

“Sometimes it is hard but nothing is impossible they say, everything has a solution but.. sometimes is hard (...) sometimes is hard to be a mother, especially when José has his crises, when he is without medication you suddenly want to hit him, I don’t know (...) But I never do, because they did it with me and I know what it feels like.”

Andrea is a 45-year-old woman who has struggled with the perils of poverty during her whole life. Growing up in foster care, working since she was a kid, being in jail and currently living with a US\$ 300 household income. On top of this her son, José, has severe ADHD and she is determined to help him at all costs.

Various studies conducted over the past five years have shown that the incidence of student socio-economic context continues to be relevant in the results of standardized international tests measuring (OECD 2016, TERCE 2015). In the case of Chile, the difference between the highest and lowest socioeconomic quartile is 50 percent points, the second highest of the 63 countries considered in the study (OECD, 2016). After controlling for various factors such as grade repetition and family structure, among others, a student from the lowest socioeconomic sector would be 6 times more likely to have poor school results.

Furthermore, the differences among students from private and municipal schools also reflect similar trends. A sophomore student of a public school has the same results as a fifth-year elementary student in a private school, a cognitive gap that widens throughout their academic path and their lives. Thus, educational inequality between students from different socioeconomic groups perpetuates. It is then an important problem to examine as it reproduces the social, cultural and economic inequality of the population through the correlation between the educational background of the students and adult social mobility.

From the early 60’s onwards, numerous studies have described that the socioeconomic status of families appears as an important factor explaining inequality of educational achievement among children (Baker, Goesling and LeTendre, 2002; Kao and Thompson, 2003). The work with the family as an agent for educational improvement is relevant and currently, research is expanding its operationalization of the relationship between agents and reimagining participation models that prevail as schools often do not recognize the many "invisible" ways in which lower-class families are involved (McWayne, 2015).

Andrea, for example, practices her patience and engages in meaningful conversations when her son misbehaves, a type of parenting she never experienced. She cares about his diet so "he can be healthy to complete high school" and she is constantly vigilant of the different effects of his prescription medication.

However, in the public eye Andrea, as well as many families are blamed for the education results. As a Chilean researcher once wrote:

"In the less 'empowered' poor , by contrast, bad relationships, devaluation of couples, rebellious children, low self-esteem , feelings of inadequacy , helplessness, and disability are combined. With low educational attainment , children exhibit a lower educational level - which is expressed in high school dropouts , unsuitable age - grade relationships, and mothers have few educational expectations for their children and do not consider that education plays an important role to meet the challenges of daily living."

With a scarcity of resources, underpaid teachers and the pressure of high stake testing, schools often reinforce these discourses over parents, turning it into different actions that furtherly antagonize different agents. As Andrea recounts "For example, the gym class teacher at the beginning of the school year wanted me to pick him up at 1:00 pm (before gym class) because he is very restless so I told the psychologist and she said: No mom, you can't pick him up at 1:00 because kids like José need to play sports so they can release tensions, I don't know. Leave him there."

Without the psychologist advice, Andrea would have probably followed the teacher's orders, since schools and the staff are who traditionally hold the 'power' of cultural capital in these communities.

Stories like Andrea's and many others tell us there is still much to know about these particular invisible strategies that parents develop in their home-based involvement practices, as well as whether their inclusion and recognition of schools may strengthen family-school relations and how they particularly affect student outcomes. Promoting "empowerment approaches" to family-school relations, in which parents become "active agents, critics and transformers of education and schools" (Baquedano-Lopez, 2013) and shedding this positive light on mothers may remind them that they can act and are advocating for their children's education, thereby resisting the common deficit discourses that reign over the Chilean's public school system.