When school language and culture enter the home: testing children as a 'school-aligned' parental activity

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Abstract

Since Bronfenbrenner's claims on the ecology of human development, an impressive amount of research has explored the ways in which children's primary social worlds (i.e., family and school) connect and potentially create an osmotic ecological milieu. In the building of the so-called 'family-school partnership', homework plays a crucial role. Being a school activity carried out inside the home, it is a key site for implementing parental involvement and a crucial occasion where cultural models of 'good parent' and 'good pupil' are instantiated. This video-based, conversation analytic study shows a specific activity taking place while parents assist their children with homework: testing. The analysis shows that parents deploy a 'school-like' interactive conduct by reproducing the standards, morality, and linguistic practices of the school. In so doing, they comply with the contemporary model of 'good parent as school partner' and socialize their children into the culture of the school by turning them into 'good pupils'.

Keywords: *homework; family-school partnership; test; parental involvement; ethnography-informed conversation analysis.*

1. Introduction

Since Bronfenbrenner's (1979) claims on the ecology of human development, an impressive amount of research has been devoted to exploring the ways in which children's primary social worlds (i.e., family and school) connect and create (or not) an osmotic ecological milieu. "Family-school alliance" (Contini, 2012), "partnership", "involvement", or "educational co-responsibility" (Auduc *et al., 2019*; Dusi & Pati, 2014; Humbeeck *et al.*, 2006) are the terms commonly used to evoke not necessarily a state of affairs but rather a morally laden horizon, an 'ought to be world' where the two institutions should work in tune, create and maintain connections,

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and avoid discontinuity and divergence as much as possible. On the basis of such a theoretical (see among others, Epstein & Sanders, 2000; Milani, 2012, Contini, 2012; Gigli, 2016) and normative prescription for continuity[11], mandatory and/or optional encounters between parents and teachers throughout the school year have been established in many countries as one of the major institutional loci where such an osmosis should take place. Therefore, growing attention has been paid to school-family communication events and practices – such as and typically parent teacher conferences – as these events are understood as quintessential lieux where the family-school alliance is constructed (or not). Indubitably the (more or less formal) encounters between parents and teachers are crucial events where the construction of the partnership can be at stake (Bove, 2020). They are also social occasions where the cultural models of 'good parent', 'good pupil' and 'good teacher' relevant for the student's academic career are deployed by participants and made actionable through talk (see MacLure & Walker, 2000; Pillet-Shore, 2012; 2015; 2016; Caronia, 2022; Caronia & Dalledonne Vandini, 2019). However, there is at least another practice that – by definition – bridges school and family: homework. Far more ancient than school-family encounters, homework is among the oldest school-family trans-contextual practices: whether conceived of as a means to build continuity or not, it literally enacts this continuity by circularly displacing artifacts and activities from one context to the another (see the notion of "learning at home" as one of the forms of parents' involvement in the school lifeworld, Epstein, 1995). Homework constitutes "the curriculum for the home" (Baker & Keogh, 1995), it enters the domestic sphere bringing school expectations, ways of speaking, standards of (cognitive) behavior, and canonical ways of doing things. As we argue, it is also a further occasion where cultural models of "good parent" and "good pupil" (Thornberg, 2009) are instantiated. Beyond subject-specific tasks, the culture of the school enters the home enacted by the speech acts deployed by participants during the activity (e.g., school-typical directives voiced by parents or children) or introduced by the logbook. These speech acts establish what and how the child at home should do to perform as a 'good pupil'.

Despite the relevance of this school-home trans-contextual practice, little attention has been paid to its situated accomplishment at least with respect to the relatively more investigated parent-teacher conferences (but see Colla, 2022a; Pontecorvo *et al.*, 2013; Arcidiacono & Gonzales-Martinez, 2018; Wingard, 2006; Forsberg, 2007; Wingard & Forsberg, 2009).

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1   In Italy the prescription for the 'educational alliance' has been normatively established by a series of laws that, since the seventies, have outlined joint education as a protective factor for children's development and school success (see Italian laws n.59, 1997, n.53, 2003, n. 107, 2015, and the DPR 249/1998 and its modifications in the DPR 235/2007, art.5). These laws and normative documents establish for instance that school should negotiate an "educational co-responsibility pact" with the families and be accountable by deploying their "Triennal Plan of Formative Offer" (*piano triennale dell'offerta formativa*).

Adding to this line of inquiry and drawing on a larger research project on homework as an ordinary family activity (Caronia & Colla, 2021; Colla, 2020; 2021a; 2021b; 2022a; 2022b; Colla & Caronia, 2020; Bolognesi & Dalledonne Vandini, 2020; 2021), in this study we investigate a specific activity ordinarily taking place while parents engage in assisting their children during homework: testing, i.e., the parent verifies the child's understanding of the lesson and capacity to remember it through a series of oral questions. By illustrating how parents and children engage in testing, we make a case of parents' orientation to the school culture, language, and demands. Our study adopts an ethnographic, video-based research design that is well known to create possible sample biases. Participants who accept to take part in this study are supposedly those who perceive themselves as (and often are) aligned with the explicit or implicit culturally established 'ought to be' implied in whatever educational practice. However, far from undermining the validity of the study, participants' possible orientation to the camera allows the researcher to access their ought-to-be worlds: in our case, we witnessed a perfect alignment between the school demands and expectations and parents' interactive behavior. While this orientation enacts the family-school partnership, it also seems to be defining which parent is the perfect school partner: the one who is competent in the school culture, who knows the 'forms of talk' of the school (Goffman, 1981) and, therefore, is able to enact the ideal 'recipient' embodied in the assignments.

A question arises as to the pupils who cannot count on such a 'school-aligned parent': if pupils' school career depends on an implied school-oriented, school-competent parent, how to include children whose parents do not share the school culture presupposed and implied in homework? How to bridge families' "small cultures" (Formenti, 2000) and the school institutional culture? If homework 'assumes' a school-aligned domestic cultural capital, does it risk marginalizing the pupils that cannot count on *this* cultural capital? And from a more radical point of view, since the notions of 'family-school continuity', 'parental involvement' and 'pedagogical alliance' have become taken-for-granted pedagogical assumptions as well as a naturalized, culture-specific framework, should not they become something to (re)think vis-à-vis the increasingly cultural and linguistic heterogeneity of contemporary schools?

The article is structured as follows. The introductory sections (n. 2 and 3) report extant literature on homework as a culturally dense, socializing activity, and delineate the current debate on the (un)suitability of this parent-involving activity. After the description of the data and procedures of the study (section n. 4), we present the analysis of a series of excerpts drawn from the different phases of the testing activity (section n. 5). The analysis shows how parents deploy a 'school-like' interactive conduct by reproducing the habits, standards, morality, linguistic practices, in a word, the 'culture' of the school. In the final section (n. 6), we reflect on the moral and educational value of parent-child interactions

during testing. As we argue, they constitute occasions for parents to both comply with the contemporary model of 'good parent as school partner' and, at the same time, socialize children into the culture of the school by turning them into "good pupils" (Thornberg, 2009).

2. Parent-child interactions as vectors of culture: the case of parent-assisted homework

After Ochs and Schieffelin's groundbreaking studies on language socialization (Ochs, 1988; Schieffelin & Ochs, 1986; Duranti *et al.*, 2012), a great amount of research has been devoted to illustrating the situated, language-based ways in which children are socialized to culture-specific ways of thinking and acting in and through everyday interactions with caregivers, particularly parents. In parent-child interactions, cultural beliefs, expectations, and norms are not only present in the form of implicit underlying premises, but they are also frequently brought to the surface of interaction, especially through parental corrections and "practices of control" (Goodwin & Cekaite, 2018). Research on family interaction has illustrated how socialization occurs in and through interactions during various family activities, such as dinner (see among others, Ochs *et al.*, 1996; Caronia & Galatolo, 2018; Caronia *et al.*, 2021), cleaning practices (Fasulo *et al.*, 2007), shared housework and domestic tasks (Ochs & Izquierdo, 2009). Along with practical knowledge and pragmatic competences (e.g., how to accomplish a certain task), children are introduced to a specific ethos, cultural models, suitable ways of acting, and culture-specific ways of doing the 'right thing'. Like other family activities entailing interactions between parents and children, homework constitutes a "cultural site" (see Ochs & Shohet, 2006), that is an opportunity for (re)affirming and conveying "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: 5). According to Pontecorvo *et al.* (2013), parental help with homework is characterized by a "hybridization" of different learning practices, both formal and informal. Through such practices, children are apprenticed to the cultural norms, values, and beliefs enacted within the family (Colla, 2021a; 2021b) and gradually become legitimate and competent participants in the activities of their community (see Lave & Wenger, 1991). For example, during homework, children and parents locally negotiate notions of autonomy, self-reliance and responsibility concerning learning activities (Forsberg, 2007; Wingard & Forsberg, 2009; Caronia & Colla, 2021; Colla, 2021a) and socialize each other to culturally relevant ideologies about childhood and 'good parenting' (Colla, 2022a; 2022b; Kremer-Sadlik & Fatigante, 2015). Furthermore, research has stressed that parental assistance with homework fosters children's time management and planning abilities

(Colla, 2021b). By asking about homework, making plans for its completion, and urging children to 'do homework first', parents socialize children to managing homework time appropriately as well as to the cultural hierarchy establishing which activity is to be accomplished first (Colla, 2020; Wingard, 2006).

As these studies illustrate, there is a lot of cultural apprenticeship at stake in parent-assisted homework: this activity appears to be a key family activity through which children become competent "speakers of culture" (Ochs, 2002). However, there is a dimension that should not be overlooked: this cultural apprenticeship is intertwined with school education as it occurs in and through the joint accomplishment of school tasks. While parents orient children to family moral horizons and values, they concurrently align (and, moreover, are supposed to align) with the school demands, expectations, ways of speaking and doing things. From this point of view, homework provides parents with unique occasions to reproduce the culture and morality of the school inside the home, and, therefore, educate their children into a school-aligned cultural and moral horizon. Given its impact on family everyday life and the standards it sets for parents' school-aligned conduct, homework has always been a pedagogically debated/debatable practice.

3. The homework controversy: pros and cons of a school practice

Since the spread of compulsory education, home assignments have given rise to a harsh socio-pedagogical debate concerning their efficacy with respect to school success and their role in reinforcing, instead of reducing, the impact of sociocultural differences and vulnerable conditions on pupils' school performances (Gill & Schlossman, 2000; 2003). Basically, the proponents of the "no-assignment" position underline that correlational research has demonstrated only minimal positive effects of home assignment on school success, which are almost absent in primary school (Cooper, 2007; Flunger *et al.*, 2015). Additionally, they underline that homework risks to perpetuate and even reinforce socio-cultural differences if it is conceived of as the completion of the school work and makes relevant parental involvement (Bolognesi, 2018; Favaro, 2014). Last but not least, the "no-homework crusade" (Gill & Schlossman, 1996) underlines that homework is an excessive burden for children and a family-time-consuming activity (Kralovec & Buell, 2000). On the opposite side, the "pro-homework" stance underlines the positive outcomes of home assignments. In this perspective, homework is viewed as an occasion for the child to develop a sense of responsibility, autonomy, and agency (Foyle & Bailey, 1988; Keith *et al.*, 2004; Merieu, 2002) as well as a way to connect family and school (Coleman, 1988; Epstein, 2001). Although home assignments constitute an organizational issue for parents (Izquierdo *et al.*, 2006; Kremer-Sadlik &

Fatigante, 2015), this activity can reinforce parent-child bonds, promote the management of children's emotions and the sharing of experiences. Moreover, it constitutes a way for school practices to become inspectable by the parents beyond formal documents and teachers' or children's reports (Marsico *et al.*, 2013). After decades of pedagogical controversy, the dilemma – for some even a "battle" (Cooper, 2007) – is still unresolved as the suitability or unsuitability of homework clearly depends on hyper-contextual factors. Among them, the most important are arguably whether the accomplishment of homework requires parental assistance, which type of assistance is necessary, and how parents perform it.

Drawing on a video-based study on naturally occurring interactions during parent-assisted homework, in this article we focus precisely on the school-oriented (linguistic) behavior undertaken by parents and children while doing homework together. In particular, we analyze one of the activities that recurrently occur during parent-assisted homework: the parent engages in testing the child to verify their understanding of the lesson and capacity to remember it. In the next section, we describe the research design and analytical procedures of this study aiming at analyzing in detail how parents and children engage in the school-like activity of testing.

4. Research design and analytic procedures

The study presented in this article is part of a larger research project on the accomplishment of homework as an ordinary activity. In this project, a total of 62 parent-assisted homework sessions were collected in 19 family residences. The participant families lived in the north of Italy and were composed of two working parents and at least one child attending primary school (i.e., aged 6-10 years old). Among the nineteen families involved, three had a migrant background; all families spoke Italian when doing homework. Participants were recruited through the authors' personal and work connections and their consent was obtained according to Italian law n. 196/2003 and EU Regulation n. 2016/679 (GDPR).

After repeated observation of the data, we identified a series of activities whereby parents get actively involved in children's homework. These include: structuring space and time for homework (Colla, 2020; 2021a; 2022a), organizing the material choreography (Caronia & Colla, 2021), explaining concepts (Bolognesi & Dalledonne Vandini, 2020), monitoring the execution of homework (Colla, 2022b), testing children, checking and correcting homework (Bolognesi & Dalledonne Vandini, 2021). Building on these works, this article focuses on the activity of testing, i.e., conversational exchanges whereby parents verify and assess children's understanding and knowledge of the lesson assigned for homework. More specifically, the analysis illustrates how parents in the study demonstrate their orientation to reproducing the school culture (e.g., habits, morality, linguistic practices, and standards) through the activity of testing. The excerpts pre-

sented in the analytical section are representative of the communicative practices typically deployed in all the families involved in the study.

Once identified the phenomenon of 'testing', the excerpts containing occurrences of this activity have been transcribed and analyzed by adopting a conversation analysis informed approach (Jefferson, 2004; Sidnell & Stivers, 2013). This theoretical and methodological approach is particularly suited to the aims of this study. Indeed, it provides unique means to describe the sequential unfolding of the testing activity and illustrate the micro, situated ways in which parents and children cooperatively accomplish it. At the same time, the conversation analytic approach allows to transcend the micro, contingent dimension of conversation by tracing participants' orientation to cultural and moral notions (e.g., 'parental involvement', 'family-school partnership', and 'good parenting'). In line with the multimodal approach to conversation analysis (Mondada, 2016), transcripts have been enriched with notations for gaze directions, gestures, and body movements when ostensibly relevant for the participants. Transcripts are presented in two lines: the original Italian transcript is followed by an idiomatic translation in American English. For the sake of anonymity, all names have been fictionalized and references to places and people have been deleted.

5. Analysis: testing as school-like activity

We identified three, sequentially ordered phases that constitute parent-child testing activity in our data: 1) opening, 2) realization, and 3) closing. These phases are characterized by some typical, non-mutually exclusive, nor necessary, sub-activities (see Table 1). The opening phase features parents' and children's mutual recruitment and possibly the negotiation of the ways in which the testing should be done. The realization is the core of testing. In this phase, parents ask children a series of questions concerning the lesson due for homework, they evaluate children's replies, correct them when wrong, and sometimes scaffold children toward the correct answer. Finally, in the closing phase of the testing activity, parents offer an overall assessment of the child's performance in the test and tell the child what to do next (e.g., repeat the lesson or proceed with the next assignment).

The excerpts analyzed in the next sections are drawn from the different phases of the testing activity and illustrate parents' pervasive orientation toward reproducing the habits, standards, morality, and linguistic practices of the school. By deploying a 'school-like' interactive conduct (e.g., engaging in question-answer-evaluation sequences) and through declarative claims (e.g., "I do what the teacher will probably do") parents do two 'things with words'. First, they educate their children to the culture of the school, thus socializing them into "good pupils" (Thornberg, 2009); second, they enact the cultural model of 'good parent' they assume, that is the 'school-aligned partner'.

Phases	Sub-activities
Opening	Parents and children's mutual recruitment; negotiation of the ways in which the test should be done
Realization	Parents' questions; children's answers; parents' evaluation and correction of answers; parents' scaffolding
Closing	Parents' overall assessment of children's performance; parents' indications on what children should do next

Table 1 – The phases and sub-activities of testing in parent-assisted homework

3.1. "As the teacher will probably do": Defining the incipient testing as a 'school-like' activity

Ex. 1 – "As the teacher will probably do" (min. 00.00 – 01.01)
Mother; Stella (eight years old, third grade)

```
1    Mother   allora o,- >possiamo far così o ti faccio delle
              well either,- >we can do it that way< either I ask you some
2    Mother   domande così (.)sparse.
              questions like this (.) random.
3    Stella   m::h,
4    Mother   come farà: probabilmente la maestra. ti darà d:elle
              as the teacher will probably do:. she will give so:me
5    Mother   domande, da scrivere, =
              questions, to write down, =
6    Stella   = la maestra ha detto che mi dà delle schede, =
              = the teacher said that she will give me some forms, =
7    Mother   = brava =
              = right =
8    Stella   = con delle domande ma non <sparse.>
              = with some questions but not <random.>
9    Mother   no. da che cosa pensi che inizia la maestra? da una
              no. where do you think the teacher will start from? from
10   Mother   cosa fatta tanto tempo fa?
              something done a long time ago?
11   Stella   m:: ^dalla terra ha una storia
              m:: ^from earth has a history
12   Stella      ^((pointing to the heading on the history book page))
13   Mother   dalla storia della terra
              from the history of earth
14   Stella   mh mh
15   Mother   ok  allora  f-  vogliamo fare: (.) una simulazione e vediamo:,
              ok then w- do we want to do: (.) a mock test and see:,
16   9 lines omitted: Mother and Stella further discuss the topics to be dealt with in the test
17   Mother   allora (.) m: <vediamo un po' che domanda potrebbe dirti la
              well (.) m: <let's see what questions could ask you the
18   Mother   maestra>, (.) che cos'è la scienza?
              teacher>, (.) what is science?
```

The exchange above occurs during the opening of the testing activity (see Table 1). The child has already recruited her mother; now they are sitting side by side negotiating the ways in which the test should be done as well as the topics that should be covered. This negotiation in the opening phase clearly shows parents' orientation toward testing children in a 'teacher-like' manner.

In line 1, the mother opens the negotiation on the ways in which the testing should be done. After the discourse marker "*allora*" which typically signals the beginning of a new activity (Bazzanella *et al*., 2007), she proposes to quiz Stella through a series of random questions (lines 1 and 2). Following the child's continuer ("m::h,", line 3, see Schegloff, 1982), the mother accounts for her proposal by suggesting that this way of testing is likely to be the same that the teacher will adopt at school ("as the teacher will probably do", line 4). In the same turn, the mother even explains what the teacher will probably do at school ("she will give so:me questions, to write down,", lines 4 and 5). By making predictions about the teacher's conduct, the mother demonstrates her knowledge of the school-specific, institutional talk activities (Mehan, 1979). At the same time, she displays her orientation to mirroring the teacher's practices in testing the child according to school-established procedures.

The mother's intention to reproduce the teacher's conduct is also visible in what follows. When Stella reports the teacher's claim about her testing practices (lines 6 and 8), the mother straightforwardly aligns with the child's statement and asks her where the teacher will start from in making questions ("where do you think the teacher will start from?", line 9). Once obtained the child's answer (line 11), the mother acknowledges it and further displays her intention to imitate the school setting by proposing to do "a mock test" (line 15).

When Stella and her mother finally close the negotiation by establishing the topics to be dealt with in the test (line 16), the mother starts testing Stella (note again the use of the term "*allora*" marking the beginning of a new interactive activity, line 17). It is worth noticing that, before asking Stella the first question (which is produced in line 18), the mother voices once again her orientation toward the teacher's testing practices. By wondering about the questions that the teacher could ask (lines 17 and 18), the mother makes relevant and "talks into being" (Heritage, 1984: 290) her intention to reproduce the school situation at home and test the child in ways that are consistent with the teacher's standards.

In sum, by repeatedly making relevant the teacher's testing style and displaying her intention to reproduce it, the mother frames the testing activity at home as a 'mock test', an imitation of the school exam, and stages herself as a 'school-aligned parent' who is competent in the culture of the school. As we will see in the next section, the mirroring of school culture in the testing activity is also achieved through the deployment of interactive sequences, question formats, and terms that are typical of classroom talk.

3.2. Features of classroom talk in the realization of testing: interactive practices

Long-standing research has indicated that classroom talk is characterized by specific sequences, turn formats, and jargons that distinguish this kind of conversation from other types of exchanges (Gardner, 2013, for a recent overall review, see Caronia & Nasi, 2021). Among the most characteristic features of classroom talk are IRE (initiation-response-evaluation) sequences (Mehan, 1979; Sinclair & Coulthard, 1975; McHoul, 1978), designedly incomplete utterances (Koshik, 2002; Margutti, 2010), and the use of terms belonging to specific disciplinary vocabularies (Schleppegrell, 2001). Interestingly, parents in our study pervasively reproduced these features of classroom talk when testing their children at home. The excerpts below provide some examples of 'classroom-like talk' occurring during the phase of realization of testing (see Table 1). In particular, ex. 2 illustrates how a mother reproduces the IRE sequence, which is constituted of 1) initiation (typically a question), 2) response, and 3) evaluation (see among others, Mehan, 1979; Lee, 2007; Margutti & Drew, 2014). By issuing the first and third turns of the sequence, the mother embodies a "surrogate teacher" (Popkewitz, 2003: 73) inside the home.

Ex. 2 – "What is the Pangea?" (04.05 – 04.37)
Mother; Stella (third grade)

```
1    Mother   e ti ricordi invece che cos'è la pange:a?
              and do you remember what is the pange:a instead?

2    Stella   la p:angea è stata la prima terra a formarsi che però
              the p:angea has been the first earth to form that however

3    Stella   era (.) molto calda
              was (.) very hot

4    Mother   brava era la prima terra. tutti i continenti erano uniti.
              well done it was the first earth. all continents were united.

5    Stella   la maestra dice che si chiama bro:do primordia:le
              the teacher says that it is called primo:rdial sou:p

6    Mother   ecco brava sì
              there you go right yes ((looking at the book))

7    Stella   che ti scotti tanto tanto
              that you get really burned

8    Mother   e come si chiamava il m:are che era intorno alla pangea?
              and what was the name of the sea that surrounded the pangea?

9    Stella   m:: pantalassa
              m:: panthalassa

10   Mother   <la pantalassa>
              <the panthalassa> ((nodding))
```

The first IRE sequence occurs in lines 1-4. In line 1, the mother issues the first component of the sequence: she asks the child to define the word "pangea". The mother's initiation is followed by the child's response in lines 2 and 3. In the following turn, the mother produces the third component of the IRE sequence: she positively evaluates Stella's statement by praising her ("well done", line 4) and repeating the core of her utterance in a falling intonation ("it was the first earth.", line 4). The mother then expands her closing turn by adding some information ("all continents were united.", line 4). In so doing, the mother treats this information as relevant and therefore missing from the child's already provided answer.

The next IRE sequence occurs in lines 8-10. It is initiated by the mother's question in line 8 ("and what was the name of the sea that surrounded the pangea?"). After displaying her thinking process (see the response cry "m:" in line 9, Goffman, 1978), the child provides an answer ("panthalassa", line 9). The child's answer is followed by the mother's positive evaluation: in line 10 she repeats the child's turn in a slow-paced, falling intonation. In addition to showing the IRE sequence, this excerpt also illustrates parents' preoccupation with their child's ability to learn and remember the disciplinary jargon of the specific subject (for another instance of this phenomenon, see below). Indeed, in this exchange the mother asks the child the meaning of the specialized word "Pangea" (line 1), she praises her for remembering the term "primordial soup" (line 6), and tests whether the child knows the word "Panthalassa" (line 8).

As we mentioned above, another key interactive component of classroom talk is "designedly incomplete utterances" ("DIUs", see Koshik, 2022; Margutti, 2010) or "*domande a imbeccata*" (see Ciliberti & Anderson, 1999). DIUs are a particular question format in which the teacher produces incomplete utterances as a means to elicit the missing information in the form of utterance completion by the pupil. As ex. 3 shows, DIUs are used by parents when testing their children at home as well.

Ex. 3 – "Where they build…" (min. 02.30 – 02.50)
Mother; Tania (nine years old, fifth grade)

```
1     Tania     i micenei si spostano a nord est
                the mycenaeans move to the north east

2     Mother    di cosa? a nord est di cosa?
                of what? to the north east of what?

3               (1.0)

4     Tania     d:el: mar ege::o,=
                o:f: the aegean se::a,=

5     Mother    = dove costruiscono,
                = where they build,

6     Tania     dove costruis::cono, nuove abitazioni. .hh=
                where they buil::ld, new houses. .hh=
```

In line 5, the mother tests Tania by using a designedly incomplete utterance. The mother's utterance is constructed as the continuation of the child's turn (see the use of the conjunction "where" and the subject pronoun "they" referring to "the mycenaeans" mentioned by Tania in line 1). However, this utterance is evidently incomplete: not only does it lack the direct object of the sentence, but it is also produced in a slightly rising intonation that conveys its incompleteness. By virtue of its syntax and prosodic contour, the mother's turn makes relevant a completion, which the child produces immediately: Tania repeats the mother's turn and completes it by adding the missing information ("where they bui::ld, new houses.", line 6).

The excerpt below illustrates in detail a phenomenon we have already noticed in ex. 2: parents appear to be oriented to reproducing a further feature of classroom talk, i.e., the use of specialized terms belonging to the disciplinary vocabulary of the subject under discussion. In ex. 4, such an orientation is made visible in the mother's correction of the child's vocabulary. The following exchange is the continuation of ex. 3.

Ex. 4 – "To cohabit" (min. 02.55 – 03.10)
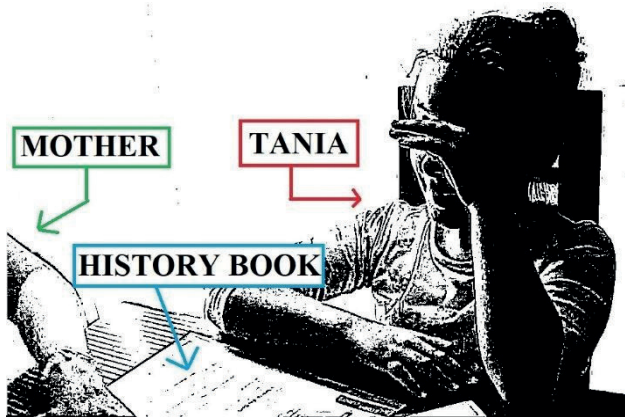Mother; Tania (nine years old, fifth grade)

Fig. a – The test scene

```
1      Tania    nell'ottocento avanti cristo dori e micene:i, cominciano a
                in the 800 before christ dores and mycenaea:ns, start to

2      Tania    vivere insieme,
                live together,

3      Mother   a convivere,
                to cohabit,

4      Tania    a convivere,
                to cohabit,
```

Tania is narrating the history of the populations of Dores and Mycenaeans (line 1) when she uses the phrase "live together" (line 2) to describe the fact that these populations shared the same territories and villages. Immediately, the mother intervenes with a correction whereby she substitutes the lay expression "live together" with the more formal term "cohabit" (line 3). It is worth pointing out that while correcting the child's word choice, the mother holds the history book open in front of her (see fig. a), which suggests that she is probably reading the term "cohabit" in the schoolbook. Therefore, through her correction, the mother is prompting the child to use a word that is not only more formal, but also more specialized, belonging to the disciplinary jargon of the specific subject (i.e., history), and used in the schoolbook. In her following turn, the child repeats the specialized term used by her mother, incorporating it into her discourse (line 4).

3.3. "Well done! A plus": Parents' teacher-aligned conduct in closing the testing activity

Parents' demonstration of their alignment with the school culture was also visible in the closing phase of the testing activity (see Table 1). Indeed, by evaluating the child's performance, parents mirrored the teacher's final assessment that inherently characterizes the testing activity at school. Ex. 5 illustrates how parents even happened to evaluate their child's performance through the use of the marks that are typical of the school institutional assessment scale. We join the interaction when the child is listing the types of invertebrate animals she has studied.

Ex. 5 – F15H2 v. 3 (11.15 – 11.35)
Mother; Roberta (seven years old, second grade)

```
1    Roberta   poriferi, (.) celentera-ti, (1.0) molluschi,
               porifera, (.) coelentera-ta, (1.0) mollusks,

2    Mother    sì,
               yes,

3              (1.2)

4    Roberta   vermi, (0.5) echinode:rmi, (0.8) aranch-arac[nidi],
               worms, (0.5) echinide:rms, (0.8) aranch-arach[nids],

5    Mother                                               [nidi]
                                                          [nids]

6              (1.1)

7    Roberta   crostacei, e insetti.
               crustaceans, and insects.

8    Mother    BRA:VA:. dieci più.
               WELL DO::NE. A plus

9              (0.8) ((Roberta smiles))

10   Mother    ok. basta per stasera.
               ok. enough for this evening.
```

When Roberta finishes listing the types of invertebrate animals (lines 1, 4, 7), the mother issues a very positive evaluation. She praises her ("WELL DO::NE") and assesses her performance with the highest mark ("A plus", "dieci più"). The use of this school-like standard is particularly interesting as it demonstrates the mother's orientation to adopting "the teacher's evaluative eye" (Kremer-Sadlik & Fatigante, 2015: 75; Colla, 2022b) by aligning with the school institutional assessment scale.

It is worth noting that parents' mirroring of the school culture went beyond the use of school-like assessments at the end of testing. As the next example shows, the mother does not only evaluate the child's overall performance in the test, but she also takes the teacher's side when the child problematizes her homework-related conduct. In so doing, the mother demonstrates that she shares the moral order of the school and, at the same time, ratifies its validity inside the home.

Ex. 6 – "She can even give you ten because she is the teacher" (min. 12.20 – 12.55)
Mother; Tania (nine years old, fifth grade)

```
1    Mother   allora secondo me bisogna che lo riguardi eh (.) perché=
              ok in my opinion you need to look at it again eh (.) because=
2    Tania    =sì  ma  non ci può dare   [all'inizio  della scuola qua-]
              =yes but she can't give us [at the beginning of the school fo-] ((in a
              whiny tone))
3    Mother                              [no    lei    può.]
                                         [no    she    can.]
4    Mother   lei può.
              she can.
5    Tania    quattro pagine
              four pages ((in an irritated tone))
6    Mother   sì te  ne può  dare  anche dieci ^perché lei è l'insegnante.
              yes she can  even give  you ten  ^because she's the teacher.
7    Tania                                    ^((moves the history book to her side and starts
              reading it))
8    Mother   lei può.
              she can.
```

In line 1, the mother initiates the closing phase of the testing activity (note the use of the discourse marker "*allora*"): she instructs Tania on what she should do next (i.e., revise the lesson), thus conveying a negative evaluation of Tania's performance until then. In her reply, Tania quickly accepts the mother's suggestion and implicit negative evaluation ("yes", line 2); then she starts complaining about the teacher's homework-related behavior, which she criticizes by resorting to a pedagogical argument ("she can't give us at the beginning of the school", line 2). Note that, by denying the pedagogical legitimacy of the homework assigned by the teacher, Tania indirectly provides a justification for her poor performance in the test.

However, even before Tania finishes her turn (see the overlapping between lines 2 and 3), the mother rejects her complaint in a totally unmitigated way (lines 3 and 4). She openly contradicts her daughter's claim ("no") and displays her disagreement by recycling part of Tania's turn in a reversed polarity ("she can", lines 3 and 4, vs "she can't", line 2). The concise and generic deontic claims "she can" uttered twice discursively construct the teacher as an unquestionable authority over homework, in clear opposition with Tania's claims. Through this openly disaffiliating turn, the mother takes the teacher's side and presents her homework-related behavior as a non-debatable matter.

Vis-à-vis Tania's further complaint (the child problematizes the amount of homework, "four pages", line 5), the mother keeps taking the teacher's side. She confirms and even upgrades her previous deontic claims with a conforming extreme example ("she can even give you ten", line 6) followed by a 'quasi-tautological' account ("because she's the teacher", line 6). The extreme example and quasi-tautological account further present the teacher as an absolute authority whose homework-related decisions cannot be questioned. Even after Tania has visibly abandoned the complaint trajectory (she starts revising the history lesson, line 7), the mother further affirms the teacher's authority by recycling the previous deontic claim in a final intonation ("she can.", line 8). In sum, this test-closing sequence constitutes a precious occasion for the mother to stage herself as a school-aligned parent. At the very beginning of the excerpt (line 1), the mother evaluates the child's overall performance, thus reproducing the teacher's evaluative eye inside the home. In the following turns, she interactively constructs herself as the 'teacher's advocate' by exploiting the child's complaints as an occasion to affirm the unquestionable nature of the teacher's authority and ratify the moral order of the school inside the home.

4. Concluding discussion

The analysis has illustrated the many diverse ways in which the parents in the study demonstrated their orientation toward reproducing the habits, standards, morality, linguistic practices, in a word, the 'culture' of the school when testing their children during homework. More specifically, parents displayed their willingness to align with the testing style (presumably) adopted by the teacher (ex. 1), they reproduced the interactive sequences, question formats, and jargon typical of classroom talk (ex. 2, 3, 4), they evaluated the child according to school-like standards (ex. 5) and ratified the teacher's authority when it was challenged (ex. 6). Although there is no explicit prescription or request to act in such a teacher-like way, this is how parents in our study interpreted and enacted their 'being an involved parent' while doing homework: they embodied the school culture, acted as a 'sounding box' of the school voice and even as advocates of the teachers' epistemic and deontic authority. This is not to say that parents are always aligned, i.e.,

they consistently position themselves as spokespersons of the school-culture in any socio-discursive circumstances. On the contrary, in other social circumstances – like parent-teachers conference – some parents adopt also the opposite stance: they behave as their children's advocates challenging the teachers' epistemic and deontic authority (Caronia & Dalledonne Vandini, 2019; Caronia, 2022). However, when they are at home interacting with children about home assignments, they appear to be highly school-oriented as if homework was a non-negotiable 'curriculum for home'. As a trans-contextual artifact-mediated activity, not only does homework bring the school culture at home but it also seems to activate locally relevant identities: the child acts as a pupil and the parent as a teacher. As long as these identities work (e.g., the relative role behaviors allow for the task completion), they acquire a moral status: when homework doing is at stake, the 'good parent' is the teacher-like parent and the 'good child' is the pupil-like child.

At least in the cases that we have observed, homework appears to work mostly as a 'one way bridge': it is the culture of the school that enters the home with its repertoire of relevant knowledge and expectancies of appropriate behavior. When, as in our data, family members are competent enough in school forms of talk, expectations, implicit definitions of what learning is and what behaviors are its visible evidence (e.g., recycling the exact words of the schoolbook), the home-school encounter embodied in the homework activity appears to smoothly unfold and perfectly enact the 'family-school alliance'. A question arises as to what happens when the family private culture is not aligned with the models of good parent and good pupil implied in homework, and parents do not have the cultural capital necessary to scaffold their children's tasks.

Not surprisingly we do not have videorecordings of this hypothetical situation. The well-known sample bias of ethnographic video-based educational research is that participants are often those who perceive themselves as (and often are) aligned with the unavoidable explicit or implicit culturally established ought to be orders implied in whatever educational practice. It is unlikely that those who perceive themselves (and often are) not aligned with the educational normative models accept to put their everyday life on record. But still, the 'ideal scenario' that our data enlighten suggests that the family-school alliance and partnership is interpreted and enacted as the alignment of the home to the school. Rooted in the assumption that at the other end of the bridge there is an epistemically and deontically school-aligned parent, this unstated but operating model of partnership risks to produce more social divide than it is supposed to reduce.

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