

# Revisiting the Challenges Linked to Parenting and Home–School Relationships at the High School Level

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## Abstract

The article revisits data from a 2005 study on the parental involvement process. The purpose of this study was to analyze parents' written statements regarding two processes: parenting and home–school relationships associated with school success at the high school level. The objectives are mainly to describe parents' understanding of their role in adolescent education and schooling, to document their perception of adolescents' and teachers' invitations to become involved, and to identify contradictions within their relationships with adolescents and teachers. Using the Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT), we analyzed qualitative data obtained from 409 parents' statements. Main findings indicate contradictions in the *rules* and *division of labour* poles of the activity systems. Divergent points of view were noted between parents and adolescents and between parents and school/teachers in regard to their responsibilities. The same observations were made with respect to home–school relationships. Other contradictions were also identified

when the parents addressed the recurrent tensions to improve either their relationships with their adolescents or with the teachers. As a promising avenue for intervention and developmental research, the authors suggest to apply the Change Laboratory (CL) methodology to give adolescents a better voice and the ability to act as mediators in both activity systems.

*Keywords:* family processes, parental involvement, parent–adolescent relations, home–school relationships, school success, Cultural-Historical Activity Theory, Change Laboratory Method, tensions and contradictions

## Résumé

Le présent article revisite les données d'une étude précédente menée en 2005 sur le processus de participation parentale. Le but de cette étude est d'analyser les commentaires écrits des parents relativement à deux processus, l'exercice du rôle de parent éducateur et les relations famille-école associés à la réussite scolaire au secondaire. Les objectifs visent à décrire la compréhension des parents de leur rôle dans l'éducation et la scolarisation des adolescents; documenter leur perception des invitations à participer de la part des adolescents et des enseignants à participer et identifier les contradictions au sein de leurs relations avec les adolescents et les enseignants. Prenant appui sur la théorie historico-culturelle de l'activité (CHAT), nous avons analysé les données qualitatives obtenues à partir des commentaires écrits de 409 parents. Les résultats indiquent des contradictions dans les pôles *règles* et *division du travail* des systèmes d'activité susceptibles de contribuer à l'émergence de conflits. Des points de vue divergents ont été notés entre les parents et les adolescents et entre les parents et les enseignants/école en regard de leurs responsabilités. Les mêmes observations ont été faites en ce qui concerne les relations famille-école. D'autres contradictions ont également été identifiées lorsque les parents ont abordé les tensions récurrentes dans le but d'améliorer leurs relations soit avec leurs adolescents ou avec les enseignants. Comme voie prometteuse pour l'intervention et la recherche de développement, les auteurs suggèrent d'appliquer la méthode du Laboratoire du Changement (CL) basée sur CHAT afin de donner aux adolescents une voix au chapitre et d'agir comme médiateurs dans les deux systèmes d'activité.

*Mots-clés* : processus familiaux, participation parentale, relations parents–adolescents, relations école-famille, réussite scolaire, théorie historico-culturelle de l’activité, méthode du Laboratoire du Changement, tensions et contradictions

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## Introduction

A large number of scientific literature conducted nationally and internationally have emphasized the influence of family on children's and adolescents' learning and success in school (Adams & Ryan, 2000; Deslandes, 1996; Deslandes, Royer, Turcotte, & Bertrand, 1997; Epstein, 2011; Fan & Chen, 2001; Henderson, Mapp, Johnson, & Davies, 2007; Jeynes, 2007; Leithwood, 2009; Spera, 2005; Steinberg, Lamborn, Dornbusch, & Darling, 1992) and other student outcomes such as student attendance and homework completion (Deslandes, 2005, 2009a; Eccles, Early, Frasier, Belansky, & McCarthy, 1997; Epstein & Sheldon, 2002; Trusty, 1998). Apart from studies done on family characteristics based, for instance, on family structure or parents' education level, more recent works have focused on family processes (Deslandes, 2012a; Deslandes, Potvin, & Leclerc, 1999; Sputa & Paulson, 1995). These refer to parents' involvement behaviours and interactions with their children and the school. They are the mechanisms through which parents have an impact on their youngsters' academic and social development. In their research brief, Kreider, Caspe, Kennedy, and Weiss (2007) have put into evidence the family processes that correspond to parenting and home–school relationships. Parenting includes attitudes, beliefs, values, and parental practices of parents in the education of their children, whereas home–school relationships refer to formal and informal links between the school and families. These processes are modified when the child becomes a teenager because of adolescents' need to express their autonomy and independence (Deslandes, 2005; Greenberger, 1982; Steinberg, 2014). Another group of researchers have focused on parents' psychological motives for getting involved in their adolescent schooling (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997; Hoover-Dempsey, Whitaker, & Ice, 2010). These comprise understanding of their parental responsibilities or role construction, parents' self-efficacy, and perceptions of invitations to involvement. In fact, those elements of Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's (1997) model of parental involvement processes fall under the topics covered by Kreider and colleagues' (2007) brief.

This article revisits data from a previous 2005 study anchored in Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's (1997) theoretical model. Deslandes and Bertrand (2005) collected survey responses from 770 parents of secondary-level students attending five public schools in urban and rural areas in Quebec, Canada. Quantitative analyses revealed the importance of distinguishing between parent involvement at home and parent

involvement at school, and put into light the contribution of parents' role construction as well as their perceptions of teachers' and students' invitations to become involved (Deslandes & Bertrand, 2005). In other words, whether at home or at school, parents became involved if they perceived that teachers and students expected or desired their involvement. The authors had then suggested that the quality of parent–adolescent and parent–teacher relationships might be enhanced by specific behaviours. Eager to widen their own comprehension of the nature of parents' views regarding their involvement in their adolescent's education and schooling and their motives for doing so, the two researchers had also invited the participants to write their comments at the end of the questionnaires.

In the present work, we want to analyze and then describe the parents' comments in a systemic and multileveled way so as to enrich our understanding of parenting and home–school relationships at the high school level. A qualitative analysis should also provide us with more details about the needs parents are expressing. We believe that these needs reflected their main preoccupations at the time and that their statements are still quite relevant in these days of turmoil in the world of education (Deslandes, 2012a). This work is in continuity with some of our prior studies on parental involvement and family–school collaboration conducted over the past 20 years (for a review, see Deslandes, 2005, 2007, 2012b) and, more recently, on teachers' understanding of their work with parents and their expectations regarding parents' role (Deslandes, Barma, & Morin, 2015). Even though parents' involvement tends to decline throughout the middle and high school years (Deslandes, 2003; Lee, 1994; Spera, 2005), their role remains crucial regarding adolescents' development and academic outcomes (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002; Simon, 2004). As time went by, despite the deployment of numerous initiatives and strategies to promote family involvement in their adolescents' learning and schooling, some challenges seem to persist, mainly regarding individual interactions between a parent and his or her adolescent or between a parent and a teacher, at both the interpersonal and institutional levels (Deslandes & Barma, 2015; Deslandes et al., 2015; Kreider & Suizzo, 2009).

## Brief Literature Review

The following section outlines some of the previous research conducted on *parenting* and *home–school relationships* as related to the learning and development of adolescents. The

section will focus mainly on parenting practices or involvement behaviours, and parents' perception of adolescents' and teachers' invitations to become involved. It also highlights some relevant findings issued from our own studies involving Quebec parents and adolescents.

## Parenting

Parents influence their children in many ways. Research shows that some fundamental parenting practices are more likely to positively influence the success and development of youngsters than others. When parents manifest warmth and show interest in their youth, when they monitor the teens' whereabouts and promote their autonomy, for example, by having them participate in decision making—in short, when they adopt an authoritative parenting style—their teens tend, in general, to succeed, behave better, and optimally develop (Deslandes, 2005, 2007; Epstein, 2011; Henderson et al., 2007; Pourtois, Desmet, & Lahaye, 2008; Steinberg, 2014; Steinberg et al., 1992). According to Darling and Steinberg (1993), parenting styles that correspond to the “emotional climate in which the parents' behaviours are expressed” (p. 488), and parental educational practices are partly the result of the goals and values of the parents. It is thus important to pay attention to parents' attitudes and beliefs in order to understand their behaviours.

Other parenting practices linked to schooling play a significant role in the success of young people. For instance, when parents verbalize their aspirations, they help convince their teens to pursue post-secondary studies (Deslandes, 2005; Fan & Chen, 2001; Jeynes, 2005; Hill et al., 2004). Likewise, when parents provide students with affective support, such as encouraging words and compliments, homework assistance when needed, or positive discussions regarding school, course options, and so on, adolescents tend to perform better in school. Similarly, when parents and adolescents communicate in relation to study or work projects, it also seems to bear fruit (Deslandes, 1996; Domina, 2005). It is interesting to note that, contrary to popular belief, a great proportion of high school students want parents involved in their schooling (Deslandes & Cloutier, 2002). For example, with regard to home-based involvement, adolescents are willing to ask a parent to help prepare for an exam, or to discuss course options to choose from. In this regard, the results of a study (Deslandes & Bertrand, 2005) indicate that adolescents' invitations are the best predictor of parental involvement at home. It seems that parents

wait for their adolescents' invitations before they do become involved. It is plausible that parents may consider that their adolescents have taken personal responsibility for school and schoolwork and that they are the ones who should initiate the requests for parent involvement (Deslandes & Bertrand, 2005).

However, for parent–adolescent communication to take place, it requires that teens be willing to exchange with parents at a time when they are beginning to gradually distance themselves from their parents. Indeed, adolescence is a pivotal moment for the development of autonomy (Eccles et al., 1997; Steinberg, 2014). Teens must take more responsibility while staying connected to their parents. Obviously, there may be variation in the level of adolescents' openness to support certain types of parenting practices (Deslandes & Cloutier, 2002).

At the same time, parents have to be aware of their responsibilities and of the importance of being responsive and remaining actively connected with their adolescent. Yet their practices must respect the adolescents' developing maturity (Deslandes & Cloutier, 2002). In a previous study, Deslandes (2000) found that over a two-year span, adolescents' autonomy not only resulted from higher parental warmth, granting of psychological autonomy, affective support, and parent–adolescent communication, but also contributed to evoke these parental behaviours. The call for a balance between autonomy and connection can be quite challenging for parents at times and provoke tensions when interacting with their youngsters.

## **Home–School Relationships**

As for the connections between the family and the school, research shows that parental involvement in school life also contributes to greater persistence, more positive attitudes toward school, better behaviour, and increased class attendance on the part of the adolescent. Parents then participate, either by attending a performance, a show, or a sporting activity that takes place at school, or by contacting one or more teachers, such as at the school's report card night. Parents and teachers can also interact and communicate as members of the school council or other school committees, or as volunteers in classroom activities and school events (Epstein, 2011; Sanders & Sheldon, 2009). Parents have to be receptive to invitations to participate on the part of teachers. It seems that the perception of invitations to participate issued by the teachers and school is an essential aspect of a

parent’s decision to become involved at school (Deslandes, 2005; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2010). However, for the invitations to be heard and accepted by the parents, trust in teachers is required (Christenson, 2003; Deslandes & Bertrand, 2005). Trust is necessary for the development of collaboration between home and school (Deslandes, 2006a, 2006b, 2010). When staff members engage in relationships of trust and caring with parents, they recognize them as partners in the education of their teens. Teachers must take the time to earn the trust of parents because it does not come automatically—it develops with repeated interaction with parents. This type of interaction can occur at meetings, face-to-face interviews, discussions, telephone conversations, written comments, and participation in educational and social activities (Deslandes, 2006a).

The role of adolescents is an important aspect in the development of family–school collaboration. The adolescent is often considered as the “go-between,” or the liaison agent, between the school and the families (Perrenoud, 2015). In light of sociocultural theory, he or she can be perceived as a mediator as well as an engaged actor with regard to the role he or she is playing. As we will discuss later, it can be an important source of dialectical tensions (Ilenkov, 1977). Communication is established through adolescents and with the adolescents. They are not only messengers; they are also active actors instigating parents’ involvement in their schooling (Deslandes, 2013, 2015). As found in a prior study, parents are more likely to be involved at school if they feel that their presence is wanted by their adolescent (Deslandes & Bertrand, 2005). Authors have concluded that parents’ home-based and school-based involvement seems to be primarily an issue of not only parent–teacher relationship but also of parent–adolescent relationships.

Frequent and regular communication is the cornerstone to effective and collaborative relationships between parents and teachers. Communication must go beyond the stage of information to include exchanges on educational practices, expectations, and concerns. Frequently, communication between home and school only occurs when learning or behavioural difficulties are present (Deslandes, 1996; Deslandes et al., 1997; Lee, 1994). On the one hand, some parents are asking for more positive communication with the teacher, especially when the youth is improving (Deslandes, 2006a). On the other hand, as Shinn (2002) has said, “parents, recognizing that adolescents need to assert their independence, tend to back away from their child too soon” (p. 34). Research has shown that some teachers do not want more communication or collaboration with parents, as



parents tend to overprotect their child. As well, often the teacher does not receive enough support from the school principal (Deslandes et al., 2015). So it appears that school–family communication is still primarily unidirectional, despite all the works showing the compelling nature of reciprocity and bidirectionality in communication, components that must be present in order to foster collaborative relationships between teachers and parents (Deslandes, 2010; Epstein, 2011; Sanders & Sheldon, 2009).

In light of the above findings, three questions are raised: (1) What is the parents' comprehension of their role in adolescents' education and schooling? (2) What is their perception of adolescents' and teachers' invitations to become involved? (3) How can these areas of tensions within these relationships become driving forces to induce a significant and positive change for the adolescents, the parents, and the teachers involved?

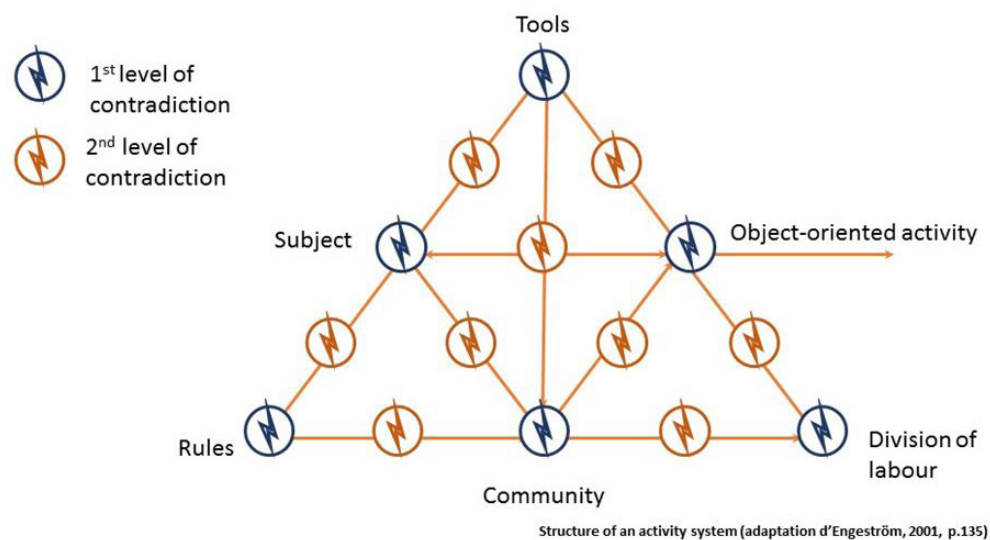
## Theoretical Frameworks

While keeping Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's (1997) model as the core theoretical model for analyzing parents' statements, as well as Kreider and colleagues' (2007) family processes linked to parenting and home–school relationships, we also relied on the Cultural-Historical Activity (CHAT) theory to identify and analyze the zones of tension and to provide some avenues to alleviate them. Such a theoretical model allowed us to use the analysis of parents' statements as a springboard to revisit our previous research. Building on the work of Vygotsky, Leont'ev, and recently of Engeström and Sannino (cited in Barma, Lacasse, & Massé-Morneau, 2014), third-generation activity theory (Engeström, 2001, 2007) provides a glimpse into the possible transformation of parent–adolescent and home–school relationships (*object*) with a view of improved adolescents' school success (*expected result or outcome*). The *subjects* (parents) associated with a targeted activity system act based on a common goal (being the improvement of adolescent's school success), experiencing tensions arising from the rules established in their respective communities, which often call for a clarification of roles and influence the division of labour when parents and communities interact (Barma, 2011). In CHAT, an activity system is always the unit of analysis. It is object-oriented and mediated by artifacts. The activity system provides a systemic way to understand how actions are conducted both by individuals and a collective who share a same goal. "The object of the activity is constantly

moving and cannot be reduced to short-term aims” (Barma, 2008, p. 161). The study of the activity being pursued by the subjects is no longer focused solely on the psychology of an individual, but also on the interaction between the individual and the various tools, as well as the interaction between the individual and the other players in the activity system, which implies a necessary consideration of roles and division of labour of the members (Engeström, 2001, 2010).

Two previous studies (Deslandes & Barma, 2015; Deslandes et al., 2015) have shown that recurrent systemic tensions leading to contradictions can emerge at each pole of an activity system as well as in the interactions between parents, children, and teachers. Given that contradictions based on third generation Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) (e.g., Figure 1) can be a force for transforming activities, we suggest an expansion of this area of knowledge at another level through a better understanding of how recurrent tensions—namely, contradictions—can be seen as useful to promote change at both the individual and collective levels (Engeström, 2015).

### 1st and 2<sup>nd</sup> levels of contradictions in an Activity System



*Figure 1.* Model of an Activity System and two levels of contradictions (Engeström, 2001)

In his theory of expansive learning, Engeström builds from the work of Davydov (2008) and conceptualizes four types of contradictions (primary, secondary, tertiary, and quaternary), all in the context of an expansion cycle of learning. Following Ilenkov (1977, 1982), the theory of expansive learning sees contradictions as historically evolving tensions that can be detected and dealt with in real activity systems. Engeström characterizes contradictions as drivers of change that are inherent to all human activity. In capitalism, the pervasive primary contradiction between use value and exchange value is inherent to every commodity, and all spheres of life are subject to commoditization. This primary contradiction takes its specific shape and acquires its particular contents differently in every historical phase and every activity system (Engeström, 1987). Most importantly, contradictions are the driving force of transformation. The object of an activity is always internally contradictory. It is these internal contradictions that make the object a moving, motivating, and future-generating target. Expansive learning requires articulation and practical engagement with inner contradictions of the actors' activity system.

In the context of this contribution, we have focused our attention on the first and second level of contradictions in order to get a deeper understanding of parents' comprehension of their roles with adolescents' education and schooling. The first level of contradiction is situated at each pole of an activity system when opposing forces are identified. The second level of contradiction is located between different poles when participants start addressing an identified problem to resolve it (e.g., Figure 1). CHAT proposes that the social relationships between subjects (parents, adolescents, teachers) and the object of their ongoing activity are mediated by tools (e.g., communication modes), by rules (e.g., norms, policies, conventions), and by division of labour (e.g., tasks and status relations) that can hinder or facilitate interactions in activity systems. The pole community corresponds to the involved groups of actors (adolescents, school/teachers) (e.g., Figure 1). When CHAT is applied as a lens to the present study, it allows the researcher to shed a different light on parenting and home–school relationships. The object is considered under the angle of the transformation of parent–adolescent and home–school relationships in view of improved parental involvement for student success: it is an object in construction, a third space that is not there yet.

Resolving contradictions is key and a necessary step in thinking of a new dynamic between parents, teachers, and adolescents. Negotiating boundaries between the actions of parents, teachers, and students involves multifaceted and interrelated aspects

that cannot be examined separately (Barma, 2011). In the end, the goal is a productive and meaningful experience for adolescents who navigate between their family and their school (Phelan, Davidson, & Cao, 1991).

In this article, we also sought to bring to light an innovative form of activity wherein parents, teachers, and students have to find a way to make sense of their multivoicedness and find a productive way to intersect their activities. Bridging home and school is often a source of tension, although both spaces are mutually constitutive (Deslandes & Barma, 2015; Deslandes et al., 2015). It becomes necessary to address the recurrent tensions and co-model a new way to interact in order to foster academic success among students. This is where CHAT can be useful as a theoretical lens.

## **Research Objectives**

As we presented earlier, the purpose of this study is to analyze parents' statements regarding some family involvement processes associated with school success at the high school level. The objectives were (1) to describe parents' understanding of their role in adolescent education and schooling; (2) to document their perception of adolescents' and teachers' invitations to become involved; (3) to identify tensions within their relationships with adolescents and teachers; and (4) to provide avenues to support parents, adolescents, and teachers as they engage in individual and collective transformation processes for positive and effective relations associated with student learning.

## **Method**

### **Participants**

Of the 770 parents of high school students who participated in Deslandes and Bertrand's study (2005), exactly 409 parents (53%) wrote some comments. Participants were mostly mothers (84%) with two children (37%) and with a high school diploma or a secondary-level trade formation (65%).

## Data Analysis and Processing

All of the transcribed statements yielded a document of 179 pages, and this document was analyzed using the N' Vivo software package. The coding is mixed (L'Ecuyer, 1990) in nature with a closed set of categories inspired by the two strands of family processes (i.e., Kreider et al., 2007; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997), and an open set of categories based on the content analysis (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). Examples of items are presented in the findings section. Note that both positive and negative statements were included in the analysis. The study was realized according to the university ethics standards of the time. The participants' statements were never published before. They are likely to help identify tensions that may have been accumulating in the processes of family involvement with regards to school success.

There are some limitations regarding this study that must be addressed. Even though the parents' comments were collected a number of years ago, our recent studies (Deslandes & Barma, 2015; Deslandes et al., 2015) lead us to believe that the identified contradictions at both the interpersonal and institutional levels are still quite relevant in 2016. In those studies, we also examined the viewpoints of teachers and other stakeholders. Hence, modes of communication have evolved, now including e-mail messages and student–parent portal systems at several schools and school district levels, but parents' desire to more easily reach teachers and to hear “positive feedback” and words of encouragement from them are still very present. As in other works using questionnaires, it is possible that parents who wrote comments were among the most involved parents.

Using CHAT analytical tools we were able to highlight some tensions and contradictions that will need to be addressed in a nearby future. The first level of analysis was rooted in the written comments of participants using Engeström and Sannino (2011) dialectical analytical tools. The discursive manifestations of tensions in the transcripts were identified, and the units of meaning were selected for their dialectical character, i.e., as embodying opposing forces or trends within an evolving system (conflicts, critical conflicts, double binds, and dilemmas). In addition, we made use of the parents' comments, analyzing them in light of conceptual tools of the third generation of activity theory, such as activity systems, tensions at each pole of the triangle, and zone of proximal development occurring between activity systems. There was a continual back and forth movement between the data and the analytical tools of activity theory.

## Major Findings and Discussion

The findings of the study are divided into two themes, *parenting* and *home–school relationships*. The *parenting* theme is in turn divided into the following categories: (1) attitudes and values of parents in bringing up their adolescent, (2) home-based parenting practices that match their actual behaviours and that they believe are part of their responsibilities, (3) parents' perception of adolescents' invitation to become involved, and (4) parents' perceptions of adolescents' responsibilities in their schooling, a category that emerged. The *home–school relationships* theme comprises three categories: (1) participation in school-based activities, (2) communication, and (3) parents' perceptions of family-school relationships, the latter of which emerged as a new category. The communication category also reflects the parents' perceptions of school/teachers' invitations grounded in Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's (1997) model. The results are first presented in line with the theoretical framework, and then they are discussed in light of the cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT) (Engeström, 2015).

### Parenting

The *parenting* theme contains over 238 statements that deal with attitudes, values, and parental practices. Attitudes of openness as well as values associated with good manners and respect are put forward as being crucial to convey to youngsters. For instance, one parent states: “As parents it is our responsibility to help develop values, know how...” (607). Another one adds: “We have worked hard to raise our children with love and respect for each other” (461). Another one writes: “I encourage him to do well his homework, to make sure to meet deadlines and not to wait at the last minute” (751).

Over 193 statements regarding parents' involvement practices at home were reported. By far the most important one in number is the subcategory *support, encouraging, and reinforcing* followed by *monitoring, communicating, guidance/modelling, and teaching*. They correspond to what parents believe they are supposed to do (role construction) and what they actually do (declared involvement practices). Examples are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Examples of comments regarding parental practices at home

Categories of Practices	Examples of Comments
Support, Encouraging, and Reinforcing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>We show interest in her, we help when needed, encourage, congratulate for hard work, reinforce work when well done.</i> (1240)</li> <li>- <i>I try to be interested in what she does and experiences in school.</i> (1384)</li> <li>- <i>At each report card, I buy small rewards to continue to stimulate and motivate them.</i> (17)</li> </ul>
Communicating	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>We have good communication and I often ask questions about the school activities in which my youngster participates.</i> (1438)</li> </ul>
Modelling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>We are models in our own way of life, in solving problems, in remaining motivated to continue to learn, to succeed in our life.</i> (907)</li> <li>- <i>Doctor appointments or others are always planned in function of the pedagogical days off. Our children never skip classes because of family travelling or holidays.</i> (775)</li> </ul>
Guidance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>They need guides; we, parents, currently act as their guides.</i> (748)</li> <li>- <i>We guide him so that he can take his responsibilities (organizing his study time, leisure time, and free time).</i> (1382)</li> </ul>
Teaching	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>Students lack the necessary tools. Parents must help by teaching them working techniques.</i> (985)</li> <li>- <i>I often discuss with my daughter about solutions to a problem. I asked her to inquire about the services offered at school and to ask questions to her headmaster.</i> (1541)</li> </ul>
Monitoring	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>In the morning and at night, I ask questions about her day at school and we discuss about her school results and her extra-curricular activities.</i> (217)</li> <li>- <i>I like to keep informed of his school day, his teachers, his activities, his friends.</i> (1510)</li> </ul>

The next two categories of statements are *parents' perception of adolescents' invitations* and *parents' perception of adolescents' role in their success* (47 statements). As shown in Box 1, some parents say that their adolescents never asks for help nor show them what they have done and that they leave their work at school. Others declare that their youngsters refuse any kind of help.

## Box 1

*Parents' Perceptions of Adolescents' Invitations**Positive Perceptions*

- *I intervene when needed, when he asks for it. (243)*
- *For a Halloween project, my teenager asked for some ideas in elaborating a scenario. (1164)*
- *On a few occasions, my daughter asked for help in solving math problems. (1165)*

*Negative Perceptions*

- *It's difficult because our adolescent does not want us to interfere in his or her work. (314)*
- *He never asks for help; he rarely shows me what he does, he leaves everything at school. (479)*
- *He never asks me to help; I have to ask him whether he has any homework. (369)*
- *I find it very difficult to motivate a child who does not like school. There is never one week going by without me offering my help but he refuses... He does not like me to check his things. (1428)*

At the same time, some parents state that success is primarily the adolescents' responsibility. As parents, they try to make them understand that they, alone, have the power to either succeed or fail (see Box 2).

## Box 2

*Parents' Perceptions of Adolescents' Responsibilities in Their Schooling*

- *I do not supervise homework, I leave to her the responsibility to do what is on her agenda. However, I ask her if she has any homework almost every night. (245)*
- *I believe that my 15-year-old has a great deal of responsibility regarding school achievement. (393)*
- *...their success is primarily their responsibility. (495)*
- *I try to make her understand that she alone has the power to either succeed or fail her school year. (1061)*
- *He doesn't always have the will that is required to do the job adequately. We may want to help but adolescents are the ones who must make the effort. (1115)*
- *I think he has to take the responsibility and get organized by himself knowing that his parents are present and keep an eye on what he does. (1183)*



In light of CHAT theory, on the one hand, parents are expected to be involved at home, while on the other hand, they face non-receptivity from adolescents (rules). Likewise, some parents want to help adolescents in developing their sense of responsibility, while others expect adolescents' total autonomy (division of labour). The unclear rules and division of responsibilities and roles between adolescents and parents are likely to contribute to accumulating tensions and to the possibly of conflicts arising between them (e.g., Figure 2). These analyses based on CHAT show a first level of contradictions in the rules and division of labour poles of the activity system. With CHAT, we focus on opposite forces within the same elements (Virkkunen & Newnham, 2013).

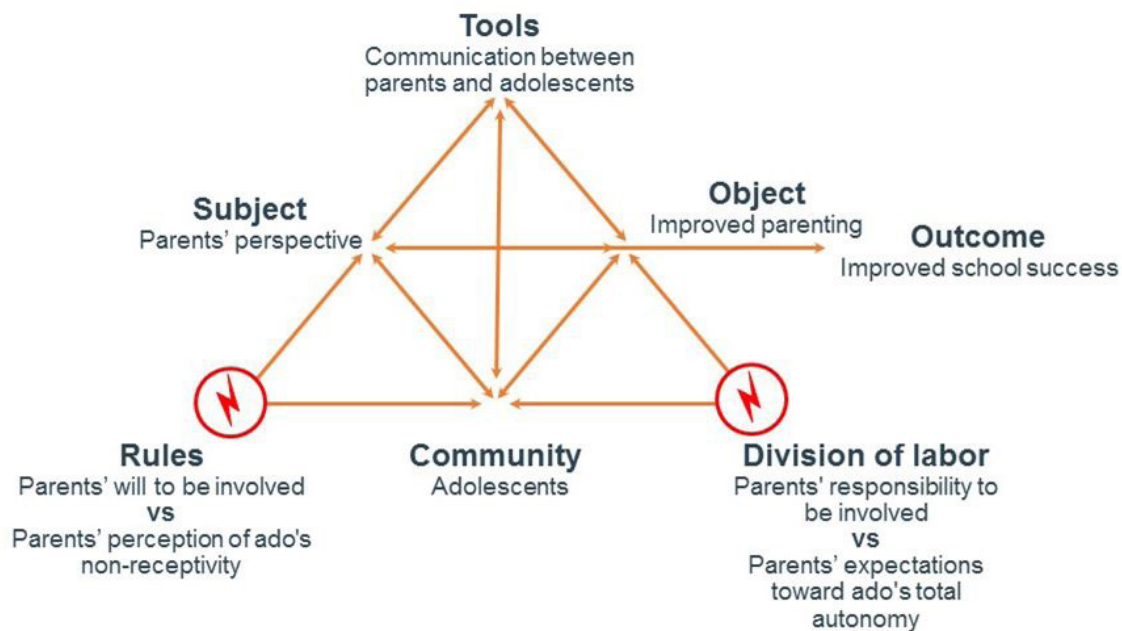


Figure 2. First level of contradiction for understanding processes of parental involvement for adolescents' school success

## Home–School Relationships

The *home–school relationships* theme has two main categories: *participation in school-based activities* and *communication*. The latter category reflects also *parents' perceptions of school/teachers' invitations* based on Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's model. In fact, these last two categories are not quite mutually exclusive. A third category emerged, that

of *parents' perceptions of family–school relationships*. Only a few statements (10) dealt with parental school-based activities involvement with respect to either involvement in the school council or participation in parent–teacher meetings. At those meetings, some participants complain that there are too many parents at the same time and therefore there is not enough time to exchange information with the teachers—referring to a lack of organization at the institutional level. The parents deplore that some teachers do not know their students at the time of the meeting. A greater number of comments (35) explain their non-involvement in terms of lack of time, whether due to a full-time job or the demands of being single parents, echoing Hoover-Dempsey et al.'s (2005) life context variables in their updated model.

In terms of *communications and perceptions of teachers' invitations* (46 statements), even though some parents expressed having regular communications with teachers, others expressed wanting to have a meeting with the homeroom teacher (one-to-one) in order to have time to ask questions and to clarify some points. Some parents find it hard to reach some teachers and to be given information regarding the new terms and the new teaching methods that are being used and that are different from what they were used to. Several parents complain that teachers invite them to meetings or communicate with them only when problems arise. They would like to be informed of their adolescents' progress and to be told that things are going well. One parent says: “When our adolescent has no problem, a wall of silence settles between the school and the parent. We cannot as a parent make contact with the teachers. They are not interested in talking to us as if success is not worth of our mutual interest” (1223). (See Box 3 for examples of positive and negative excerpts.)

### Box 3

#### *Parents' Perceptions of Communications and Invitations from the Teachers*

##### *Positive Perceptions (16 statements)*

- *I have regular contact by phone with the headmaster or the school principal. (194)*
- *It is interesting to be able to discuss [ideas] with the teachers. (269)*
- *When there are problems, we communicate with the teachers through memos. I once received a phone call from the school regarding my child's low achievement scores. (718)*
- *We respond to every school invitation in order to get more tools to help our children as much as possible. (878)*

*Negative Perceptions (30 statements)*

- *It is difficult to follow the teaching methods. We have to ask a lot of questions to know what is going on at school... Few school information, difficulties right at the beginning of the school year and the only feedback we received was the report card. (82)*
- *There is not much information coming from the school with respect to our child unless it is negative. (69)*
- *I have the impression that the teachers do not communicate with us, parents, because they have other problems to take care of. I would like to know how my son is doing at school. (88)*
- *I wish the teacher had sent me a written notice. (386)*
- *Teachers whose students do not have too many behavioural problems do not call parents to mention that all is well. (127)*
- *Teachers do not or simply do not have the time to contact us when things go well. When they do, it is already very serious. (905)*
- *Teachers rarely communicate directly with us unless we get in touch with them. There could be better communication at other moments than when things go badly. (792)*
- *It is difficult to reach teachers and to have some information. (468)*

As mentioned previously, some comments emerged as parents' perceptions of family–school relationships. Box 4 exemplifies statements that are positive on the one hand (13) and statements that are negative on the other hand (18). As shown, the positive excerpts evolve around parents' satisfaction and respect for the teachers' work with their adolescent. However, parents expressed frustrations regarding some teachers' lack of motivation in helping their adolescents, the teachers' focus on pinpointing their weaknesses instead of their strengths, the school's poor listening skills with respect to what parents have to say, and the school's failure to consider parents' availability (e.g., farmers' work schedules) when planning meetings.

## Box 4

*Parents' Perceptions of Family–School Relationships**Positive Perceptions of School–Family Relationships*

- *I admire the efforts made over the years to try to provide adequate responses to parents' high demands and to students' high level of thirst to learn. (937)*
- *I am satisfied with the school and especially proud of my daughter. (949)*
- *We do not need to meet the teachers because she gets good results and good feedback. We are very pleased with her teachers and her school. (1101)*
- *We pay respect to teachers work. (431)*
- *I've been positively surprised by the amount of help provided to my adolescent. (438)*

*Negative Perceptions of School–Family Relationships*

- *I think that teachers do not care about the success or the failure of students. (303)*
- *Even though we collaborate, some teachers do not want to [collaborate]. (471)*
- *They claim that everything is perfect, even though there is room for improvement; they have too many students to take care of, they cannot do miracles. (550)*
- *Often, secondary-level teachers tend to focus on some of the adolescents' negative points and to ignore the positive ones and the youngsters' strengths. (642)*
- *I have never received any notice from any of my child's teachers. I do not think they take the time to explain it properly to our children, to help them in their weaknesses. (810)*
- *I find that there is not much room for parents in school. The school does not listen to parents, but when the child has a problem at school, the blame is put on parents' shoulders. (1415)*
- *When it comes to attend parents' meetings and extracurricular activities, farmers and other members of the agricultural class find it almost impossible to participate because of schedule conflicts. (1422)*

When CHAT theory is applied to better understand the processes of parental involvement for adolescents' school success, primary contradictions are being observed, especially when it comes to the *rules* and *division of labour* (e.g., Figure 2). By primary contradictions, we refer to tensions within the same pole of an activity system. Even though there seems to be consensus on the importance of the object, that is, improving parenting and home–school relationships, there seems to be opposition between expected parental responsibility to be involved versus parents' perception of adolescents' non-receptivity to their involvement. There is also conflict between expected parental involvement in school-based activities versus parents' perceived lack of invitations from the

school community and parents' non-availability (*rules*). Primary contradictions have also been identified between parents' willingness to be involved versus their expectations for adolescents' total autonomy, and between parents' requests for helpful and positive communications with the school and parents' perceived communication with teachers only when the adolescent is having school or behaviour difficulties (*division of labour*) (e.g., Figure 3). This is particularly reflected in the excerpts revealing parents' dissatisfaction regarding their relationships with the teachers and the school.

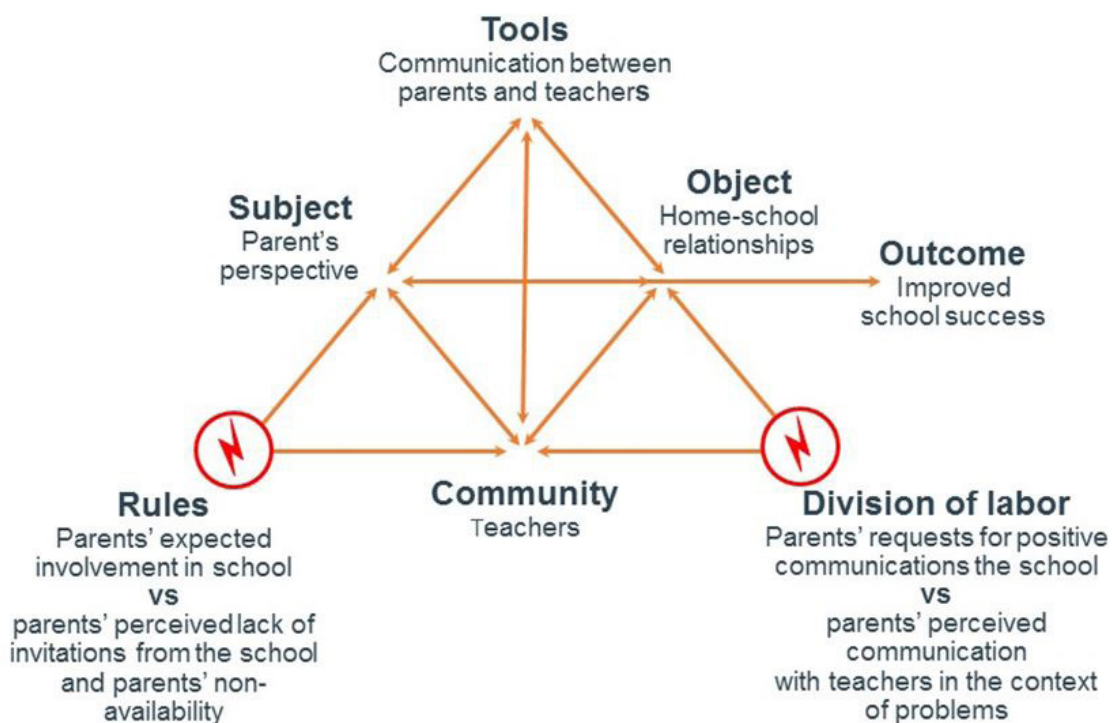


Figure 3. First level of contradiction for understanding processes of parents and school relationships for adolescents' school success

## New Angles to Approach the Conclusions

A large body of research has shown that parenting and home–school relationships remain crucial in the adolescent years (e.g., Deslandes, 2009b; Epstein, 2011; Hill & Tyson, 2009; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2010; Jeynes, 2007; Kreider et al., 2007; Sheridan,

Holmes, Smith, & Moen, 2016; Shumow, 2009; Shute, Hansen, Underwood, & Raz-zouk, 2011). Our analysis revealed that the actual practices reported by the parents are in line with those perceived as effective in the reviewed literature. Globally, the parents' responses regarding their involvement practices and, at the same time, their role construction, are in congruence with the mechanisms of influence highlighted in Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's (1997) model. However, our study showed some divergent points of view between both sets of parties, parents and adolescents and parents and school/teachers, in regard to their responsibilities and their sharing that may create conflicts (see Figure 4: first level of contradictions role and division of labour). There seems to be ambiguity and tensions in the rules and responsibilities in the parent–adolescent relationships which present in the following ways: parents' desire to be involved versus adolescents' non-receptivity, or disenfranchised parents versus completely autonomous or left-alone adolescents. The same observations were made with respect to home–school relationships: parents' non-involvement in school-based activities versus very traditional school-based involvement, or parents' desire for more information and feedback from teachers versus the perceived reluctance of teachers to communicate. These results are in accordance with one of our recent works, which pointed to some elements of tensions in the parent–teacher relationships (Deslandes et al., 2015).

In Figure 4, our results illustrate a possible expansion between two activity systems, namely, parenting and home–school relationships, both sharing the goal of improving adolescents' success at school. The circles with the broken arrows pinpoint the first level of contradictions related to rules and responsibilities. The broken arrows identify the second level of contradictions taking place when the parents address the recurrent tensions to improve either their relationships with their adolescents or with the teachers. Despite the fact that some programs have been designed and deployed to guide and support parents in accompanying youth and schools and teachers in promoting the quality of parenting and home–school relationships that already exist (e.g., Chrispeels & Rivero, 2001; Epstein et al., 2009), we believe that there will always be elements of tensions and dilemmas. They are inevitable (Deslandes, 2012a). The tensions seem to be recurrent and not often resolved in a constructive way. It would seem that it is time to gather all the different actors together (parents, teachers, and adolescents) in order to bring them to co-model a solution jointly, as they would address those recurring tensions.

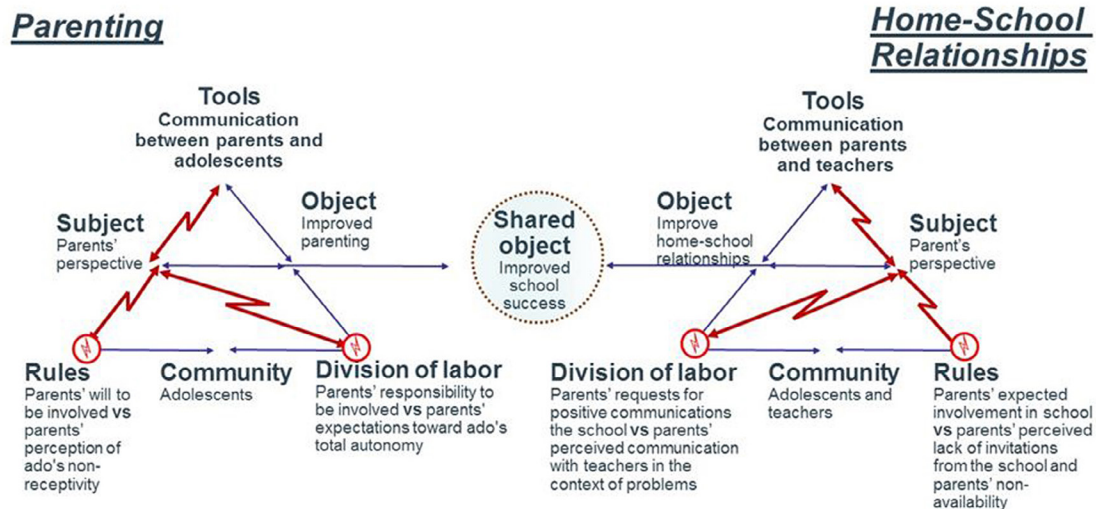


Figure 4. First and second level of contradictions in two activity systems sharing to improve adolescents' school success

As a promising avenue for intervention and developmental research, we suggest applying the Change Laboratory method based on CHAT to give adolescents a better voice and act as mediators in both activity systems. The Change Laboratory (CL), an interventionist research approach rooted in CHAT, aims at bringing to light the origins and systemic causes of a problem by raising questions about it, reformulating it, and envisioning a new form of activity (Engeström & Sannino, 2010). This methodological approach relies on collaborative learning and transformation of work activities or practices (Virkunen & Newnham, 2013). In the current situation, it aims at building on collaborative transformative agency based on a new understanding of the teacher–parent relationships and a new vision of its future development. Through the use of mirror data, the Change Laboratory method will allow the resolution of obstacles or barriers understood as discursive manifestations of contradictions in the discourse of the teachers and parents as adolescents give voice to their needs. A typical Change Laboratory is divided into six main phases, and is therefore in coherence with the Engeström expansive learning cycle.

A typical sequence of actions in an expansive cycle comprises, first, the action of questioning and criticizing the actual practice. A second action is that of analyzing the situation. It involves mental, discursive, or practical transformation of the situation. The

third action is that of modelling the new solution to the problematic situation. The fourth action is that of examining the model, operating and testing it to seize its potentials and limits. The fifth action involves implementing the model through practical applications, enrichments, and adjustments. The sixth and seventh actions require reflecting on the process, and consolidating the new form of practice (Engeström & Sannino, 2010; Virkkunen & Newnham, 2013).

In light of CHAT, our study results correspond to the questioning stage or the need stage, the first phase of a possible cycle of expansive development (Engeström, 1987–2015). By reinvesting the quantitative and qualitative results as using mirror data, the Change Laboratory method could find a way to overcome the recurrent tensions encountered by the various actors (Engeström & Sannino, 2011). Typically, five to 12 sessions are conducted at the beginning of a formative intervention. Historical and empirical analyses of the object of the activity are conducted, and results used as firsthand mirror data for representing the current practice (Virkkunen & Newnham, 2013). In the present situation, we would reinvest our conclusions regarding divergent points of view between parents and adolescents and between parents and school/teachers (with respect to their responsibilities and their sharing that may create conflicts). In order to do so, we would bring to the same table, along with the interventionist researches, three to four parents, two adolescents, and two teachers. We would then start the Change Laboratory process by discussing the most challenging opposite viewpoints and then go on to identify possible solutions and so on (Virkkunen & Newnham, 2013).



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