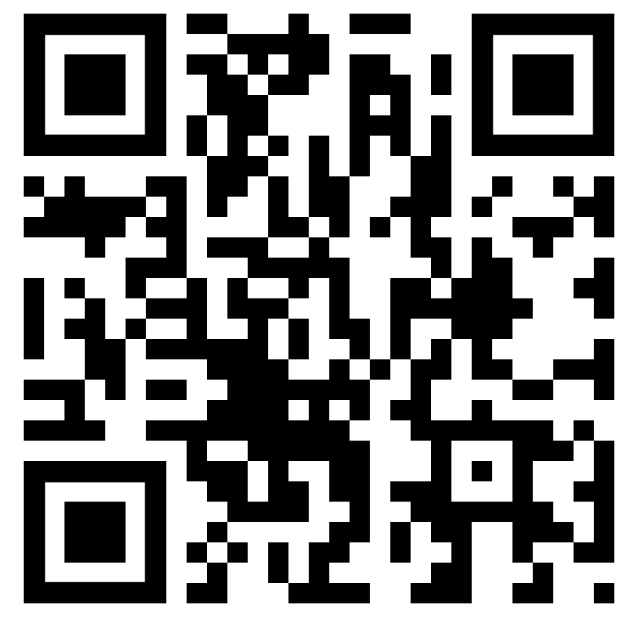


The ethnocentrism of the school institution: A key obstacle to school-family collaboration?

Two ethnographic studies in Switzerland (Fribourg)

2262

First study: COREL (2012-2016)

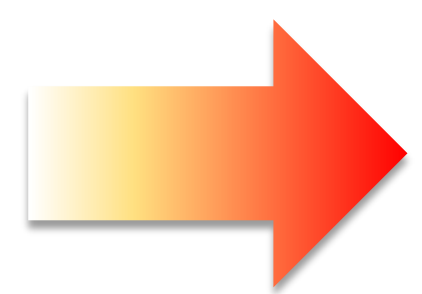


1 Starting point:

- Collaboration between schools and families is recognized as beneficial to the academic success and well-being of the child/pupil.
 - Yet research consistently reports that the results of the many efforts to develop collaboration are disappointing.
- Why is it so difficult ?

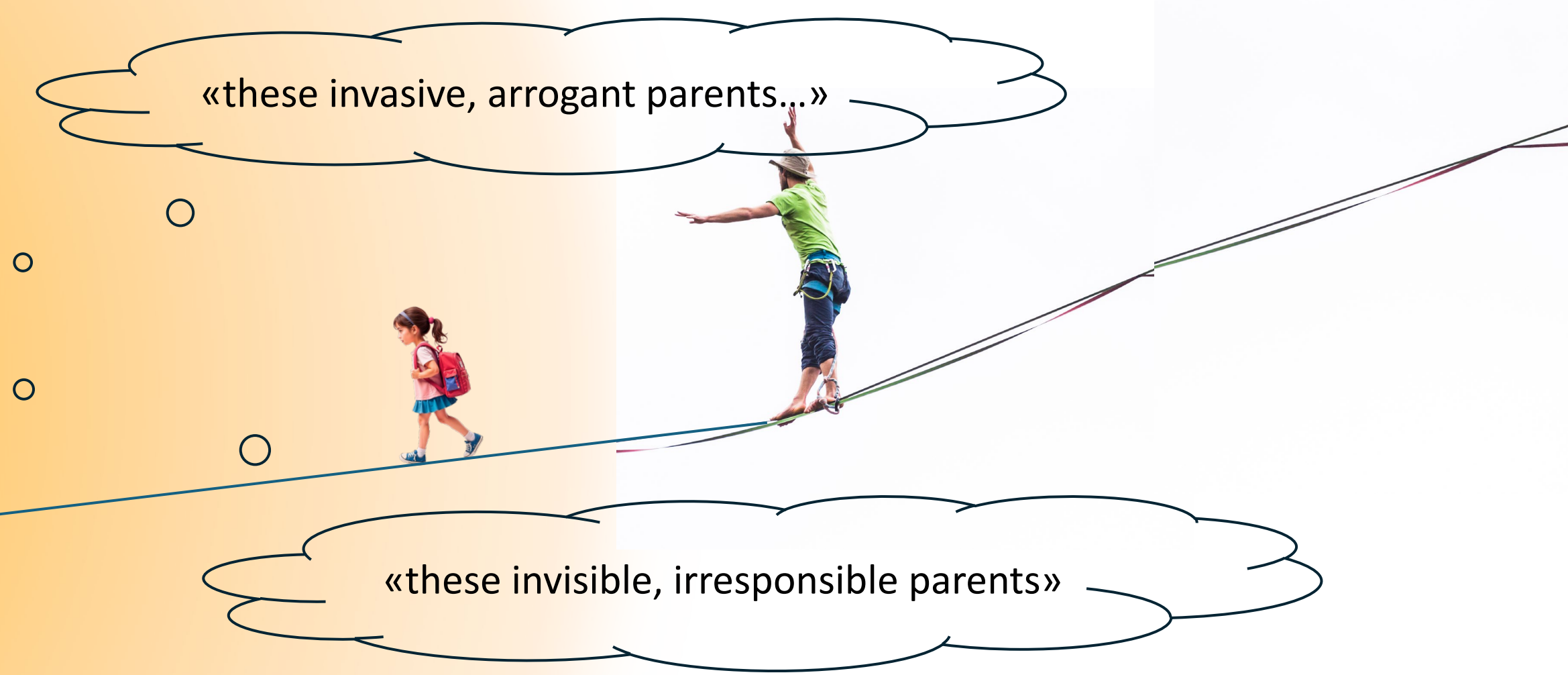
3a Main results:

- Teachers mainly viewed collaboration as requiring parental attitudes and practices to be aligned with school norms, which are perceived as indisputable and self-evident (Conus, 2017);
- Paradox: teachers expected a lot of support from parents regarding their children's schooling but remained largely silent about what was going on in school.



Interpretative hypothesis: the ethnocentrism of the school institution is a major obstacle to school-family collaboration

"Ethnocentrism involves a strong sense of importance that people give to their ethnic groups as if that group is in the center of everything and as if everything revolves around that group"
(Bizumic et al., 2021, p. 29)



2 Objective: to observe the development of the relationship from the very beginning: when the family's first child starts compulsory schooling (age 4):

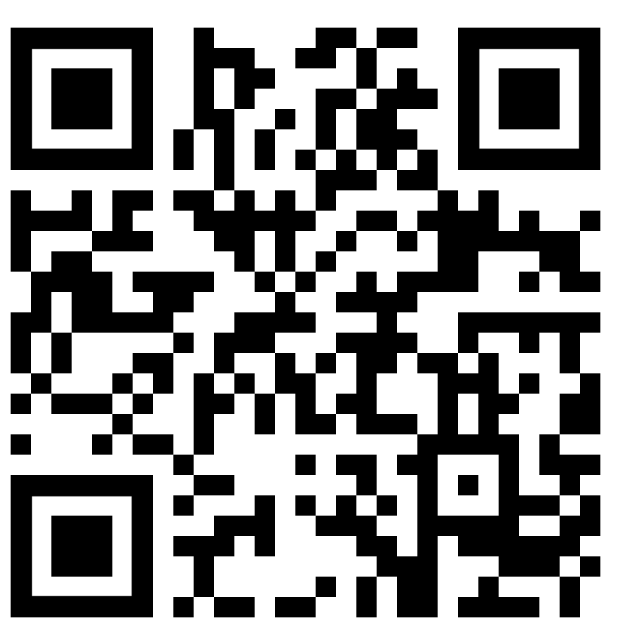
Ethnographic study in a suburban school, canton of Fribourg (CH)

- 22 families (predominantly with a migrant and socially disadvantaged background), 6 teachers (none with a migration background), 4 classes;
- 195 observations of moments of interaction between parents and teachers, 101 interviews (parents: 68, teachers: 30), collection of documents produced by the school.

3b

- Parents are often blamed for the difficulties encountered (deficit view of parents, Lasater et al., 2023), as if school action would not make a difference too;
- The school institution is self-centred (Ogay, 2017): school professionals tend to consider their perspective as THE reality that all parents should know and share. The needs of parents are often overlooked because school professionals do not see them.

Second study: DÉCOLLE (2019-2024)



4 Objective: to understand where school institutional ethnocentrism comes from

- To what extent do leaders of the cantonal school administration contribute to the production and maintenance of institutional ethnocentrism ?

6a Main results:

- The cantonal school leaders appear to have far less power and influence than we had expected. They are constantly striving to protect the cohesion of the institution, weakened by internal dissensions and external pressures from parents, the media and politicians (Ogay and Conus, 2024);
- To avoid conflict with their colleagues in the field, leaders of the school administration scale back their ambitions regarding the changes they should / would like to bring about, such as strengthening collaboration with parents;
- Perceived as an additional threat in this delicate context, parents are excluded from governance processes.

7 Perspective:

- To develop an Intercultural Communication Approach to the school-family relationship (started in Ogay, 2024), in order to analyse and understand its interactional and systemic challenges better;
- Put this theory into action by developing training courses for school professionals.

5 Ethnographic study in the school cantonal administration of Fribourg:

- Focus on the 3 heads of the departments for compulsory education, their 6 deputies, 15 inspectors;
- 90 interviews, 299 observations, 101 internal documents, 129 external documents;
- Abductive content analysis (Hallée and Garneau, 2019), with NVivo12 software.

6b

- Rather than being at the root of institutional ethnocentrism, school administration leaders appear to be limited in their action by the immobility of an inward-looking institution (and society ?), reluctant to change;
- Parents are kept at a distance and the school institution continues to operate in its self-centred way;
- Only parents who already share the school's implicit codes and standards have a chance of accessing it.

References used:

