



Epistemic foundations of the attitudes requested on the part of preschool teachers working with low socioeconomic status children and their families

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Abstract

Within the present curriculum reform taking place in Québec (Canada), a special emphasis is placed on two topics. First, its epistemic basis is proclaimed to be constructivist or socioconstructivist. Second, the restructured curriculum is supposed to consider the parents as partners, and knowledgeable ones, within the educational process. These two topics are supposed to characterize the whole educational system, including the preschool levels (pre-kindergarten and kindergarten). In this paper, we will first briefly present the history of preschool education in Québec and the major epistemic differences between the previous and actual pre-K and K education in the province. We therefore will present some results from a granted research recently finished, identifying the level of coherence between teachers' attitudes towards parents' knowledge and competencies and the attitudes requested within the department of education discourse and curriculum. We will conclude by an analysis of the implications of the distances described between teachers' attitudes and curricular requirements, especially in terms of continuous education needs for the ones working with the low SES child and his family.

Key words: preschool teachers, epistemology, curriculum, school-society interactions

Foundations and history of preschool education in Québec

The socioeconomic and demographic evolution of Canadian society, since the 1960s in particular, has brought about a strong request for services in preschool education. This type of service is generally defined as an educational intervention that takes place prior to schooling, before starting primary school. In theory, it is designed for children from birth to the age of six (Canadian Association for School Boards/School Councils, 1998). The term preschool education is most often used to qualify this type of intervention during the period from four to six years of age.

On the international scale, preschool education constitutes a zone still not too well delimited, for if in certain countries, it was built following the school model under the exclusive jurisdiction of Ministries of Education; whereas in other countries, in Canada notably, it was also built after a day-care model, answering to different Ministries as in Québec, the Ministries of Education, Family and Childhood, Health and Social Affairs. This ambivalence is linked to its history, in essence fairly recent, and to the evolution of divergent social needs that it tried to answer since it was first set up, continually oscillating between a day-care and education mission (Boily, Gauthier & Tardif, 1994; Larose, Terrisse, Bédard & Karsenti, 2000). In this sense, we notice that there still lies considerable ambiguity between preschool concepts on the one hand, and on the other, precocious interventional education (PEI). This type of intervention includes day-care intervention to the extent that it fulfills extra-curricular aims for the intervention for four-year olds outside the school milieu, but under the jurisdiction of school boards and the intervention in the Kindergarten class for children four years of age from a low socioeconomic milieu (Larivée & Larose, 2003).

Aims of education in the Kindergarten class

In general, preschool education, insofar as it occurs in the Kindergarten class, distinguishes itself from primary education to the extent that it not only has an educational mission, and often an instructional one, but also one of socialization, mothering and day-care. The Kindergarten class is generally conceived of for all children as a transition between education in the family and the collectivity (Lombardi, 1992; Terrisse & Larose, 2003) and should prepare the child for socialization and development prior to confronting primary school as well as its didactical demands, while stimulating his cognitive, conative and socio-affective development (Bédard, Larose & Terrisse, 2002; McCall, 1998; Perry & Weinstein, 1998). Moreover, this double mission is reflected in the expectations of parents. If all favour socialization and the affective development of their children during the preschool period, most of them would like their children to benefit from a programme of activities preparatory to school as of the age of four (Family Service Association, 1997; Gouvernement du Québec, 1993).

Particular mandates are added to this mandate that pertains to all children. This is the case for the compensatory education mandate that has affirmed itself more and more since the 1970s (Doherty, 1997). It first became concretized with the creation of part-time Kindergartens for four-year olds and full-time Kindergartens for five-year olds of low SES in Quebec and the rest of the country.

Mandates attributed to preschool education in Québec

Since the modification to the Public Instruction Law (Gouvernement du Québec, 1997a), Kindergartens for five-year olds are accessible full-time for all children and half-day Kindergarten is accessible in a complementary way for those in low-income milieus. This specific mission of preschool education inscribes itself within the framework of precocious intervention measures destined to prevent massive school failure and drop-out of children from these milieus as well as behaviour problems and further difficulties of social adaptation (ACCS, 1998; Conseil supérieur de l'éducation, 1996, 1999; Gouvernement du Québec, 2001a). This means that the preschool mandate integrated itself directly within the framework of the curricular reform which, since its inception (Gouvernement du Québec, 1997b), aimed at having all pupils complete secondary schooling and obtain certification.

The uniformization of foundations and epistemological logic that founded the preschool and primary school programme is situated directly within this perspective. Moreover, the articula-

tion of Kindergarten with the primary cycle aims to reduce the impact of transition from one level of teaching to the other (Gouvernement du Québec, 2001b). In this perspective, preschool education aims to compensate for eventual education stimulation deficits in children considered to be "at risk" (Terrisse, Larose & Lefebvre, 2001).

Society also confers a second important mandate to preschool education. It is the function defined in the 1980s as a result of the philosophy of education and normalization of social roles (Wolfensberger, 1972) which consists in optimizing the development of the capacities of children with special needs in order to foster their integration into primary school as normally as possible. Hence, as of Kindergarten, four-year olds with deficiencies and handicaps are integrated into the regular Kindergarten classes (Bernheimer, Keogh & Coots, 1993). Lastly, in urban centres, Kindergarten classes welcome more and more children coming from other countries and other cultures, mostly allophones. In fact, in certain schools of Montreal, more than fifty per cent of children were not born in Canada or are from a family that has recently immigrated. The Kindergarten classes constitute the privileged place and first line of intervention to foster their social integration (ACCS, 1998; McAndrew, 2001).

Efficacy of educational intervention in preschool

The scientific documentation identifies several variables that affect the efficacy and the coherence of educational intervention pertaining to the aims attributed to preschool education. Among some of these that are noteworthy is the degree of preparation of teachers with regard to the specificity of preschool educational intervention (Bédard, 2002), *the representation* they share concerning the equality of chances to succeed and the school perseverance of pupils from an "at risk" population (Terrisse, Larose, Lefebvre & Martinet, 2000) as well as the coherence of *models of educational intervention* they refer to with regard to the epistemological foundations and didactical and pedagogical prescriptions to the curriculum (Larose & Lenoir, 1998).

Variables affecting the educational intervention of practising teachers

In Québec, educational intervention in Kindergarten does not constitute an area of specialization in the education of the teaching profession. The teacher education programs offered by the universities globally qualify practitioners in preschool and primary education; however, the part concerning content proper to preschool education and to the needs particular to vulnerable childhood populations remains marginal (Gauthier, Mellouki & Tardif, 1993; Larose, Terrisse, Bédard & Karsenti, 2000; Tardif & Lessard, 1999). Hence, in Quebec as elsewhere in North America, Kindergarten teachers build the essence of their competencies specific to preschool intervention on an experiential basis, therefore, informally (Bos, Mather, Dickson, Podhajski & Chard, 2001; Maxwell, McWilliam, Hemmeter, Ault & Schuster, 2001).

In this context, the weight of "common sense knowledge" that these professionals are exposed to concerning their expectations for the learning of pupils, of the priority of the various dimensions of educational intervention in preschool, for example childhood socialization or learning of a predisciplinary type, preparing the transition to primary school, becomes preponderant. Moreover, the learning of "common sense knowledge" or social representations contents constitutes an integral part of the professional socialization of the practitioner regardless of the level of teaching practice (Larose, Lenoir, Grenon & Spallanzani, 2000; Terrisse, Larose, Lefebvre & Martinet, 2000). The same applies for the relationship with knowledge that teach-

ers construct and the consecutive representation they share concerning the nature of school knowledge and the process they implement for pupils to access it. This representation of the nature of learning of the processes by which it is built or that allows access to it, is in large part the effect of informal learning of a social nature (Larose, Lenoir, Bacon & Ponton, 1994).

Impact of epistemic beliefs on models of educational intervention and preschool teaching practices

The epistemic beliefs of teachers refer to their way of envisioning, to the representation they have of learners and to the relationship with school knowledge. For Baffrey-Dumont (1999) the epistemic beliefs allow the teacher to “circumscribe the values the subject refers to for the acquisition of knowledge in which he represents the learning process and consequently responsibility in this regard” (p. 160). According to Schommer (1992, 1993), epistemic beliefs refer directly to the rapport that the subject, in this case the teacher, holds with regard to the relationship with knowledge. It can be conceived as an absolute given, a certitude, exterior to the subject. It may also be seen as a body of relative representations as evolving in a certain way, indefinite at time of a social nature (scientific knowledge in the state that it is in during a certain time in history) and private (the product of a process uninterrupted by the building on the discourse on reality which is particular to each human in his capacity as an epistemic subject) (Lenoir, 2000). In addition, Schommer, Crouse and Rhodes (1992) see two more dimensions. On the one hand, the teachers have beliefs on the nature determined or not of the learning subject (beliefs in aptitudes innate or to be acquired, stable and definite or to be improved over the course of time) as well as learning itself (Walton, 2000). Learning can be conceived as mechanical, predetermined and planned sequentially or progressively consequently relative to the relationship that each individual holds with a learning universe which is defined in a contextual manner (Watson, 1999).

Hence we are led to think that the epistemic beliefs of Kindergarten teachers whether they be on the spontaneous nature of learning or on a form of social determinism, for example with regard to the chances of intermediate or long term school success of pupils of low SES, affect educational intervention models that they privilege. On the basis of a classification by Not (1979) revised by Lenoir (1991, 1993), teachers may structure their teaching according to one or other of four main educational intervention models (the French acronym being MIE – *modèles d'intervention éducative*). These models are the following:

- Traditional cognitive heterostructuration which favours a revelation process of pre-established knowledge either by exposition or imposition or by imitation of models transmitted and impregnation according to diverse modalities of intervention (MIE 1).
- Cognitive heterostructuration of a coactive type which differs from the first model by taking into consideration the rationalization of the intervention process by an action on the part of the learning subject on the objects of learning, action where the pupils react to stimuli, the real subject, the artisan of learning always being the teacher. This model corresponds to behavioural approaches (MIE 3).
- In cognitive selfstructuration which is opposed to the first two models, educational intervention is no longer guided by the knowledge to be taught but by the subject who learns. The goal is to allow the pupil to transform himself. Intervention is conceived and oriented, arising from the interests and needs formulated by the learner. Learning takes place in a process of spontaneous investigation with no particular planning (structure being random). This model of educational intervention refers to so-called active pedagogy (MIE 2).
- Finally, cognitive interstructuration is based on a set of interactions among the components of a network of didactical relationships between the learner, his peers, the teacher and

knowledge. It fosters structure and regulated investigation by the actualization of learning processes of a scientific character which at the outset rely on initial representations of learners allowing empirical groping and calling for the intervention of the teacher to orient support and regulate the process. It introduces reflective feedback on the trajectory made and assures the objectivation and synthesis of knowledge produced. This last model turns out to be coherent with the constructivist approach (MIE 4).

If there is interaction between epistemic beliefs and educational intervention models privileged by teachers and if epistemic beliefs and the MIE privileged refer, for example, to the spontaneous conceptions of learning often underlying the Kindergarten teachers' practices, the probability of structured strategies appearing on the level of cognitive learning of pupils will be weak. What interest would their be in effect, to organize learning that refers to the structure of school subjects that do not appear on the curriculum? What use would there be in evaluating the cognitive dimensions of learning when many practitioners consider that the preschool program posits intrinsic and spontaneous nature inasmuch as there is activity and pleasure on the part of the learner? Inversely, what prior knowledge, proper to the child and his family, what knowledge of common sense should be taken into consideration within the framework of the educational intervention if, *a priori*, the milieu of origin of the pupil is considered inapt to produce knowledge of experience of a certain value at school? It is these representations and beliefs as well as their effects on the practices of Kindergarten interveners that we propose to analyse briefly within the framework of this paper.

Preschool teachers, epistemological beliefs and attitudes towards social knowledge of the family

Within the framework of a study funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC)¹ from 1999 to 2002, we conducted, among other activities, two inquiries by questionnaire using on the one hand a convenience sample to survey 370 socio-educative child and family interveners and, on the other, a second sample of convenience composed of 310 parents of young children having recently benefited from these services. The main research objectives were the following:

- Define the socioeducational competencies desired for front-line interveners with young children (0-6 years old) and their family, in low socioeconomic milieus;
- Circumscribe the needs of these front-line interveners;
- Determine if the competency profile desired by interveners, parents and teacher education educators corresponds to the socioeducational competencies required by the symbio-synergic model of intervention actually put forth by governmental organisms.

The inquiry with interveners targeted a reference population made up of professionals working in the following sectors:

- The health and social services network – French acronym (CLSC);
- Community organisms working with low SES populations;
- Early childhood day-care services – French acronym (CPE) and home day-care;
- Education network (Kindergarten for four and five-year olds in the public school network).

At the outset, it was a sample that corresponded to the demographic weight of the Quebec administrative regions. In this paper we will only concentrate on results obtained from a sub-sample composed of 51 preschool teachers.

Subsample

The sub-sample was composed of 51 Kindergarten teachers thirty-four (67%) of which worked in a low SES (Kindergarten for four-year olds) and seventeen (33%) teaching to mixed populations in Kindergarten for five-year olds. The quasi-totality of the sub-sample was composed of women ($N = 50$), which corresponds quite reliably to the distribution of genders in the teaching staff of preschool teachers in Quebec. Ninety-six percent of the respondents were born in Quebec, only two came from another province or country. The age distribution reflects fairly well that of the profession in Quebec (table 1).

Table 1
Age of respondents

Age of respondents (by category)	Percentage
Under 26 years	16%
26-29 years	6%
30-34 years	18%
35-39 years	14%
40-45 years	14%
46-49 years	14%
50 years or more	18%

The majority of teachers (39%) may be considered in insertion, therefore having less than five years of professional experience. A little less than one-third of them (31%) are in an active career phase (6-19 years of seniority) or at the end of their career (20%). The major portion of respondents have permanency of employment (88%) whereas a minority among them, generally in insertion, are of precarious status; career status and permanency of employment variables being significantly associated (Likelihood Ratio Chi-square = 6,97 (2); $p < 0,03$). Only a minority of our respondents (24% of the group) followed professional improvement activities on a regular basis. There is no meaningful association between professional experience and following activities of professional improvement.

Instruments

Data collection was based on a survey questionnaire consisting of three blocks of multiple choice items (Likert response format of five levels from "not important" to "essential") allowing for assessment of the value given to competence components, to situations describing attitudes and educational practices or to their foundations, insofar as they are linked to the socioeducational intervention of the young child (0-6 years) and his family:

- 1° block: 10 statements of professional competence;
- 2° block: 28 statements targeting attitudes favourable or not to socioeducational intervention in a constructivist and ecosystemic perspective;
- 3° block: 12 statements targeting the epistemic beliefs of socioeducational interveners.

The origin of scaling structures

The belief scales result from the factorial analysis of the principal components with Varimax rotation of the distribution of responses of the 370 subjects to the 12 pertinent items (Larose, Lenoir, Bédard, Terrisse & Couturier, 2004). From these, 10 items were retained, 2 items were eliminated, one because of its colinear distribution and weak saturation on its related factors, the other because of its ambiguous character (doubly referenced) of formulation.

- The first scale measures a trend to favour a behaviourist type of relationship with knowledge (external control on the conditions and normative dimensions of learning). It is made up of five items and scores vary from 5 to 25. It presents a good internal consistency, Cronbach $\alpha = 0,81$.
- The second scale measures a trend to favour a neo-behaviouristic type of relationship with knowledge (focus on the procedural and progressive internalization of learning control). It consists of three items and the scores vary from 3 to 15. It presents a satisfactory internal consistency, Cronbach $\alpha = 0,60$.
- The third scale measures a trend to favour a relationship with knowledge of a constructivist type (focus on the recourse to competencies constructed by the subjects and on social interaction as a vector of knowledge). It is made up of two items and the total scores vary from 2 to 10. It presents a rather weak internal consistency, Cronbach $\alpha = 0,50$.

Results

The calculation of differences between mean scores obtained on the different scales (Mann-Whitney U and Kruskal-Wallis non parametric ANOVA) do not allow for identification of significant differences in the partition of the diverse descriptive variables of the categories retained. However, the calculation of the same statistics crossing the scores of the different scales and the ordinal ranking of importance attributed to some components of competencies judged by the respondents to be more or less important within the framework of realization of socioeducational intervention of the young child and his family, notably in a low socioeconomic milieu, allows for the appearance of indices in the variation of profiles, depending on the epistemological stance of the subjects. Hence, respondents who obtain a higher score on the behaviourist orientation scale are those who attribute the least importance to orienting their intervention, while bearing in mind the needs, interests and specific characteristics of the child and his family, especially when they come from underprivileged areas ($\chi^2 = 8,53$ (3); $p < 0,036$). These are also the ones who grant the least importance to the need to create contexts and use instruments that allow for the assessment of individual characteristics, familiar or environmental, that influence global development as well as the social and school adaptation of the child from a low socioeconomic milieu ($\chi^2 = 14,84$ (3); $p < 0,002$). Conversely, teachers who favour a constructivist type of epistemology are those who grant more importance to taking into consideration the effect of sociodemographic and sociocultural conditions of family environment as factors of risk or protection on child development ($\chi^2 = 7,92$ (3); $p < 0,048$).

Other than the epistemological stance of respondents, the level of insertion, or if we prefer, career seniority, affects the importance given by the respondents to the diverse dimensions for taking into consideration social reality and, therefore, informal knowledge of the child and his family. In order to identify these effects, we have proceeded with a series of multiple correspondences analyses (MCA) crossing the following ordinal and nominal variables: the socioeconomic status of the child and his family; seniority in the profession as well as items pertinent to the block describing competencies required to exercise the profession and the one describing attitudes and educational practices desired on their part. MCA is a specific modality of the correspondence analysis that takes in consideration the intercategory data weight

difference to reduce the bias associated to the variation between the number of categories of the different variables and their sampling dispersion effects (Meulman, Van der Kooij & Heiser, 2004).

As compared to the practitioners in professional insertion, the experienced interveners attributed more importance to attitudes adapted to the framework of interactions with parents and children from low socioeconomic milieus and with actors from these milieus (full square in Figure 1). On the other hand, practitioners focussed on the curricular dimension of the task and did not attribute much importance to competence (dotted circle). For the teachers who are by the end of their career, the adaptative dimension is still important but not crucial (dotted square).

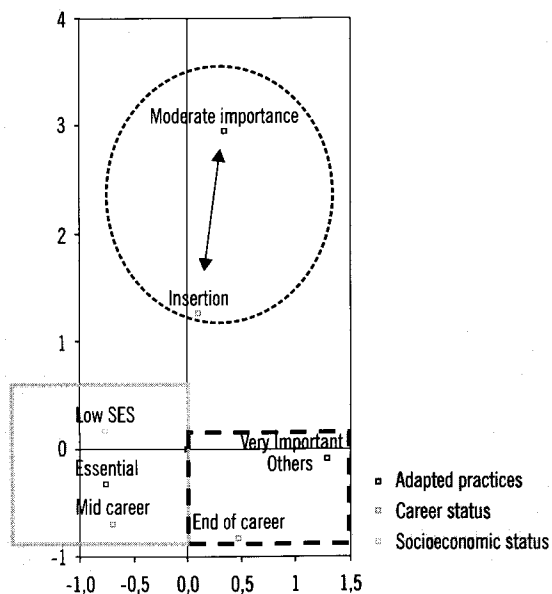


Figure 1

MCA crossing the socioeconomic status of populations, the professional trajectory and item 2i "To have attitudes and practices adapted to the reality of the milieu of origin of the child"

The recourse to resources in formal and informal networks, meaning to say networks of natural helpers that the children and their families refer to (figure 2) and their contribution, seems to be a very important practice, for young teachers in professional insertion (full square). The degree of importance attributed varies however, depending on whether they intervene with children from low socioeconomic or mostly with middle class milieus. Teachers in full service tends to consider this attitude and practice as essential (dotted square) whereas those who are towards the end of their career tend to value these practices in an average way with children, particularly when they intervene with populations not identified as socioeconomically underprivileged (dotted circle).

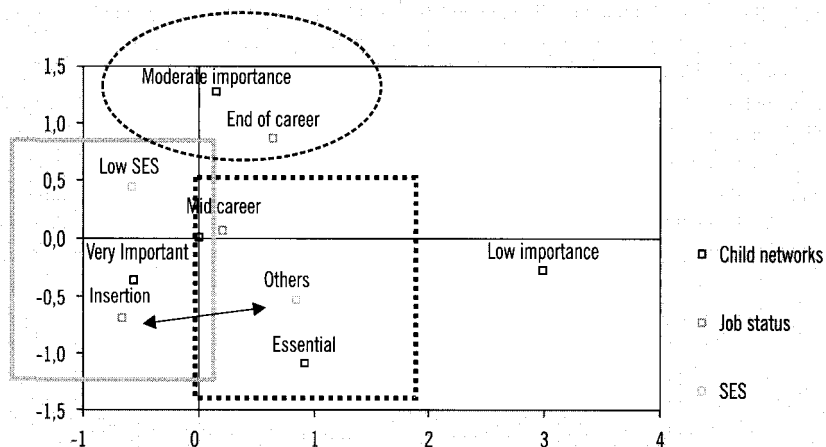


Figure 2

MCA crossing the socioeconomic status of populations, the professional trajectory and item 3c "Make use of the resources available to the child by formal and informal networks..."

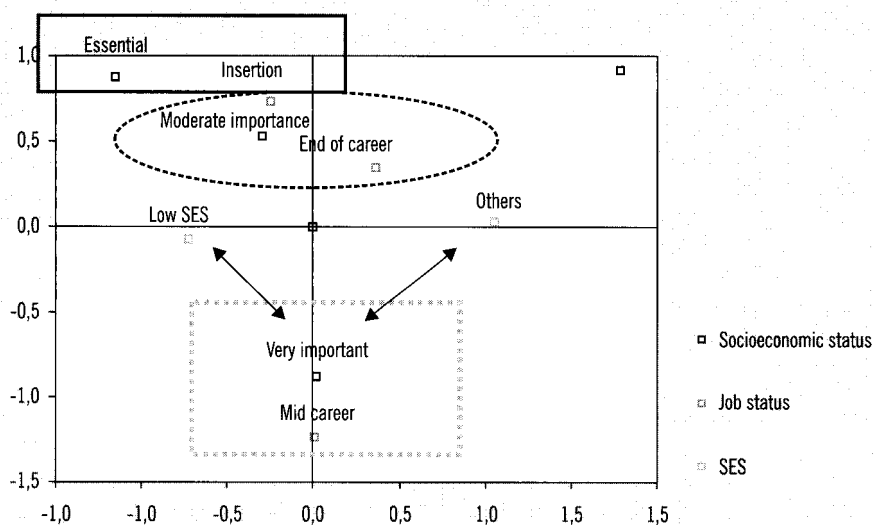


Figure 3

MCA crossing the socioeconomic status of populations, the professional trajectory and item 3m "Identify the effect of sociodemographic and sociocultural conditions of the family environment..."

The identification of the effect of sociodemographic and sociocultural conditions of the family environment as factors of risk or protection on the development of the child (figure 3) seems to be a characteristic much more important for experienced teachers (dotted square) than for their elders close to retirement (dotted circle). The importance they attribute to this dimension of the teaching task varies slightly depending on the socioeconomic status of the population they service. As for the novice teachers who intervene with pupils from low socioeconomic environments, this practice is essential (full square), whereas for the older interveners, it appears to be of average importance, especially when these populations originate from underprivileged environments.

Lastly, a final attitude, this time in a relatively clear-cut way, distinguishes practitioners according to their professional experience. It is the importance attributed to the fact of establishing a relationship of collaboration in a perspective of partnership with the family and with the other interveners (Figure 4). For the experienced teachers, especially when they intervene in low socioeconomic environments, establishing a relationship is essential for the exercise of their teaching function (full square). For the novices, this relationship is also very important particularly when the population is "regular" (dotted square). Lastly, teachers close to retirement attribute only average importance to collaboration and partnership with parents (dotted circle).

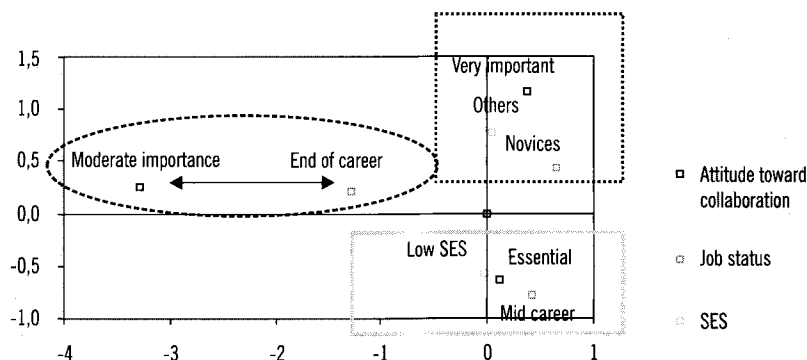


Figure 4

MCA crossing the socioeconomic status of populations, the professional trajectory and item 3t "Importance attributed to collaboration in a perspective of partnership with the family..."

Discussion

In the structure of the instrument, we did not dispose of an indicator for the relationship that preschool teachers may have with the curriculum. Nevertheless, those who obtain the highest scores on the behaviourist epistemological orientation scale are also those who attribute the least importance to 1) taking into consideration the individual characteristics of the pupils and those of their family, and 2) the creation of contexts that allow for observation and consequently for precocious intervention to prevent the risk of social or school adaptation. This result is not without interest. In fact, the type of relationship with knowledge described by this

scale implies that school knowledge, which is the object of learning, be considered as representing unquestionable data, not to be reconsidered, but to be integrated in a normative manner. The main object of educational or socioeducational intervention is therefore represented by the programme, the content of learning and not the relationship that the pupil or his social environment could have with regard to this object. Another interesting result is that teachers who favour a constructivist type of epistemology attribute more importance to taking into consideration the effect of the sociodemographic and sociocultural conditions of the family environment as factors of risk and protection on child development. In fact, in a constructivist type of epistemology, the teaching task is focused on taking into consideration individual processes. There is a dialectical relationship between knowledge built by the pupil and knowledge that the teacher should build. Hence, in preschool, the knowledge of the child is mostly of a social nature, corresponding to knowledge of experience as well as to the integration of representations proper to his family environment. Whether it be conceived of as an obstacle or as a tool for knowledge-building of a social nature, this knowledge as an individual characteristic of the pupil is both the foundation and the material used in educational intervention.

The orientation of the new Quebec school curriculum which integrates preschool and primary school programmes aims to be fundamentally constructivist. It emphasizes the importance of taking into consideration the experience and common sense knowledge particular to the child and his family for learning to be more meaningful. The intent of the previous curriculum, in effect from 1979 to 1997 was for a neo-behaviourist orientation, its structure reflecting the logic of "mastery learning" (Bloom, 1956, 1979). From then on, the importance of knowledge-building in the child of an extra-curricular nature, outside of school, had little weight, the objects of learning referring to cognitive, conative or behavioural abilities, referring only to the existence of prior objects of school learning (pre-requisites).

Moreover, the results obtained from the multiple correspondences analyses (MCA) are also interesting with regard to the effect of the phases of professional development of teachers on the focus profile they adopt concerning the various dimensions of the task. Hence, it is not surprising that teachers in insertion attribute more importance to the curricular rather than the relational dimensions of the task. The scientific literature pertaining to the professionalization of the teaching function clearly identifies the five first years of exercise in the craft as a phase for the affirmation of competencies for behaviour management and curricular management of the teaching act (Tardif & Lessard, 1999). Dimensions external to classroom dynamics such as the adaptation of attitudes within the framework of parents and children in low socioeconomic environments and with the other actors in these milieus imply a knowledge of this domain and context which requires another type of intervention, external to what pertains to the simple relationship with the curriculum or to classroom dynamics.

The fact that recourse to networked resources for natural helpers that children and their family refer to seems to be a very important practice, even essential, for young teachers in insertion in the profession may seem contradictory with what was stated previously. In fact, this could be an effect of social desirability created by the importance of the collaborative dimensions in the official discourse of the employer since the start of the reform in 1997 and the implementation of the curriculum in 2001. The practices in the milieu would probably conform more to those described by the experienced teachers for whom the use of formal and informal child networks is only of "average" thus secondary importance.

The importance attributed to partnership with the family, central for the teachers with experience and novices as well, also calls for reflection, especially following what was stated above. A partnership founded on a weak knowledge of the dynamics of the child's and his family's network may very easily be conceived of as a relationship of subordination of the family milieu concerning the realization of the purposes of the teacher's work. It could be summarized by the existence of formal relations, for example in the framework of the four end of term meetings, having to do with the supervision of work the child has to accomplish and that the parent must assume. This restrictive reading of parental participation in the educational mission of the school and its effect on the motivation and parental implication has, moreover, been am-

ply treated in the North-American and European scientific documentation (Adams & Christenson, 2000; Brook & Hancock, 2000; Crozier, 1997, 1999; Todd & Higgins, 1998).

We situated the subject of our study in the context of the profound modifications that a curricular reform that claims to be of constructivist orientation should engender on the level of the relationship of knowledge held by preschool teachers as well as the one pertaining to their attitudes and conduct with regard to the social environment of the pupil entrusted to them and the level of competencies of parents that they recognize. Québec school teachers, whether they work in pre-K or K classes for four or five year olds or in primary school, receive identical teacher training, the portion of the programme designated for the specificities of preschool children being minimal. Novice teachers, during their initial training such as during professional insertion, learn their craft in large part by a modelling effect of the representations and practices of experienced teachers (Larose, Lenoir, Grenon & Spallanzani, 2000; Lenoir, Larose & Laforest, 2001).

Their teaching is influenced by an epistemological orientation profoundly neo-behaviourist, according to which school knowledge and cognitive or social behaviours with which they are associated have hardly any relationship with common sense knowledge constructed outside the school universe. The representations of teachers concerning partnership with parents are also tributaries of a past where the relationship between parent and school was essentially formal, the inequality of rapport with expertise being implicitly recognized. The teacher prescribes a conduct of support for this relationship which the parent is free to adopt or not, but the construction of a common intervention strategy recognizing the expertise or, to say the least, a certain educational competence in the parent, is generally excluded. The adoption of such a perspective would imply the emergence of an ecosystemic approach on the part of interveners in the school milieu.

This is what the modification to the Public Education law adopted by the Quebec government at the outset of the reform in 1997 aimed for, notably by the creation of a decisional organism granting parity representation for parents and school personnel in each school. Nevertheless, a curriculum reform supported by a modification to the administrative structures of a school system does not represent sufficient conditions for the representations and, particularly, for teaching practices to become spontaneously modified. This is a long-term task, the effects of which only time will be able to measure.

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Note

1. Terrisse, B., Larose, F., Lefebvre, M.-L., & Bédard, J. (1999-2002). *Les compétences socio-éducatives des intervenants de première ligne auprès des jeunes enfants (naissance-6 ans) et de leurs familles en mséf*. Montréal-Ottawa: Université du Québec à Montréal, Faculté des sciences de l'éducation/Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) (Programme for ordinary research grants).

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