Parents shine by their presence in school: making visible the absence in the cogenetic theory

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Abstract

In this paper, I propose extending Tateo's systemic cogenetic approach in relation with the dimensions of absence and invisibility. I illustrate my proposition in relation to the phenomenon of school-family-community interaction. I further develop my own theoretical work on how the interaction between school and family is constructed amidst tensions between presence versus absence, as well as visibility versus invisibility. This enables integrating the following dimensions in the systemic cogenetic approach: first, the process of making absence visible, invisible and present; and second, the process of rendering invisible the very process of constructing absence. I also delve into the constructive aspect of absence. I propose extending the systemic cogenetic approach in relation with the following aspects: (a) active absence (Goethe) as a way to make the invisible visible on the edge of the phenomenon; (b) the role of boundary in making visible the invisible; (c) boundary case (Non-Non-A) as a flexible designation (considering a phenomenon as A *or* non-A); and (d) circular and intransitive movement rendering visible the whole range of phenomena in irreversible time. I use the analysis of parents' and teachers' discourse as illustration of these theoretical propositions.

Keywords: Child development; Learning; Parental engagement.

In this paper, I propose extending Tateo's (2016) systemic cogenetic approach with regard the dimensions of absence and invisibility. I illustrate my propositions in relation to the phenomenon of school-family-community interaction. In the first part of the paper, I develop further my own analysis, presented elsewhere (Boulanger, 2019a), of how the interaction between school and family is constructed amidst tension between presence versus absence as well as visibility versus invisibility. This enables integrating of the following dimensions to the systemic cogenetic approach: first, the process of making absence visible, invisible and present and, second, the process of rendering invisible the very process of constructing absence. In the second part of the paper, I delve into the constructive aspect of absence. I propose extending the systemic cogenetic approach with regard to the following aspects: (a) active absence (Goethe) as a way to make the invisible visible on the edge of the phenomenon; (b) the role of boundary in making the invisible visible; (c) boundary case (Non-Non-A) as flexible designating (considering a phenomenon as A *or* non-A); and (d) circular and intransitive movement rendering visible the whole range of phenomenon in irreversible time. I use the analysis of parents' and teachers' discourse as an illustration of these theoretical propositions.

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Extension of the systemic cogenetic approach: constructing (passive) absence and invisibility

The systemic cogenetic approach

Based on Herbst's cogenetic logic, Tateo (2016) presents human phenomena as threefold systems – a phenomenon A, its opposite (Non-A) and the boundary enabling the creation of this complementary system. In this trend, development is a dialectic process evolving amidst tensions.

Figure 1
Cogenetic perspective

1a) Complementary set   1b) Socially guided development   1c) Diachronicity
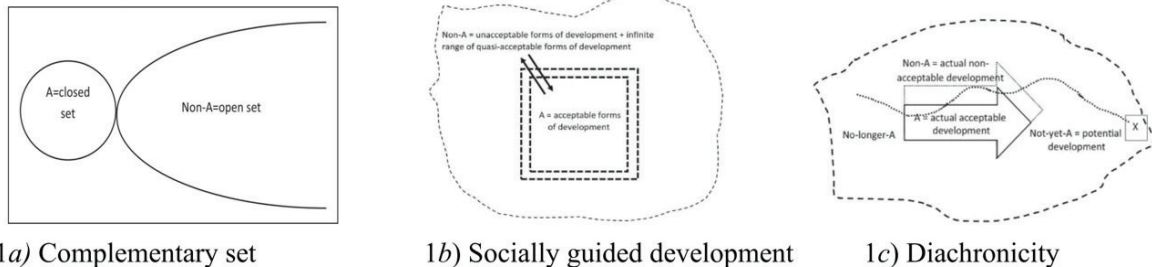
Note: Reproduced with permission from Tateo (2016, pp. 439, 7, 10).

As illustrated in Figure 1a, the phenomenon A that is considered or expected – manifested in people's life field (on the forefront), in Lewin's perspective– is well-determined and identifiable. It forms a closed set – think of our national identity as a determined phenomenon. Its opposite – Non-A as non-national identity – is rather an open set, designating a wide range of possibilities. As far as time is concerned, the systemic cogenetic approach postulates that "[…] when a human collective establishes the *acceptable* parameters of a window of possibilities, this immediately implies the emergence of its complementary negation and the border between them" (Tateo, 2019, p. 6; emphasis added).

In this perspective, A and non-A are respectively defined as what is acceptable (promoted) and unacceptable (prevented). Social guidance takes the form of promotion – what the other "should do" – and prevention – what the other "should not do". Therefore, myself (as A) acts on others (as non-A) based on social expectations. The border between A and Non-A is what orients change (toward A) and non-change (maintenance of A and resistance to Non-A), but also the emergence of novelty – non-A (what is non-accepted) can become part of the range of A (accepted). It is specially the case with quasi-acceptable forms of development (Figure 1b) – in certain countries (Canada, for instance) children are allowed to move around the classroom by using the "bicycle desk" – which could be included in the set A, depending on the context. These cases may be open to a negotiation process and enable a transition from Non-A to A.

Human development being unpredictable (Figure 1c), "[a]ny developmental trajectory "X" can diachronically unfold in different ways, sometimes within and sometimes outside the windows of possibilities" (Tateo, 2019, p. 10). Yet, while Tateo's systemic cogenetic approach is epistemologically based on the assumption that A and non-A are inclusively interrelated (Valsiner, 1998) and evolve in an unpredictable fashion, it also recognizes that people usually think in an exclusively separated way, in terms of dualities – an either/or logic. While "[w]hat is not yet observable, potential and fully developed is as important as what is already observable or actual" (Tateo, 2019, p. 11) because it signals an unpredictable range of emerging phenomena, a normative view leads to reducing this very range. What is expected (e.g., the child should regulate his/her behavior in school) reduces this range to what fits with social norms and makes it predictable.

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Thanks to the boundary creating a complementarily system A/non-A, the open set is constrained by the limited sets:

> It is this dynamic system of meanings, in which openness is constrained by the defined nature of the complementary closed set, which guides the collective development of the society toward a more limited range of possible alternatives, maintaining in such a way the balance between production and reproduction of social dynamics (Tateo, 2016, p. 439).

School tends to operate as a closed set because it defines itself from the inside ("what we are as school agents") and regulates its relation to the external world using homeostatic mechanisms preventing the outside from invading the inside. For this purpose, School agents reduce the range of acceptable forms of family engagement. As displayed in Figure 1a, Non-A (Non-school; informal range of parental engagement) constitutes an open set. Considering the aforementioned mechanism, how do schools reduce the range of informal parental engagement and thereby make it a closed set?

Responding to this question could enable me to tackle how the closed set and its boundaries are constructed. More specifically, it could enable me to understand how *Non*-A (Non-school) – as an open range – is made into *Not*-A (ABSENCE of A), that is how the opposite and open set Non-A is defined in terms of "lack" (Not) – parents lacking X and Y school properties and not being like teachers. It could also help me understand how this very absence is made both VISIBLE (what parents are not constitutes *observable* risk factors) and INVISIBLE (the sense ascribed to informal parental engagement by family actors is not part of the teachers' field, of what they 'see'). In the next section, I tackle the issue of people constructing Non-A as absence and making this absence visible and invisible.

Constructing absence and invisibility in the interaction between school, family and community

Why trying to CONNECT the school, the family and the community, particularly in poverty-stricken contexts, by trying to lessen the boundary *separating* them? Rather, can we just assume that such connections exist if we consider with Tateo (2016, 2019) that a boundary is something that both connects and separates (differentiating parts in a whole) (Marsico, 2016)? Marsico and Iannaccone (2012) refer to the metaphor of the school's balcony, as an extension (boundary) of the school in the community, to argue about how school (A) agents manage their relation (connection) to the family (Non-A).

Teachers being often reluctant to parents' (physical or symbolic) presence in a school (Crozier, 2001, 2012) or managing parent's engagement by keeping parents on the school periphery (Marsico & Iannaccone, 2012) – through managing an "engagement zone" (promoting parental engagement formal meetings) VS "non-engagement zones" (preventing parents from wandering in the entrance or voluntarily come to school to meet the teacher with no prior formal appointment) (Boulanger, 2019b) – suggests the willingness to break, reduce or maintain connections between school and families. So, there is not necessarily absence of connection, as school/family and its boundaries form a complementarily system.

The fact that such a complementarity is negated -researchers and educators claiming that there is no connection between schools and families - signals, first, that teachers affectively react to the school-family connection and, second, that they construct the interrelations as an exclusive separation between the agents in a mechanistic ''either/or'' logic (Valsiner, 1998).

The difference – signaling cultural variability – between the school and the family agent is generally constructed as exclusion (Doucet, 2011). Teachers' discourses generally take the following form: "[…] parents are not like us (non-A as disturbance), therefore they are threatening and we must make sure that they

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don't overwhelm us by keeping them outside the school or on its boundary". On the other hand, parents are needed to support child's (unidirectional) transfer of knowledge from school to the family environment. Parents are thus constructed as *too present* in zone Non-A (what is non-excepted from them) and *not enough present* in zone A (what is expected from them).

Teachers construct the over-presence of parents in the zone Non-A by representing the family as invading the school. This invasion happens, first, directly through parents being too present, particularly in a non-expected form of engagement (spontaneous presence in school without appointment, wandering in the corridor, etc.). Second, it occurs indirectly through, first, their informal practices at home (c.f., loose structuration of child's activities, scrutinizing the child at distance) not fitting with school's practices, and second, the informal knowledge conveyed to the child (Matthiesen, 2019; Nakagawa, 2019).

Because Non-A (what the parents should not do or be) is defined in relation with A (what is expected in relation with the school norms), parents and children are constructed as LACK and (negative) ABSENCE –absence of parent's support, absence of children's self-confidence, lack of parent's presence, lack of school success, etc. They are NOT-A instead of NON-A. NOT-A is a closed set designating the *absence of* A (school). By way of contrast (in an "either/or" logic), teachers are considered full (of good intention, morality, values, and good practices) of A, fully present to children and even parents when they are inviting them to the school formal activities (Gomes, 2019; Lightfoot, 2004).

Because what is absent – what the child and the parents are lacking – is *named* in reference to school's expectations (the child needs to be prepared for school through parents' intervention in X and Y ways), this very absence is made VISIBLE.

This is exactly what happens when making parents' personal and environmental conditions – which are transactional (Dewey & Bentley, 1949), that is processual, contextual and endowed with sense, therefore hard to "grasp" – a series of risk and protective FACTORS (an objectification) (Boulanger, 2019b). Those factors are easily identifiable and manageable. What is made VISIBLE is the shadow of family experience. The informal and tacit engagement of parents that makes sense to the family is made INVISIBLE. What highLIGHTS the family's experience is put in the shadow of risk factors. Experience and factors both pertain to absence. Yet, the former is made invisible while the latter is made visible.

So, parents are constructed as absent in school because their mode of engagement doesn't fit with schools' norms (A). Yet, Non-A being made into not-A (LACK) implies rendering *invisible* the families' potentialities. Therefore, I propose calling it INVISIBLE *Non*-A. The school is closing the family's light (potentialities as an open set). In parallel, in Non-A, specific behaviors and cognitions are constructed as VISIBLE targets. I propose to call this VISIBLE *Not*-A. So, the same phenomenon – informal engagement – is both *dark*en (making invisible its constructive aspect) and high *light*ed (making visible its *dark* or problematic side as constructed by teachers).

Figure 2 (''V'' represents visibility and ''I'' invisibility) situates in Figure 1a the main dimensions of my analysis. Teachers defining themselves in relation to school (as A) oppose themselves – in an "either/or" logic (exclusive separation) – to parents (non-A). They are thereby making a connection and a disconnection. For this reason, teachers consider themselves present and the parents absent in school. This absence is made into a close set (from Non-A to Not-A). Therefore, parents are defined in relation to what they are lacking and what is absent *in* them and their environment. While the positive side of informal engagement is rendered invisible, its negative side – as attributed by teachers – is made visible in the form of risk factors. The contrast between school as protective and family as risky – the former compensating for the latter – reinforces the conception of school-family interaction as a disconnection. It signals the making of a complementary system (A/Non-A and the boundary) into a static system through exclusive separation.

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Figure 2
Closing the open set by constructing absence as visibility and invisibility
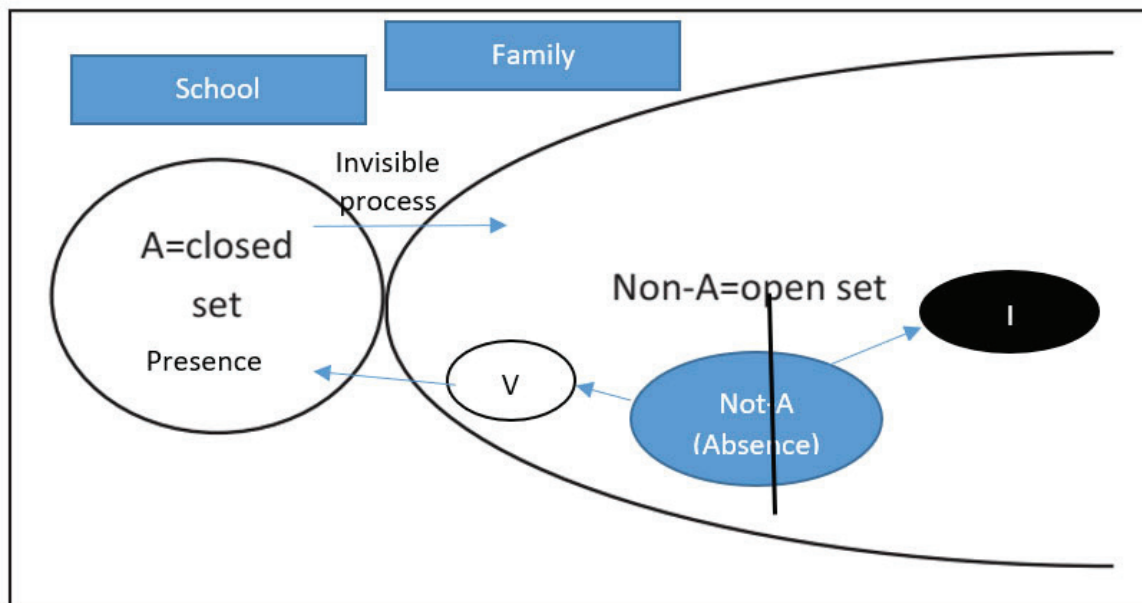
Fonte: Adapted with permission from Tateo (2016, p. 439).

Temporally regulating the boundary between school (A) and family (Not-A) signals "[…] the way of producing the distinction and at the same time the requirements to change from one condition to the other" (Tateo, 2019, p. 7). My analysis display teachers regulating the transition from Not-A (visible) to A in a linear fashion:

> [T]hese distinctions also set the rules for moving a single trajectory from 'non-A' to 'A'. For instance, we establish developmental tasks (e.g. if a child learns to tie his shoes at a proper age) and checkpoints (e.g. school assessments) through which a developmental trajectory can become 'proper'" (Tateo, 2019, p. 7).

While this transition is normatively regulated, the cogenetic approach argues "[…] that 'non-A' is not 'non-development', but rather contains all the forms that do not correspond to the socially accepted parameters" (Tateo, 2019, p. 7). In this logic, Non-A entails unpredictability and novelty. Because people are autonomous human beings interacting dynamically with their environment, they resist external influence. Development could then take place outside teachers' predefined range – outside Not-A, but inside the invisible aspect of Non-A. While teachers construct Non-A as Not-A (parents as lack), Non-A is still necessarily open. Teachers' act of closing the Non-A set is necessarily defined by its opposite – Parents and children REopening it. In this perspective, "[t]he bounded region (A), though remaining a closed set, can dynamically expand or constrict over time in the relationship with the open set (non-A) in the buffer region corresponding to the marginal instances of the person's integrity" (Tateo, 2016, p. 440).

This possible extension of A into non-A is represented in Figure 3a. In my analysis, I displayed the reduction of the open set into a closed set.

The extension (from A into Non-A) symbolized in Figure 3a above is useful to tackle how the autonomous parents and children REopen their space (extension) – the latter enabling a transition from Not-A to Non-A and actualizing Non-A's potentialities. Teachers constructing parenthood and childhood as a social problem by normatively reducing education to schooling constitute only one side of the phenomenon – it epistemically pertains to set A. Its epistemic opposite is Non-A – absence as an active rather than a passive phenomenon (making parents into passive agents) and the possibility of expanding and actualizing Non-A.

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Figure 3

Dynamic set, active absence and invisibility
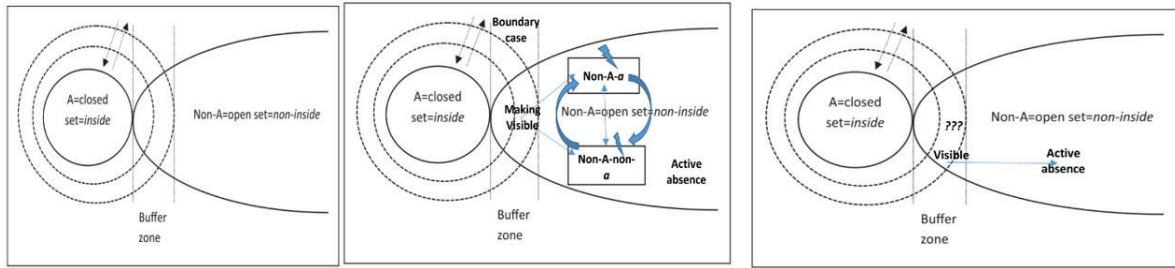
(a) Dynamic set (b) Active absence and invisibility (c) Making visible the invisible

The second part of this paper aims at regulating the boundary between (epistemic) A and Non-A by enabling an epistemic shift. As an introduction to this second part, I suggest now four avenues that I develop.

Making visible and expanding the active absence

In Figure 3b, I situate in Figure 3a four general avenues for extending the systemic cogenetic approach: 1) Active absence (Goethe) as a way to make the invisible absence visible on the edge of the phenomenon; 2) The role of boundary in making the invisible visible; 3) The boundary case (Non-Non-A) as a flexible designation (considering a phenomenon as possibly A or non-A and negotiating this attribution); 4) Circular and intransitive movement rendering visible the whole range of phenomena – in relation to specific *dimensions* (Non-A-a and Non-A-non-a) – in irreversible time.

There is a progression – expanding in complexity – in my argumentation, starting with *absence* (in relation to Goethe) *as an active condition* enabling *deeply visualising* cultural phenomena (the first of the four aforementioned avenues). In Figure 3b, Non-A is designed as an active absence comprising an infinite range. To say it simply, this is a kind of potentiality to be "awakened". For this to happen, making it visible (accessible) is an important condition. Making the invisible absence visible happens on the edge of phenomena (the first of the four aforementioned avenues) as suggested by Goethe. In Figure 3b, this process is at the boundary between A and Non-A. One way to tackle this process is in relation with the concept of boundary case referring to a case with an open boundary. It *could* be ascribed to A *or* Non-A. It, therefore, entails constructing possibilities. Someone with three hairs could be considered a boundary case of baldness – it opens negotiation to designate this case as A (bald) or Non-A (baldness). Opening a set is symbolized by a thunder in Figure 3b. A and Non-A are considered as options, with the boundary being open and flexible, even movable. Baldness is also defined in relation to specific dimensions, such as the number (a) and location (non-a) of hairs. In Figure 3b, I symbolize these dimensions as Non-A-a and Non-A-non-a. It signals that Non-A is defined in relation with many dimensions. How to make visible and actualize the whole range – all the dimensions of the phenomena (the different forms of parental engagement)? To respond to this question, I return to Goethe's work on colors that could be likened to such dimensions.

I use the analysis of parents' and teachers' discourse to illustrate these theoretical propositions. Consider that I present these propositions as potential theoretical avenues. These propositions – which I don't fully develop here – are rather starting avenues for further development. For instance, it is for this reason that I refer indirectly to Goethe (1792, 1810, 1817) in relation to Bortoft's (1996) presentation of his work, which seems reliable to me.

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Active absence (Goethe): making the invisible visible on the edge of the phenomenon

Moving from Not-A to Non-A – as an infinite range of possibilities – implies delving into the whole organization of phenomena. Goethe – as presented by Bortoft (1996) – conceives the whole phenomenon as follow:

> [T]he whole is an absence. This absence, however, is not the same as nothing. Rather, it is an *active* absence inasmuch as we do no try to be aware of the whole, as if we could grasp it like a part, but instead let ourselves be open to be moved by the whole. A particularly graphic illustration of the development of a sensitivity to the whole as an active absence is to be found in the experience of writing, where we saw earlier that we do not have the meaning before us like an object (Bortoft, 1996, p. 14, author's emphasis).

For Goethe, active absence is *a way to* get access the phenomena's whole organization and enabling this organization to unfold. Delving into "[t]he experience is one way of entering into a dimension which is in the phenomenon, not behind or beyond it, but which is not visible at first" (Bortoft, 1996, p. 21). This implies changing our mode of seeing: from visualizing an external object to being deeply immersed in it. This contrasts with passively seeing – which makes absence a passive absence (parents being represented as passively absent) – the phenomenon as object through objectification (constructing parents' personal and environmental conditions as risk FACTORS). Active absence is rather a condition for accessing (making VISIBLE) and deepening the phenomenon's invisible organization. This amounts to opening up what appears at first sight as invisible (parents' sense-making and informal engagement).

I illustrate an activity as a general condition for accessing others (other people). I do this in reference to the discourses of educators and parents participating in a bottom-up educational program in Canada (Larose & Boulanger, 2013). This program is named School of Parent (SoP), in French *l'École des Parents*. In this program, parents – who drop out of school early in their trajectory – in a poverty-stricken environment learn the content of the school curriculum to be able to support their child's schooling and eventually join formal vocational education to get a job. Parents also develop educational competence to support child's development. Informal and experiential learning is the main aspect of this program. For instance, parents determine their own project in relation to the child.

Here an exchange between educators in a focus-group:

> You [mothers] know things. You know things that *we don't know* (Educator 1).
>
> Yes, that's it, a whole heritage that is *already there* […] (Educator 2).
>
> […] so this must be put into perspective […] (Educator 1).
>
> […] this is one of the only place where mothers can just BE or learn to BE (Educator 3).
>
> […]one of the biggest victory […] is […] when someone arrives in a group […] without speaking, who is ENCLOSED […] and that we SEE take confidence and interact (Educator 1).

A short time after, Educator 3 indicates that "parents are *NOT* conscious that they need something". From these excerpts, I make three observations: 1) teachers access parents organization both in terms of structure – what is virtually (enclosed, already there) "there" – and process – genotype as the move from virtuality to actuality (parents' potential signaling what they are becom*ing*); 2) the emergence of parents' trajectory outside the school's formal window (A) of possibilities (the possibility of being or learning to be what they want to be as fixed by the school), and 3) the emerging of untapped possibilities (non-A) through a dialogue.

These observations signal the teachers making visible parents potentialities through active absence. Instead of constructing absence as a passive absence (parents being mere object of our intervention and

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discourse) and a lack (Not-A; parents being not like us), teachers constructing absence as an active zone, enabling visualizing and possibly actualizing parents' organization of experience. Absence is an open door leading to (making visible) the parents' invisible whole organizations – in terms of structure and process.

I comment now on the third observation. Let us consider the contrast between, first, the mothers having a heritage that educators know *nothing* about and, second, mothers *not* knowing their own needs. On the first hand, mothers know something (their heritage that is both affective and relational or dialogical; more on the relation between affectivity and dialogue later) about themselves that educators do NOT know. On the other hand, educators know something (their needs that are both affective and relational or dialogical) about mothers that they DON'T know about themselves. Here the Self and its Alter are co-readers producing the text because they "[…] can convey to others more of the meaning of a text than they may understand themselves" (Bortoft, 1996, p. 7). Here, the 'empty spot' is not filled (like people who fill a container with something). As I explained elsewhere (Boulanger, 2019a) in relation with parent's learning process, this movement is not filled but constantly expanding.

Fullness (filling to making full of 'something') is never achieved – the process is always and constantly unfolding. Active absence is not a hole to be closed but an opening to a horizon – like a real horizon, its boundary is constantly open and defined by the relation between the person and the environment (Tateo, 2016).

Figure 3c presents this process of making visible the potentialities in Non-A through active absence. This analysis could be completed by delving into resistance as a way of opening up the field of possibilities (Valsiner, 2019). Teachers taping on children's active deviation from school instructions (Rajala, 2019) may be a promising avenue.

I also have to consider that the teachers' interpretation in the excerpts presented previously is not imposed on parents. This is the difference between considering the other as an object or a (dialogical) "partner". The teacher "[…] does not force the text into the mold of reader's personality or into the requirements of his previous knowledge" (Bortoft, 1996, p. 7). Rather, "[i]t conveys the meaning of the text – 'conveys' in the sense of 'passes through' or 'goes between'". This in-between signals the work on the boundary (the questions marks in Figure 3c) I delve into now.

The role of boundary in making the invisible visible

Goethe opposes himself to Newton's approach of SEEING color in an objective and passive way. For him, Newton conceives secondary qualities (the invisible phenomenon of perception) as hidden behind primary qualities (the visual properties of objects) and substitutes the former by the latter. By looking at the angle of color in a ray of light (accessible primary qualities) Newton substitutes the real phenomenon by another one. He thus made invisible the absent phenomenon, like teachers do – school as a primary quality overshadows parents' experience as secondary quality (Boulanger, 2019c). Non-A is made into Not-A.

Goethe's active way of seeing –plunging into the phenomenon – leads him to consider "[…] that a *boundary or edge is necessary to call forth the colors*" (Bortoft, 1996, p. 36 author's emphasis). More precisely, he "[…] recognized from his first observation with the prism that light and dark were necessary "to call forth the colors". So, if he could see an instance in nature of the 'coming into being' of colors out of light and dark alone, then he would have read the origin of colors directly in nature itself" (Bortoft, 1996, p. 43).

In the previous section, I analyzed how teachers enter into the phenomenological organization of parents –their invisible absence – in order to let parents' experiences emerge to let them become what they want to be. Like Goethe who invites the phenomenon to manifest itself, they invite parents to unfold, calling forth their "colors (singular texture signaling the nuance in the spectrum of phenomena)" (Figure 4).

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Figure 4

Boundary opening up the absence

(a) Absence on the boundary (b) SEEing the parent's organization

Bortoft (1996, p. 40) presents how to perform Goethe's experiment to actively see colors as follow:

> Just make a card with a straight boundary between black and white regions, and look at the boundary through the prism with, the card in either of the orientations shown in the figure on the opposite page. Holding the prism so that it is oriented like the roof of a house turned upside-down, with the edges parallel to the boundary, look through the slanted side facing you toward the boundary. You will see displaced downward. In both cases, vivid colors are seen parallel to the boundary. In orientation (a), the colors appear in the white region just below the black, with red nearest to the boundary, then orange and yellow furthest away from the boundary. In (b), [...] the colors are parallel to the boundary, but with this orientation of the card the colors are blues, with light blue nearest to the boundary and violet furthest into the black.

What is interesting for my purpose is that "[b]lack, violet, and blue begin to be perceived as belonging together, as if there were a unity in these colors which is not perceived at first. [...] The colors are perceived as belonging together in a unity which is present in the phenomenon but not visible as the colors themselves" (Bortoft, 1996, p. 42). Absence – the full range of secondary qualities that I likened to parents' informal engagement in non-A as an infinite set – is what is made visible rather than what is immediately apparent, such as school norms for teachers (from THEIR external and objective point of view). Instead of looking passively at phenomena, teachers enter into it, thereby reversing their usual way of seeing.

To illustrate it, I present two excerpts of educators in their chronological order[2]:

> This [parent's learning] also *generates knowledge*, then it progressively appears like a *place where you rediscover* that you can learn, then you develop a confidence in your capacity to touch new things and integrating them. There is this fear of not being adequate; when you have not finished secondary school and that people always told you that you are *not enough educated* and that you *did not have this and that*, that you are finally always in deficit mode. This creates people who are not willing to ask a lot of questions, who fear to make mistakes; they don't want to express their point of view. So, this is a kind *of link or conversation that we create* in which *you have your place*, you can ask questions. All questions are good, you can ask whatever you want and parents react "Hein!" (Educator 1, emphasis added).

> But I think that one of the biggest victory, one of the biggest sign and victory is when a newcomer is, at first, not speaking, closed (*renfermé*), does not feel well, etc., then *we see* her take confidence, interacting and *completely changing* his/her behavior and we other participants say to her: "ha, you know, last week you shared about this, then I went on Internet for doing research, because it... [implicitly expressing that this sharing was calling her out], then I found this or that thing on this topic, blah blah blah". Then the group participants are sharing together. There, you make positive observations (Educator 2, emphasis added).

[2] In fact, these excerpts are slightly separated by other discourses.

In these excerpts, teachers take a comprehensive stance with regard to parents. They empathically see what they feel INSIDE, what is at first sight invisible. They see both the structural organization of their experience and how it unfolds. Interestingly, while teachers' main tendency is to make invisible the process of making invisible a part of parents' experience (Non-A) – as analyzed in the first part of this paper – here, teachers do see how parents closed themselves in response to being treated like a passive object and a lack. Moreover, they render visible the organization of parents' experience in terms of process – parents' opening themselves. Both in terms of structure and process, teachers make visible two main *dimensions* of parents' experience: affection and dialogue. In fact, they display parents' experience (phenomenon) by looking on the *edge of affectivity and dialogue* (Figure 4b) just like Goethe who visualizes the phenomenon of color by looking at the boundary of black and white (Figure 4a).

Mothers' (affective) fear of failure and speaking (asking questions in dialogue) in public is related to them (affectively) feeling that they *lack* competences and knowledge.

I consider black and white or affection and dialogue as two complementary *dimensions* in Non-A – the active absence. I, therefore, call them Non-A-a and Non-A-non-a. Both have a wide range of spectrum (of colors) – first, 'Non-A-a as Non-A-a^1', Non-A-a^2, Non-A-a^3 and, second, Non-A-non-a as Non-A-non-a^1, Non-A-non-a^2 and Non-A-non-a^3 The boundary enables highlighting the nuances of the phenomenon through a contrastive view (black versus white).

Figure 5
The work of boundary
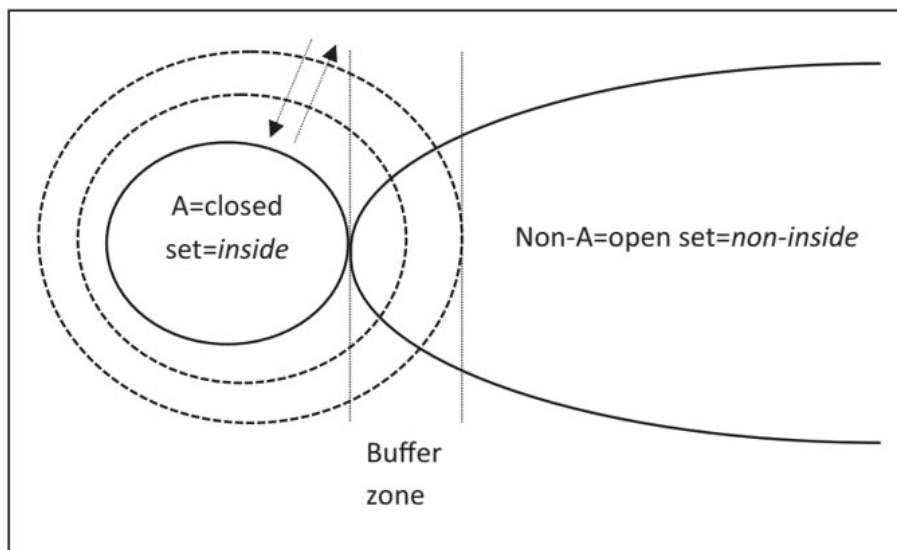
Fonte: Adapted with permission from Tateo (2016, p. 441).

This is what I represent in Figure 5. Affectivity and dialogue are not necessarily opposite. They are rather complementary terms. The latter mediate the relationship between the teacher and the parent amidst the internal (inside the parent's universe) and external world. The teacher goes inside the parent – affectively seeing him or her – then outside – by empathically expressing (dialogue) his/her understanding to the parent. This enables the parent to *affectively* rediscover himself or herself (going inside) and express himself or herself in the course of a *dialogue* (going outside) with the teacher. Here, affectivity and dialogue are in a state of tension amidst the inside and the outside – dialogue can also unfold inside and affectively be expressed outside. Another way to look at boundary work is in relation with the concept of boundary case. How does the boundary case enables opening and expanding Non-A?

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Boundary case as flexible designation

To have a boundary case, we need a boundary, a set A, a set Non-A and a case which is hard to assign to A or Non-A. A boundary case is vague to assign to a set A or Non-A. It, therefore, pertains to Non-Non-A. It is neither A nor Non-A but it *could* be either one; it is therefore situated in an open space. Is someone with 3 hairs a bald or non-bald person? It is neither one nor the other, but POSSIBLY one and the other.

Raffman (2014, p. 2) expresses well the general idea of vagueness³ that transcends scientific discord among contemporary philosophers:

> Perhaps the only point on which all theorists of vagueness agree is that vagueness is a form of unclarity – specifically, an unclarity about the boundaries of things. In language, vagueness concerns the extent of a term's application: There is no clear or definite boundary between the items to which the term applies and the items to which it does not.

So, vagueness implies unclarity in the application of a term with respect to at least two regions (A and Non-A). The object located in the gap *between* regions A and B is called a boundary case.

> Words like 'rich', 'heap', 'red' and even 'looks red', are vague. That is, they have blurred boundaries of application: there is no sharp division between cases in which they clearly apply and cases in which they don't. There is, for example, no sharp division between objects that are clearly red and objects that aren't (clearly red), people who are clearly rich and people who aren't (Raffman, 1994, p. 41).

For different reasons pertaining to standard logic (Raffman, 2014) and to the open nature (open texture) of vagueness and its environment, we cannot force an object to fit in a particular region by adding artificial criteria that would enable boundaries to apply⁴ , for instance, by fitting parents in the school's formal activities while their actions are sometimes neither formal nor informal (Tateo's quasi-A). In fact, vagueness entails indecision about boundary cases lying between different poles.

What is open here is not one of the set – Non-A for Tateo (2016) – but the boundary itself (Sainsbury, 1990; Scheffler, 1979), because the boundary case is subject to contextual negociation, and tolerance is allowed as far as its *range* of application is concerned. Usually, such cases are "made invisible" because they fall in a gray zone. Standard rules are used to fix the delimitation: a child encountering social adaptation issues or being violent in school is placed in the same category (problem, risk). Yet, rules are contradictory (Raffman, 2014) –parents have to be involved yet not/non-involved.

The choice to situate a boundary case in A or Non-A is then arbitrary and non-legislative; the "either/or" is not a static zone, but suggests *possibilities*. Boundary cases imply hesitation on the part of the subject; these cases are problematic and *polemical*, possibly giving rise to controversy. For this reason, they are always *open*, partly because there is tolerance (even partially) (Gaiffman, 2010) and because the space is open (to the possible, to the not yet explored – invisible – horizons). It is always possible to (re)negotiate how to position the object. The boundary case, therefore, constitutes a fruitful opportunity to debate and open the black boxes (Shapiro, 2006). Raffman (2014, p. 3) considers a person as a boundary case:

> Soritical reasoning bay be familiar from debates about abortion rights: Since a newborn infant is a person, and a human organism, say, one second younger than a person is also a person, it seems

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³ Vagueness is not equivalent to ambiguity, but Scheffler (1979) characterizes the second as a special case of the former.
⁴ If such thing happens, as the field of application is still open (a feature of open texture), a transference of ambiguity to other regions will happen (Waismann, 1945).

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to follow that a conceptus is a person. The existence of the latter argument suggests that the word 'person' too is vague.

I illustrate now this notion in relation to the discourse of educators (actors from school and other institutions intervening with the parents and children) participating in a partnership program (2003-2009) – School, family, community, Succeed Together (SFCST) – implemented in poor areas in Canada (Quebec), and who were interviewed in focus groups in 2007[5]. They receive instructions from political agents to develop activities to reach parents. The professionals define these activities in the context of group discussions.

Parental engagement is often represented in a traditional way where engagement equals parent physical presence in school:

> The parent who is *there* is a parent saying, "Me, I am involved," and who is already engaged at other levels in school. But it's *complicated*. The approaches are outreach approaches. And that's that. But they don't always give results. […] There have been *holes,* but we generally almost always have one [parent] (Subject 1, emphasis added).

In this excerpt, school is the norm point (zone A) of reference to define parents' presence and absence (the hole signaling Not-A, the lack of expected presence) in school. While the demarcation between presence (A) and absence (Not-A) is clear, what is not (complicated) is the way to reach the parents and the results of their presence. One of the vague zones is the engagement of parents as students (returning to school by investing in vocational activities).

> And because at the level of statistics it's been *hard to prove*, me, I know there are parents who have gone back to school*?* Is there really a connection? But, me, I know that there are parents who have chosen to continue their studies (Subject 2, emphasis added).

The absence of proof of parental engagement, as well as one of the *dimensions* of parental engagement – the parent as a student – reflects its vagueness. The status of the parent is an object of tension in the group. Below, I present a part of the dialogue between two participants in the focus group.

> It *could* also be a grandparent. They're often in school workshops, they have room, they're on the ground (Subject 3, emphasis added).
>
> I have nothing against grandparents, but *I'm not sure it's the right person to come sit here* because, me, I don't have children in school presently. I'd prefer parents *with children in school* (Subject 4, emphasis added).
>
> *Actually*, there's many grandparents coming to school to do activities and to replace parents. They're *more involved than we think!* But, of course, if the grandparent has no *link with the school*, they don't necessarily have the best point of view. But there are many grandparents helping school activities by giving them (Subject 3, emphasis added).

The controversy is on the status of the educator representing the child. From the point of view of Subject 3, the status does not depend on the level of family lineage, but on the actor's proximity to school values. Seeming to *become more flexible in the course of the discussion*, Subject 4 *expands the spectrum of the dialogue* as well as the *range* of the phenomenon under discussion mentioning that a parent can engage in another school than the one in which his or her children are officially involved.

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[5] The analysis is presented elsewhere. For more details, the reader can refer to Boulanger (2016).

The group participants do not agree on the clear demarcation of a boundary case, but they *agree to disagree*. The space given to the definition of educator or parent is *open* to discussion, *re*definition, and innovation since (yet unseen, invisible) possibilities (using the word "could") are constructed in the dialogues that emerge.

The participants hesitated to define parental presence in the school, "They aren't *here*, but it doesn't mean that they're not *happy* or *close to* the school [...] Happy, *no*, but still closer to the school because they *communicate* better since they *feel* more welcomed, *maybe*" (Subject 5, emphasis added).

In this excerpt, the *hesitating* subject admits the *possibility* that proximity to the school not only necessitates *physical* (visible) presence but also implies the way parents communicate and their feelings of being welcomed. Communication and feelings are tacit (invisible) elements representing the boundary case of parental presence (presence in mind, emotion, and communication). In fact, there is *openness to* boundary cases that *do not fit with the usual conventions,* as also expressed in the following excerpt:

> And there it provides an occasion to *see* the school *from another angle*. And it gives them [parents] a place. There are many parents who did not feel well with the school and who came know to do *other kinds of acts* in schools compared with being students. I see that it changes their ideas about, and relationship with, the school (Subject 7, emphasis added).

In this excerpt, parents can now engage in school in more informal ways, whereas professionals did focus on the formal aspect. The informal forms of engagement are both possibility and reality. Certain participants refer to parental engagement at the community library. Others refer to the informal conversation between teachers and parents in the school corridors (a zone that is not fully *rule-governed*).

The interesting thing about this situation is that educators literally discuss the absence of parents from school. They are asking themselves if X or Y is a case of parental presence (A) or absence (Non-A). In the beginning of their conversation, absence is constructed as passive absence: parents being not present (Not-A) in school. Overemphasising parents' presence in school as a restrictive way of defining parental engagement makes invisible the other case of absence. Yet, some cases progressively appear as possibly signaling presence or absence. They thus appear as a boundary case. Different invisible dimensions thus appear as cases of possible presence – moving from Non-A to A. Absence is actively absence because it is a potential in the discussion –it entails options of reclassification. In the course of conversation, a whole range of dimensions manifest –parental engagement is now seen in relation with proximity/distance, status (parent or grandparent or student) and affective versus physical investment.

A boundary case, located in a gray zone (boundary), is thus a resourceful condition for making the active absence visible and opening/expanding the Non-A zone. Alternatives are created outside the initial windows of (pre-identifiable) possibilities (Tateo, 2016, 2019).

In the last quotation, the actor seeing school (A) from another angle signals him/her representing the whole phenomenon of parental engagement in a different way. They could not go back to their previous conception because their representation changed in an irreversible way. Parent's affective investment in the child could no longer be seen as Non-A.

This means that when attributing a boundary case X or one of its dimensions (Raffman, 2014) to Non-A, then A applies a SYSTEMIC SHIFT, so that our understanding of the phenomena X changes in an irreversible way (Shapiro, 2006). Let us consider the color of an apple that is considered neither red nor yellow. Its color is somewhere in between. Consider a consumer committe trying to attribute this (growing) apple to red (A) or yellow (Non-A or not yet A). In the course of conversation, they decide to consider it yellow, therefore they attribute it to the WHOLE organization of yellowness, that is its range –with all the varying (invisible

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and possible) textures (secondary qualities). Performing a systemic shift from Non-A to A in this attribution implies changing our whole conception of X – it is now attributed to the whole range of redness. Yet the apple is growing from yellow to red during the very attributing process. Also, the person – he/she is resisting attribution and counter-positioning himself or herself. He/she defends their potentialities through resistance – making a not-A (invisible potentialities) a non-A (visible potentialities). I deepen now my understanding of the aforementioned circular and intransitive process.

Circular and intransitive movement rendering visible the whole range of phenomena

Let me return to Goethe's perspective on color (Figure 6).

Figure 6
*Expansion of invisible absence during systemic shift*
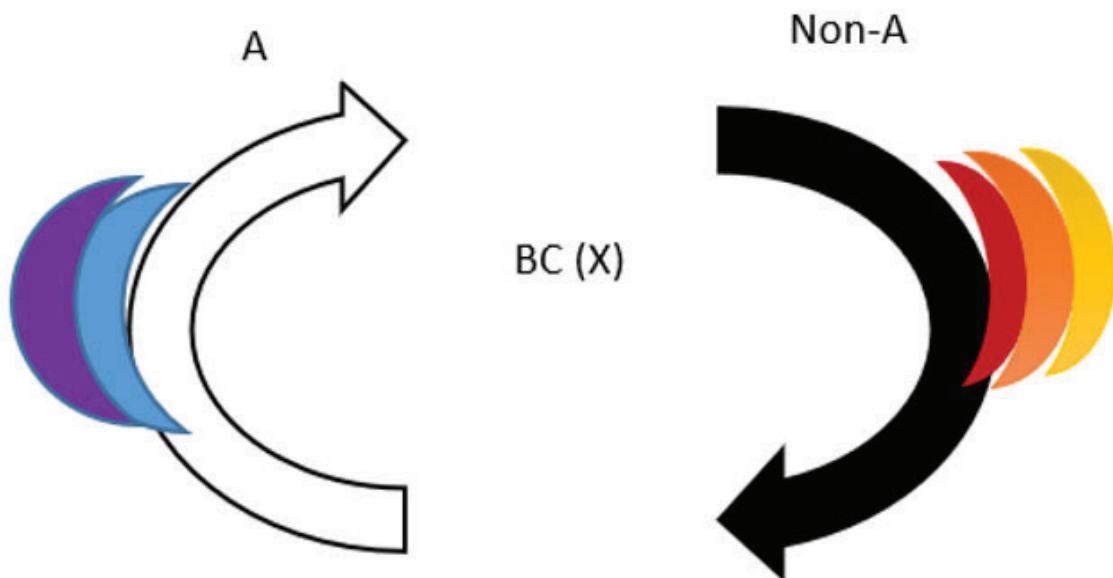
In the analysis performed in the previous section, a conversational movement (Shapiro, 2006) is happening in the attribution of engagement as a boundary case (BC in Figure 6). Considering the open and unpredictable nature of boundary, performing a *shift* in the attribution – from grand-parents or students (as parents) or affective investment as cases of non-parental engagement (Non-A) to cases of parental engagement (A) – implies recognizing the whole phenomenon and expanding understanding of its range. The different dimensions (Raffman, 2014) of parents' engagement can be likened to the different texture of colors in Goethe's experiment. The whole range of color – as a whole – can be considered as an active absence. Deeply looking INTO a phenomenon to VISUALIZE its wholeness happens on the boundary – boundary case that are situated on the boundary of a phenomeon and that are open for discussion, seem to be a constructive boundary situation. It enables both making visible the invisible – what are the invisible *dimensions* of engagement (blueness) and non-engagement (redness) – and shifting from redness to blueness. The conversational movement (Shapiro, 2006) is therefore constructive.

Let me present another illustration from the analysis of educators' discourse in the SFCST (partnership program).

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Figure 7a represents how attribution generally unfolds during the conversation inthe very beginning of this program – which is implemented for seven years. Parent engagement is distributed alongside four categories as closed sets. When they are present in school in a formal way (instrumental support of teachers' tasks) they are accepted. They are partially accepted when they engage outside of school in a formal way by supporting children's homework. They are refused when they engage informally outside of school: they are either considered risky for children (visible not-A in Figure 2) or not considered at all – meeting parents in the grocery store is invisible, it is a not-case (invisible not-A in Figure 2). Parents informal presence in school is also made invisible (not-A). Here, A is defined in relation to two complementary dimensions (Raffman, 2014) – formality and presence. Notice that in this case, *A is also a closed set*. Yet, what happens when there is movement in this closed set in the course of conversation as an intransitive cycle?

Figure 7
Unfolding of Movement
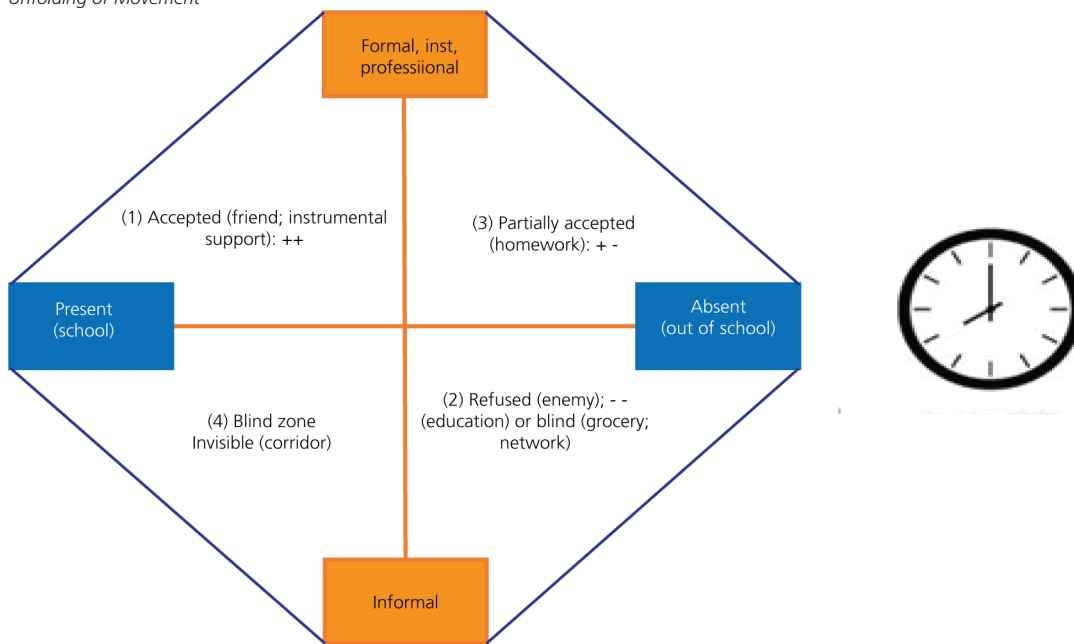
(a) Exclusive separation and absence of movement (b) Movement in intransitive cycle during the attribution process

Figure 7b represents how the conversation unfolds at the end of the program. The four sets are opened up and there is movement in attribution: what was attributed to a particular set is now attributed to another one alongside the four dimensions of the phenomenon. It happens because NUANCE is put in relation to the texture of the phenomenon (in relation to its range) (Figure 6) – allowing an expansion in SEEING of both the range of blueness (A in Figure 6) and redness (Non-A in Figure 6) enables and results first from VISUALIZING ABSENCE (which is not there at first sight) and second shifting from Non-A to A in the course of conversational MOVEMENT. Parents' informal engagement outside of school is not anymore considered a case of ABSENCE, but of POSSIBLE – extending the range of potentialities in Non-A – presence. SEEING parents in an informal school zone enables teachers to SEE the whole phenomenon differently, from another angle. There is an openness to another kind of engagement. This has an irreversible effect – SEEING the whole phenomenon differently with a restructuring of A and Non-A and mainly the interplay between A and Non-A (Figure 5).

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Conclusion

In this paper, I proposed extending systemic cogenetic approach with regard to the dimensions of absence and invisibility. In the first part of the paper, I displayed how the interaction between school and family is constructed amidst tension between presence versus absence, as well as visibility versus invisibility. This enabled integrating the following dimensions to the cogenetic approach: first, the process of making absence visible, invisible and present; and second, the process of rendering invisible the very process of constructing absence. In the second part of the paper, I delved into the constructive aspect of absence. I proposed extending the systemic cogenetic approach in relation with following aspects: (a) active absence (Goethe) as a way to make the invisible visible on the edge of the phenomenon; (b) the role of boundary in making the invisible visible; (c) boundary case (Non-Non-A) as a flexible designation (considering a phenomenon as A *or* non-A); and (d) circular and intransitive movement rendering visible the whole range of phenomenon.

Yet, I am still dealing with CLASSification which entails situating someone into a class. Whereas I considered how to open up such class, the classification does not constitute a constructive way to deepening the understanding of others because it pertains to a typological way of thinking. Classification is also contrary to Goethe's approach. So, another concept is needed to grasp the process I analyzed. Elsewhere, I propose the concept of CHARACTERization – the construction of others as a characters through imagination to deepen our understanding of them and to enable their development. Alongside a dialogical perspective, it could be one of the possible ways to further develop the propositions I make in this paper.

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