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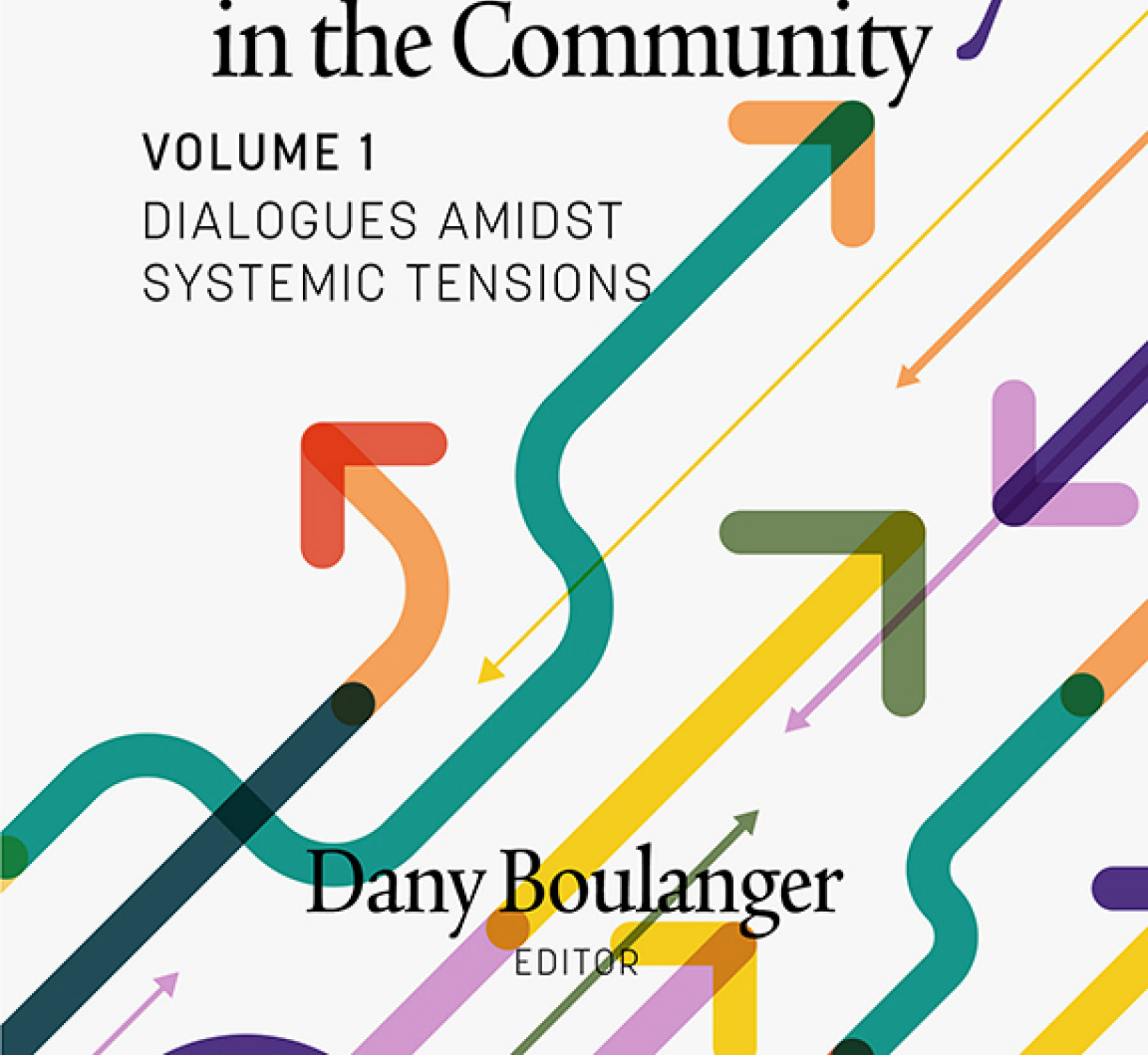
Relation Between School and Family in the Community

VOLUME 1
DIALOGUES AMIDST SYSTEMIC TENSIONS



Dany Boulanger
EDITOR

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Volume 1

Dialogues Amidst Systemic Tensions

edited by

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CHAPTER 1

THE FATHER WHO IS THE SCHOOL

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Education is a strange enterprise. It involves people who are dedicated to improve the humanity of the next generation by providing them knowledge, and social institutions which are set up to guarantee that the next generation is oriented towards the societal norms of the previous generations. In other terms—there will be no formal classes given in educational systems in any country, from kindergarten to university, on how to make revolutions in society. At the same time there is a consistent focus—at least in words—on how to make children of all ages creative, innovative, and members of the constantly changing society. Education builds on the positive ethos of engineering—the human beings who are being educated are *made to be different* from who they were before. They are cultivated. The school is a garden where cultivated crops are carefully nourished and the undesirable growth equally carefully weeded out. Yet in great difference from the agricultural image—the "harvested crops" (students finishing with educational certificates) are not up for consumption, but are expected to start cultivating

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further knowledge in different ways. Educating future knowledge makers is the goal—teachers need to prepare the learners to go beyond them as a result of their teaching what is known to them. To teach *what-is* in the process of educating new generations is oriented towards *what-might-become* in the future. Yet the educators do not—and cannot in principle—know what it is.

There is reciprocity on the other side. Human beings all over the world—old and young—*strive towards* becoming educated (Chaudhary, Chapter 11, this volume). Education is a kind of symbolic savior—it would make the educated move forward from their previous social and economic status to better lives. Illiterate farmers in a country—in any continent—would use their hard earned resources to promote the education of their children to the top university levels in foreign countries of high prestige. In places with no school buses or roads children run for a long time to reach their schools. The motivation for getting an education is high. The belief in the future—*who might I become*—is crucial for the learners. And—like educators—they also do not—and cannot know. They can imagine, create their goals, and work diligently towards achieving those. Will they succeed? There are no guarantees.

Education is oriented to establishing the reserve potential for future development by the educators and the learners both of whom are future-oriented. It is precisely at the intersection of such high motivation of the to-be-educated and the equally high motivation of dedicated educators where the question—"What is a 'school'?"—can be asked in theoretical terms. And there is a third—somewhat ephemeral but equally important—agent in this story. We call it *community* but rarely specify what it is. The coordination of the three—school, family, and community—is the focus of the present book It calls for a new kind of pedagogy—that of moving activities in school close to the needs of the society beyond the school and building upon students capacities to transcend the normativity of traditional schools in uniting their efforts within community-relevant practices (Rajala, Chapter 10, this volume).

This book is remarkable in many ways. It is focused on the relationships between three major institutional agents in the making of the educational garden—the school, the family, and the community. A number of crucial issues are addressed. First, it brings to the field of home–school–community relationships a systematic theoretical scheme (Boulanger, Chapter 2, this volume). Secondly it gives us a comparative-cultural (India, Canada) glimpse into the histories of education as it has been used as a tool to conquer the minds of new—by force annexed—members of the society (Chaudhary, Chapter 11, this volume; Moreau, Chapter 12, this volume). Thirdly, it brings into the school–home–community relationships discourse the basic principles of dialogical science (Molina, Chapter 14, this volume). These relationships are not merely general themes of discourse but can take very concrete forms—when parents join their children in jointly building models of boats (Cattaruzza et al., Chapter 3, this volume), or when

children are involved in redesigning travel routes (Rajala, Chapter 10, this volume). Fourthly, the general model of Urie Bronfenbrenner that since the 1970s has been used as a basis for looking at school in society is given careful analytic attention (Boulanger, Chapter 13, this volume, Chapter 5, this volume; Molina, Chapter 14, this volume). Finally, we get a glimpse of innovative pedagogical practices that are oriented towards the parents—who may be brought to the school territory to join their children in joint construction efforts (Cattaruzza et al., Chapter 3, this volume).

In the triadic negotiation process between school–family–community goal system that different participants reflect upon one another. Such reflections are necessarily dialogical—as none of the participants can escape from the triangular relationship even if they so wish. There are of course efforts of "home schooling"—which still are interdependent with school curriculae. If a community were to take fully over the formal school so that it would be not distinguishable in any form the education system would return to its primitive form where the possibilities to transcend the community needs would not exist. That would mean eliminating the dreams of *who-might-I-become* because it would be clear that all educated people would become precisely similar members of the community as their parents were. That would hinder any development of the community itself. Finally—if the community were to be excluded—that would be the extreme version of "imposed consensus" between school and family (additive cultural continuity in Figure 2.2, this volume)—the family would lose their children to the totalitarian system of the school.

Interestingly, fears of the "loss of the children" to the school, surface in the descriptions of families' relations with schools—especially in the case of immigrant families. It is worthwhile to think carefully of the example from the Parent Academy (Matthiessen, Chapter 7, this volume):

> **Cemil:** I do my best, but unfortunately, and it is not only mine, but I cannot say to my daughter, "Hey, there is this party but you cannot go" or "Hey, take care of yourself, you aren't allowed to drink alcohol." [. . .] In my opinion she shouldn't be allowed out until she is 25 years old, but unfortunately it doesn't work that way. If my father had said to me, "Hey, don't drink alcohol" or "Don't date that girl," I would have accepted it. But if I say that, then immediately a clever man will say, *"Hey you are in Denmark and you are pressuring your kids." They are my kids. But they can take away the child.* I don't think it makes sense.
>
> **Interviewer:** Have you been worried that they will take away your children?
>
> **Cemil:** Yes, 100%, 100%. *But I do it for my kids. I want them to behave.* (added emphasis)

The social representation of *pressure* seems to emerge from all sides. The imaginary representative of the immigrant's new home society is perceived to admonish the parent for putting pressure on the adolescent child. By doing that this hypothetical agent is putting pressure on the parent. The parent wants to put pressure on the child for the child's future ("I want them to behave"). So, a democratic society entails the ideology of *helping* the immigrants but puts them in a position of reception of the help in which the reflection about one's parental identity and that of the future for the child becomes presentable as a pressure. Lives of immigrants in communities give many examples of dramatic events on the borders of customs and laws of different societies (Wikan, 2002). The dialogue here is not back-and-forth communication of different understandings but between various *directions of conduct* that necessarily enter into tension with one another. Social power relations determine the final outcome of the coordination of these directions, and in the end the differences between democratic and nondemocratic societies may become negligible.

The theme of *pressure* that emerges as an interesting feature in the trialogue between school, family, and community is not the only means of dialogue between the participants. This may be countered by fostering the *co-educator roles* in the Atelier (Cattaruzza et al., Chapter 3, this volume).[1] The ordinary states of the dialogue seem to be those of basic distrust that can—under some conditions—be overcome. Therefore, the whole range of dialogical phenomena in this triadic relationships needs to be investigated. Beyond *pressure* and *co-option* there would be other forms, for example *normative symbolic myopia*. The latter can be found in the social perception of educators' role as being always interested in the best developmental outcomes for the learners. The possibility that an educator might selectively give advantage to some of the learners (e.g., preference of the rich over the poor, or vice versa) is not to be considered. The educator is not to have ulterior motives to keep some learners away from opportunities to develop.

In the context of the ambivalence of control over the directions the learners should take it is the boundary-negotiating frameworks such as Parent Academy (Matthiessen, Chapter 7, this volume) that may become a framework for pedagogy for the community and school. The latter need to learn from the families. What they can learn is first of all the complex picture of the realities of children's development in the family context. The evidence in the chapter by Zazzera et al. (Chapter 4, this volume) of the parent's thinking aloud about "Francesco" is indicative of such complexity:

> It has been very hard, not because of somebody's responsibility, but because it is hard to put Francesco on the right way, it has been a mess, how can I say . . . it has been not natural. I mean he (Francesco) *is very free, so to force him it was against his nature, although at the end it was effective.* Me too, I am aware, the teachers also perceived a change, a progress. Francesco changed,

> he is growing up. I was a bit disappointed, but we needed to accept it. It has been very demanding for him. It has been almost a physical effort for him. Afterwards, I knew his excellent results, even the teachers said it. It has been a very hard year for him, but the results are good, not only related to the acquisition of school subject matters, but in a broader sense. Francesco was asked to be part of a group he did not know before, because he did not attend the preschool; so his integration was good, he started to consider the classmates as his friends. He built friendships since he felt the need to be part of a group. My concern was *not on his capacity to learn, no doubts about it, but more on the socialization skills: new teachers, a new context*, so finally I have to recognize that we are very very satisfied, everybody, us (the parents), the teachers, and himself. (p. 63, emphases added)

The theme of *pressures* emerges here again—albeit in a way that demonstrates the dialogicality in a wider sense. Each pressure leads to a *counterpressure* that can neutralize, or escalate, the former. The reality of family life is nonadditive (see Boulanger, Chapter 2, this volume) and that makes it the buffer in relation to all kinds of programs of educational nature that the school and the community invent.

THE SCHOOL IS THE FATHER

While reading through the contributions to the present book I had a vague feeling of continuity—that of the discontinuity<>continuity issue being a general label that is easy to use, but it camouflages the complexity of processes involved. Boulanger's (Chapter 2, this volume) theoretical efforts point in this direction. Continuity (and discontinuity) are descriptive terms of no explanatory value, but they are eminently usable in social discourses in a society to position the families and the communities in relation with the designated social power holder—which is the social–political institution that sets up the school as the arena for education beyond the knowledge already present in the local community. Nowhere is it more visible than in the missionary education in non-European contexts. Moreau's (Chapter 12, this volume) description of the history of education in Quebec is a good example, corroborated by purposeful separation of Amerindian children from their communities into the boarding schools in the 1890s and in the introduction of formal schooling in Africa by the colonial powers.

So, school emerges in the triad family–school–community as its key part—connecting the triad with the social world beyond. For coordination of the triangle the leadership role of school is that of a father—a benevolent, affording various experiments in democratization of education for the benefit of family and community, yet firmly in control when the interests of the sociopolitical power structure becomes endangered. Both communities

and families are relevant for the functioning of the school—yet the school leads the triangle of collaboration.

NOTE

1. The joint activities in the Atelier led to "the positive attitude of parents who *did not perceive the presence of the teacher as a judging observer*, but as a resource person to deal with the complex issue of the formal children's education" (emphases added).

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CHAPTER 2

CONTINUITY AND DISCONTINUITY BETWEEN THE SCHOOL AND THE FAMILY *IN* THE COMMUNITY

Bridging Conceptual and Epistemological Inquiries

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ABSTRACT

This chapter presents and extends the chapters of the authors in this book by situating them in a classificatory model (Boulanger, 2019) aimed at identifying the epistemological orientations of systemic continuity and discontinuity amidst school, family, and community. This classificatory activity enables nuancing the categories with regard to the specific contributions of the authors. Institutional and political tendency to make the discontinuous continuous—which signals a process leading to forms—is highlighted.

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> The mother of Thomas underlines the importance of learning to read and to write. Referring to the child, she indicates that "this is his job." MT [Mother of Thomas] begins by underlying the relevance of reading and writing as the main tasks of the school. From this perspective, parents have to educate the behavior while the school needs to instruct children. Here, we can observe the opposite of what the other parents (from the lower social class) suggested about the responsibility of behavior. However, the issue is still based on a complementarity, implying compartmentation and discontinuity, and ending up in controversy concerning who is responsible for what. (Zazzera et al., Chapter 4, this volume, p. 62, emphasis added

The relationship between school and family is an area of tension. In the excerpt above, Zazzera et al. (Chapter 4, this volume) display two situations. On the one hand, the fact that two opposite epistemic orientations to education—that could also express different scientific theories about schooling— entail recognizing a *discontinuity* between school and family. On the other hand, the fact that the parents try to coordinate themselves with the school, thereby constructing conditions for *continuity* between home and school. Yet at the end of this excerpt it appears that *discontinuity underlies this continuity*. The latter implies—often implicitly—a conception of the former.

In poverty-related contexts children are considered "at risk" of academic failure because of learning difficulties experienced in situations of "cultural" discontinuity. This concept is defined as the gap between school and family as "cultures" (Self & Milner, 2012). Ultimately, in a school setting, when children are exposed to objects that are incoherent with the basis of family, children are susceptible to experience a major disruption because of the imbalance that occurs, making them particularly vulnerable in the cognitive and relational areas (Cairney, 2001). In response to this phenomenon of discontinuity, educators will make discontinuity a relatively drastic treatment by establishing *conditions of continuity* in the context of discontinuity, or by reversing the direction of the current, thereby reducing discontinuity. Their actions have often involved a *static interpretation of discontinuity*, and the continuity to be established takes the form of an artificial substitution of the family environment with school "culture," a tendency which, paradoxically, reinforces discontinuity and keeps parents from poverty-stricken environments on the outer limits of the school (Boulanger, 2019).

Drawing from a framework of conceptual and epistemological conception of continuity and discontinuity that I developed elsewhere (Boulanger, 2019), I display in this chapter how the authors in this book present what I call *systemic* continuity and discontinuity. I am interested in the epistemological basis of systemic continuity and systemic discontinuity and how these phenomena are related to one another.