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Verónica Gubbins Foxley & Francisca Campillay Figueroa

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Family-preschool relationship and family engagement in distance preschool education in the time of COVID-19 in Chile: toward a change of Principals' mentality?

Verónica Gubbins Foxley  and Francisca Campillay Figueroa 

Center of Investigation of Education, Psychology and Family (CIPEF), Universidad Finis Terrae, Santiago, Chile

ABSTRACT

Chile was one of the OECD member countries where schools stayed closed the longest during the COVID-19 pandemic. This study provides information about the type of relationship constructed between families and preschools and the conditions under which parental involvement occurred in distance learning experiences during the interruption of in-person educational activities due to the COVID-19 pandemic, from the perspective of 83 principals who lead preschools located in urban and rural areas affected by poverty in Chile. Our findings show that the principals viewed the pandemic as an opportunity to raise awareness and improve educators' knowledge about students' family contexts, diversify and adapt families' modes of participation to their knowledge and living conditions, and incorporate them into the pedagogical decisions that distance learning prompted throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. These findings pose questions regarding the sustainability of these new post-pandemic practices; in other words, whether it is sustainable to shift from a collaborative and instrumental logic of family participation to another that is based on recognition and dialogue and that takes into account families' needs, interests, and possibilities regardless of the economic, digital, and territorial precariousness that characterises their life.

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parental involvement;
preschool education;
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Introduction

Between 2020 and 2021, a COVID-19 pandemic broke out, forcing families to stay home while institutions scrambled to find options to maintain the continuity of children's educational experiences. Families emerged as the only space where children's formal education could be preserved. Family participation in children's educational processes at home became an essential resource for educational centres.

Chile was one of the OECD member countries where schools stayed closed the longest during the COVID-19 pandemic (OECD, 2022). This event, certainly a first-time occurrence for authorities and families around the world, affected traditional family-school relationships and the usual modes of family participation in children's educational processes. In-person events organised and hosted by the school were replaced by on-line, digitally