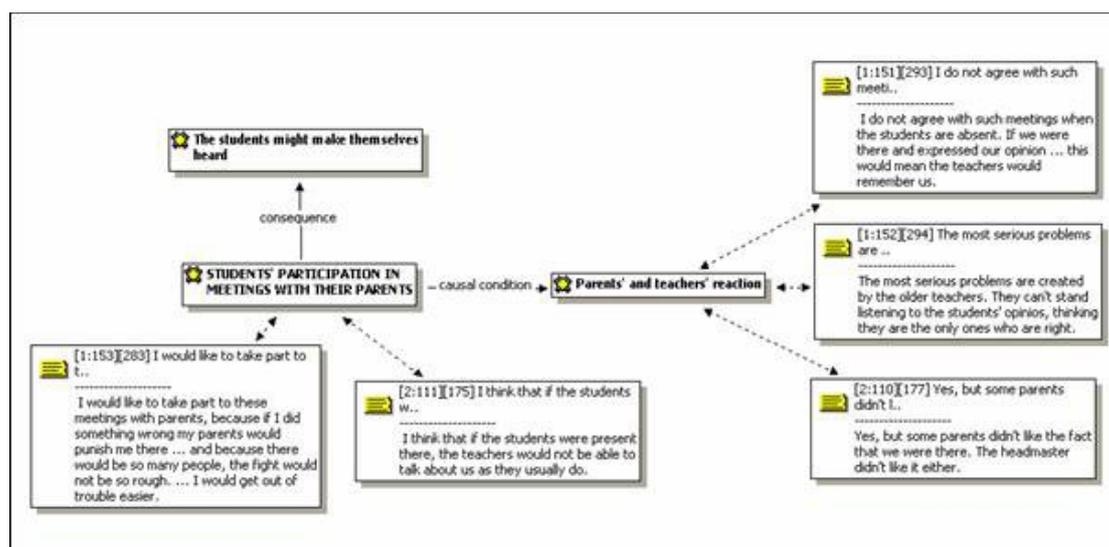


Figure 5: Semantic network of students' participation in meeting together with their parents [71]

#### 4.2.2 What students want their parents to do at the school?

The list of students' desires concerning what their parents can do at the school is long. Among the problems seen as possible to achieve is the issue of promoting the student's concerns in school, a problem that launched animated debates and the conclusion was that any attempt of that kind would end up with a failure. The matrix of the paradigm from Table 6 presents the conditional structure and the process of promoting students' interests by their parents, which, through consequences, shows the reduced probability of being successful in practice. I notice that some favorable effects arise, especially the improvements in school and the possibility of an increase in parents' authority. These aspects may facilitate a better collaboration between students and teachers. They give us the idea of spreading the power in the democratic society, a fact that is perfectly valid for the educational institutions, too.

<b>Causal conditions</b>	The parents are not organized "They will never have any power in taking any decisions in school provided that they organize themselves in a homogeneous group which, in my opinion is complicated." Lack of any initiative "The main problem is represented by parents' lack of unity and their lack of initiative."
<b>Phenomenon</b>	Failure in promoting students' interests by their parents
<b>Context</b>	The general socio-economic situation and its local particularities Specific features of community life Structure and organizational relationships in school Socio-economic and educational variables of the family
<b>Intrinsic conditions</b>	Traditional mentality and behavior The teachers' "paternalist" conception "The teachers can't do anything, they merely teach and that's all, they can't change anything, everything depends on the government" Formal participation of the parents Resistance to changes "No matter what the parents might say, the school and the teachers will remain the same ... Nobody will change anything."
<b>Action/interaction strategies</b>	Due to the parents' initiative, the problems were discussed in meetings The parents contacted the secretary's office The form teacher went to the Local Representatives of the Education Ministry

<b>Consequences</b>	<p>Improvement of some momentary situations.</p> <p>The parents are treated with indifference.</p> <p>Reduced probability of success.</p> <p>"It seems to me almost impossible that they could do anything in school. You know very well that they are given little importance or they are taken into account for the moment. In the next moment everything is forgotten."</p>
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Table 6: Matrix of paradigm of promoting students' interests [72]

The conclusion drawn by the adolescents regarding their parents' probability of solving their interests is that the latter have little possibilities for achieving this. Two situations they have experimented are relevant: the optional subjects and the changing of some teachers. Here they are in vivo:

"Why subject matters which should be optional are imposed as being compulsory? What is optional should be subject to our choice, not imposed by our teachers. The teachers we do not like should not be teaching." [73]

The solution to this issue should be given by the high school, and as far as changing teachers, the final decision belongs to the Local Representatives of the Ministry of Education. The two problems raised by the students have remained unsolved. [74]

Issues to be discussed between parents and teachers: The identification of themes for parent-teacher discussions highlights the way in which the focus-technique materializes group-interactions and uses the information at this level and not at an individual level. The analysis has conceptualized from the richness of the collected data the main issues the students consider as being the most suitable ones to be discussed between their teachers and their parents so that their situation in school should improve. An interviewed person has given the following interpretation to such discussions:

"I think they should discuss those problems that require urgent solutions. During these discussions we, the students, should be necessarily invited to, as we are the central subject." [75]

The quotes reveal the fact that the students are aware of the fact that they represent the object of any action taking place at school. They are also aware of the fact that anything undertaken in their family or at school has the ultimate goal of improving their school performance; as they are the main actors, it is natural that they should actively take part in debates and decision-making. From the great range of the problems which students consider to be very important discussion themes both for the parents and the teachers, in thematic matrix from Table 7 I hereby show a whole set of generic problems which produce two major discussion issues: curriculum for the modern educational process and the way of communicating and behaving of the involved social actors.

<b>Problems</b>	<b>Themes</b>	
	<b>Curriculum and the modern educational process</b>	<b>Communication and behavior</b>
<p><i>High school generic problems</i></p> <p>What does being a student nowadays mean?</p> <p>Instructional programs for parents</p> <p>Specialized education</p> <p>Scholarships</p>	<p><i>Parents' instruction and counseling</i></p> <p>S1: "I think that teachers should teach our parents according to the way they teach us. Thus they could demonstrate that school is not what it used to be in the past. They say that school nowadays is very easy and you should have attended school in the past, which was the real school."</p> <p>S2: "They should organize monthly sessions, discussions during which the teachers, the</p>	

	<p>headmasters and students' counselors should inform both the students and the parents what the educational system in the western countries consists of and how this can be applied in Romania so that the Romanian school system might become a specialized one, producing specialists and not only educated people."</p> <p><i>The Scholarship problem</i></p> <p>"I think that scholarships abroad should be discussed. There are plenty of students who might become interested, thus I think this subject should be paid more attention."</p>	
<p><i>Problems generated by the high school educational process</i></p> <p>Subject matters which are treated the same way</p> <p>Too much information</p> <p>Optional subject matters are compulsory</p> <p>Too many tasks</p> <p>Patience, teachers' understanding and tact</p> <p>Getting rid of any discrimination when treating students</p>	<p><i>Overloaded Curriculum</i></p> <p>S1: "They should focus more on subject matters that are useful for our graduation exam. Why should we study subjects we won't find necessary in the future?"</p> <p>S2: "We get too much information. They ask too much from us. Every teacher wants us to be well prepared for his/her subject. It is too difficult to make everybody happy. If I want to focus on a certain subject, the other teachers should leave me alone."</p> <p><i>Imposed optional courses</i></p> <p>"Why are the subject matters which should be optional compulsory? What is optional should be subject to our choice, not imposed by our teachers."</p> <p><i>Very busy program</i></p> <p>S1: "We should have a much easier program, not like the one we have nowadays. We should have the possibility of choosing the subject matters we want to study and we should also have the possibility of changing the teachers we don't like."</p> <p>S2: "I have a lot of chores at home. The teachers don't understand the fact that we need time for other things, too."</p>	<p><i>Understanding students</i></p> <p>S1: "If the student has a problem or he/she is a little shy, the teachers should treat him/her more tenderly and they should make him/her feel at ease."</p> <p>S2: "There are some teachers who use a very aggressive language, especially those between 40-50 years."</p> <p>S3: "The teachers should be more indulgent, they shouldn't come to courses when they are angry and they should use good language when addressing us."</p> <p>S3: "The teachers should understand us as we understand them. They should understand us when we don't study because we have been away or we have been ill."</p> <p><i>Eliminating any discrimination when treating students</i></p> <p>"They should not make differences between the students who have money and those who don't. If you "help" the teacher with something, he/she will also "help" you."</p>
<p><i>Generic problems for the family</i></p> <p>The parents do not know the dysfunctional aspects of the educational process</p> <p>The parents are not counseled by the teachers</p> <p>The necessity of a teachers-parents</p>	<p><i>The theoretical-practical relations; overloaded textbooks</i></p> <p>"Parents must understand that we get not enough practice for the theory we have acquired. Parents should talk to the teachers so that they might understand that the textbooks are too sophisticated, they are overloaded with information that has to be</p>	<p><i>The parents arbitrarily impose professional options to the students</i></p> <p>"The teachers should make the parents understand that the students should choose the university they want to go to. My mother should meet the teacher who teaches the subject I am the best at. The teacher should present the advantages of this subject and</p>

<p>collaboration for moral education and students' psychological assistance</p>	<p>assimilated for exams."  <i>Too much information and a lot of requirements for all the subject matters</i>                  "Parents should talk about the fact that we get too much information and there are a lot of requirements for all the subject matters."</p>	<p>the future perspectives. This could be a sort of counseling regarding my future career."  <i>The parents should get involved in all the aspects regarding the educational process</i>                  "I would like my parents to take care of the psychical and moral sides of the education."</p>
<p><i>Context problems</i>                  Taking responsibility for the students' behavior</p>	<p><i>School-family discrepancy</i>                  "Both the school and the family always blame the other one for the students' deviances. The parents let the teachers do everything, while the latter focus only on the contents they should teach the students. Every teacher focuses on his subject only, avoiding, purposely or not, training the students for real life situations. I think there is a huge discrepancy between the school and the family."</p>	

Table 7: Thematic matrix of conceptual themes [76]

## 5. Conclusions

During the analytical process I have conceptualized the categories as abstractions that do not represent an individual or the story of a group. They are the accounts of some participants or groups that are reduced and represented in highly conceptualized and related terms so that I could generally explain what is going on. In the semantic networks I have related the categories and the sub-categories so that I could thoroughly explain aspects of the investigated social phenomenon. As a matter of fact, starting with the first investigated focus-group, I have linked the categories with their sub-categories, that is, I have noticed if the latter are conditions, actions, interactions or consequences. At any rate, the major categories have not been integrated yet to form a theoretical explanatory scheme. In order to achieve this I need a central category, *a nucleus category which contains all the products of the analysis concentrated in few words, which seem to explain "what this research is all about."* [77]

I have devised the integrating diagram from Figure 6 starting from the idea that the school-family-community partnerships represent just a desideratum. It visualizes the causal conditions, the intervention variables and the intended strategy thus justifying why I have chosen this idea as a central category. As I have seen, the quality and the degree of parents' involvement in the students' home learning and in the activities at school are affected by two involving styles: reduced or "parental rejection" and authoritarian (excessive), the latter having a serious impact on the adolescents who seek independence, freedom of choice and action regarding the issues they consider to be their own concern. This thing represents one of the causal conditions leading to the generation gap. The two negative styles I have mentioned create indifference and disagreement towards the parents' presence to the activities that take place in schools.

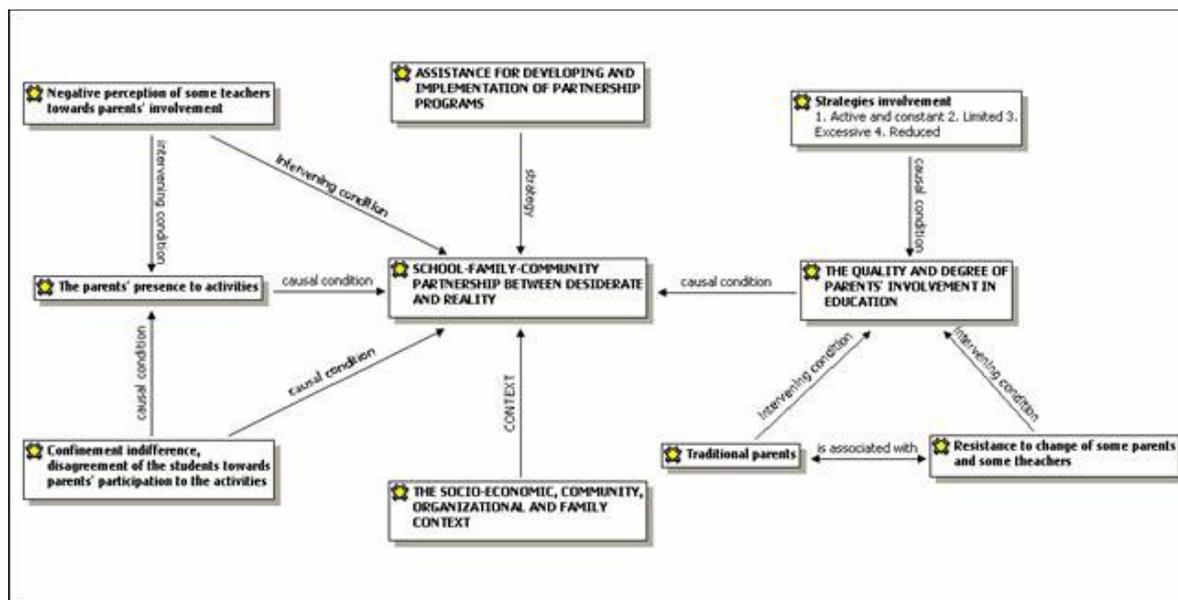


Figure 6: Integrating diagram school-family-community partnerships between desired and reality [78]

The subjects, either parents, teachers or adolescents, invoked the lack of interest of some parents and the anachronistic conceptions of the others, as well as they emphasized their lack of appropriate abilities so that their participation to the school's activities will not produce stress, frustration and dissatisfaction to the students. The analysis showed that the parents' involvement in the studying activities at home is reduced, most of it, at the assurance of the material conditions and the necessary financial support. It also emphasized that the pre-university education institutions do not have various partnership activities that make the parents, the school staff and the representatives of the community support the students' school success. Instead of that, there are "festivities" and "meetings." [79]

Some parents and some teachers' opposition to change (especially the aged ones'), the authoritative attitude of other parents and the paternalistic mentality of solving all problems at the center, were identified by the analytical process as obstacles to the renewal of the spirit of education in schools and high schools. They are emphasized by the contextual conditions generated by the socio-economic situation, by the characteristics of the communitarian life, by the particular interactions that characterize a pre-university education organization and the families' socio-economic and educational variables that lay their mark on the school-family-community relationships. [80]

The research reached two conclusions that establish themselves as favorable assumptions of action for the development and the application of certain viable partnership programs in the schools of Alba County.

- a. Almost all the families care about their children, wish for them to have success and they try to obtain as much information as they can from the school and the community, therefore they are good partners in their children's education.
- b. Almost all the teachers and the school leaders would like to involve the parents in the school activities, but most of them do not know how to create positive and efficient programs, so they are afraid to try. This situation creates some kind of "sterile rhetoric" in which the teachers feel "caught," expressing their agreement for the development of the partnerships, but without undertaking any action. [81]

On these grounds, I consider that it is possible to realize functional partnerships so that the parents and the members of the community could get involved in the process of educating the children and the adolescents. On the other hand, the investigation confirms what STĂNCIU-LESCU (2002, p.98) shows concerning the research done in other countries about the way the child or the adolescent evaluates the familial educational environment.

"They [the research] studies show that the perception of familial realities, attitudes and behaviors and of the parent-child relationships vary according to the evaluator's position; the

child interprets differently from the parents the educational style of the family, and this interpretation, no matter if it corresponds to reality or not, influences his reactions and his psycho-social development." [82]

Following the same approach, I believe that the evaluation and interpretation of the instructive-educational environment of the school by the adolescents generates specific reactions and contributes to his psycho-social maturity. In the light of the theory of the intersection of the influence spheres, the representations that were earned by the adolescents in high school overlap with the representations of the experiences from his family, offering a new and wider horizon of understanding the familial micro universe in its relationship with the school environment. [83]

## **Appendix: Topic Guide for Focus Group With the Adolescents**

### *a) General questions regarding parents' involvement in education*

How do parents get involved in your education?

When I say "the involvement of the family," what does this mean for you? How can you explain it?

### *b) Questions on the parents' involvement in the education at home:*

What do your parents do at home to encourage you and help you with learning?

### *c) Questions on parents' involvement in the education at school:*

Do you want your parents or the persons taking care of you (grandmother, grandfather, and other relatives) to come to school and take part in different activities?

What would you like your parents or the persons taking care of you do at school?

What stops you from wanting your parents to come to school and participate in different school, sports and cultural activities?

What should your parents discuss with your teachers so as things should be better for you in school?

What do you think your teachers and administrative staff think about the involvement of your family in your education? What do they think about your parents' presence in the activity of the school (high school)?

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