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Review paper

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FAMILY, SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY COLLABORATION – SCHOOL PEDAGOGUES CAUGHT IN DOUBLE BINDS

Abstract: Emphasizing the importance of community collaboration is a recent and in Croatian research a relatively unexplored way of positioning family-school relationships in the wider exosystem and macrosystem, within which they develop. The aim of this paper is to analyse contradictory expectations school pedagogues are exposed to in the process of family, school and community collaboration. More specifically, after analysing the discrepancies between theoretical and legislative articulations of community collaboration and the practical limitations that arise in their implementation, we discuss the responsibility of pedagogues to identify specific needs of families in collaboration with the community contrasted with the remedial and deficit perception of families which can, in doing so, be easily demonstrated, as well as consider the imperative theoretical requirements for a close connection between family, school and community contrasted with the managerial and coordinating role that pedagogues can, due to contextual limitations, take on. The concluding part of the paper offers guidelines for further research on this topic.

Keywords: partnership of family and educational institution, pedagogical profession, remediation paradigm, technocratic approach to education, theory of overlapping spheres of influence

INTRODUCTION

Beginning with the Plowden Report in the 1960s (HMSO, 1967, as cited in Crozier, 1998) and the Warnock Report in the 1970s (Feiler, 2010), family-school relationships have been of interest to foreign and Croatian scholars for decades, with an abundance of theoretical works, systematic reviews (Henderson & Berla, 1994; Henderson & Mapp, 2002), meta-analyses (Jeynes, 2007, 2015) and umbrella analyses (Higgins & Katsipataki, 2015), which in their entirety support the idea that an intense permeation of these two for the child basic domains is important. Under the influence of Bronfenbrenner's (1977) ecological model, it became apparent that family-school relationships are deeply immersed in a network of other complex relationships, ranging from those determined by the characteristics of the immediate environments they exist in, such as neighbourhoods and communities, to the echoes of the wider social system and the times in which they develop. This model is a permanent forum for discussions about the relationships between family and educational institution (e.g. see the systematic elaboration in Downer & Myers, 2010) and is, at its core, compatible with Epstein's (1992; 1995) model of overlapping spheres of influence, one of the most used models of collaboration between family and educational institution in general (Mattingly et al., 2002, as quoted in Daniel, 2011). The overlapping moment of Epstein's model refers to the relationships between family, school and community, which have the child at the centre of the overlapping relations, whose context for development is better when the overlap between the three spheres is greater (Daniel, 2011).

Epstein, however, did not begin to develop this model as a model of three overlapping spheres of influence: in the 1992 text the author does already emphasizes the importance of community, but states that in her earlier works she analysed five basic types of parental involvement (Epstein, 1987b, as cited in Epstein, 1992) to which she later added a sixth type that recognizes the impact of the community (Epstein, 1992), while in later works she regularly gives emphasis to the community already in the titles (e.g. Epstein, 1995; 1996; 2018). The author explains that adding the community as a third overlapping sphere of influence opens a new research space, which should answer the questions of "whether this is a separate type of involvement and, if it is, how it differs from the others. For example, school-community, family-community, and school-family-community connections may have separate and combined effects on children's learning. Or, community groups and individuals may provide resources to strengthen the other five types of school and family connections." (Epstein, 1992, p. 14). It appears that in this initial articulation of the revised model the author presents the dilemma of whether the community is the moderator of the other five dimensions of parental involvement (e.g. learning at home or communicating with the school) or whether it is a domain separate in its content,

significantly different from other dimensions. She sees the community, recognizing the role of various agencies, cultural, business and other organizations, etc., as having an important effect on the child, and schools as those that enable or coordinate family access to community resources (Epstein, 1992), at the same time stressing that a close relationship between these domains increases the likelihood of students receiving analogous messages about the importance of education (Epstein, 2010). For this sixth type of parental involvement, the goal is to "[i]dentify and integrate resources and services from the community to strengthen school programs, family practices, and student learning and development." (Epstein, 2010, p. 85). Therefore, schools connect with different community stakeholders who are interested and responsible for children's education (Epstein, 1992; Sanders, 2001, all as cited in Epstein & Sanders, 2002) and families inform themselves about community programs and services, all with the aim of increasing family access to these resources. She also highlights the possibility for schools to improve the quality of their programs through collaboration with the community and, at the same time, recognizes the role of parents as important actors in collaboration (Epstein & Sanders, 2002).

Continuing on from Epstein's (1992) dilemma, in this paper we recognize both the moderating effect of the community on all forms of family-school interactions and its specificity in content. Understanding the community as a set of programs, activities, social stimuli and educational opportunities that exist in the environment close to the family and school, we put at the forefront of our analysis the relationships between family and school, subsequently including the community, because this paper focuses on the role of pedagogues who primarily act for the child, and subsequently for their institution. However, we do not wish to imply that the family and the community could/should not nurture relations independent of the educational institution. Following this understanding of the relationship between the three domains, as well as the definition of family-school collaboration offered by Bartulović and Kušević (2016), in this paper we define family, school and community collaboration as a process of constant exchange of information, opportunities and experiences between family members, school and community, aimed at supporting the child's educational potential, in which the principal cohesive role is mainly performed by the educational institution. In the rest of the paper, we analyse family, school and community collaboration in the Croatian context.

FAMILY, SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY COLLABORATION IN THE REPUBLIC OF CROATIA

In the Croatian scholarly spaces, the relationship between family, school and community is addressed more extensively on a theoretical level by Ljubetić (2014) in the monograph *Od suradnje do partnerstva obitelji, odgojno-obrazovne*

ustanove i zajednice (From cooperation to family, institution and community partnership), in which she analyses the engaged community model put forward by McDermot (2008, as cited in Ljubetić, 2014, p. 121), which aims to "educate and empower parents and professionals working with parents and to put focus on the broader context and find ways to jointly improve the community to the benefit of children", as well as the community support to families and parenting in Croatia (Ljubetić, 2014). This shows that Ljubetić (2014) is focused not only on the needs of families and professionals in educational institutions, but also on the well-being of the community as a whole. Furthermore, in the introduction to their empirical study, Kranželić and Ferić Šlehan (2008) underline the importance of school, family and community partnership for the child, but also for all other parties involved (Ellis & Hughes, 2002, as cited in Kranželić & Ferić Šlehan, 2008). In particular, they shift their focus on Epstein's sixth model of parental involvement, emphasizing the empirically documented greater success of various prevention programs that involved systematic approach. Writing about intercultural education, Bartulović and Kušević (2016) analyse the relationship between school and community, remarking on the possibility of involving families in this relationship. In terms of empirical studies, Štefulj (2021) provides an overview of the few that were concerned with parental involvement in collaboration with school and the community , but the fact that in most of them community collaboration represents more of a marginal interest rather than being the main focus suggests that it is more a matter of using progressive terminology than a genuine research interest in this topic.

The question that should be asked is why the topic of family, school and community relationships seems to be left on the margins of Croatian analyses is it a small number of scholars who concern themselves with family-school relationships, in which not addressing the community as an "additional" actor in an already complex and insufficiently contextually researched dyadic relationship is to be expected, or are the specific features of the Croatian macrocontext the reasons why both practitioners and scholars distance themselves from this subject? Bronfenbrenner (1977) describes the macrosystem as general cultural imprints in economic, social, educational, legislative and political terms, which are then reflected at lower levels of the system. In this sense, we believe it is justified to look for a part of the answer to this question in several factors of the macrosystem, such as the general positioning of the community in Croatian society , the codification of the pedagogical profession, the legislative definition of duties to be carried out by school professional teams, etc. Here, we consider the manner in which relevant documents describe the professional role of pedagogues and other members of the school professional team to be a particularly important imprint of the macrosystem. In Croatia's Regulation on Weekly Duties of Teachers and Members of the School Professional Team in Primary Schools

(Pravilnik o tjednim radnim obvezama učitelja i stručnih suradnika u osnovnoj školi, 2014, section 20), it is noted quite generally as one of pedagogues' duties, in addition to collaboration with parents, that they should "collaborate with institutions", while in the National Curriculum for Primary Education (Nacionalni kurikulum za osnovnoškolski odgoj i obrazovanje, 2017, p. 31), just below the description of the school pedagogue's role, it is noted that the "[s]chool should enable collaboration with parents and the local and wider community in order to create a stimulating and positive environment. (...) The wider and local community provide students and teachers with different opportunities for collaboration in civic engagement, volunteering, cultural and artistic events and mutual assistance in organizing various activities important for the local and wider community. The community, parents and school encourage collaboration between students and teachers on regional, national and international projects.", which points to the fact that this document follows the previously described theoretical discourse and regards the relationship between family, school and community as intertwined.

However, for such actions to be taken by the school pedagogue/school, it is crucial to provide the necessary resources, above all temporal. In the proceedings titled Suvremeni izazovi u radu (školskog) pedagoga (Contemporary challenges in the work of (school) pedagogues, Turk, 2017), several smaller empirical studies are presented that set out the outlines to understand the role of pedagogues and their practice in the local region. The study by Vračar and Maksimović, which we consider interesting for our subject (2017, emphasis added), was conducted in Serbia with 51 pedagogues-members of the school professional team to determine school pedagogues' professional activities, and the results have shown that the activity which most school pedagogues spend the least time on during their working hours is collaborating with the community (operationalized separately from working with parents). Another relevant study, in which data were collected through self-assessment by 91 school pedagogue, Popović and Anđelković (2017, emphasis added) have shown that of the nine areas of activity, pedagogues are the least committed to collaborating with authorised institutions, organizations, associations and units of local authorities on the one hand, and working with parents on the other. This finding is also interesting because it points to the fact that collaborating with parents and the community are seen as two separate constructs and because both constructs are at the very bottom of the respondents' professional efforts. Following these findings, the authors concluded that such positioning of working with parents and the community, both of which contemporary theoretical discourse insists on, is concerning, but also that the "[1]iterature, the experiences of school pedagogues, and school practice itself reveal a disconnect between the theory and the pedagogues' everyday work." (Popović & Anđelković, 2017, p. 292). We should also bear in mind the inadequate staffing of professional teams in some

schools, which makes it difficult to identify a person who would be, on top of all their other responsibilities, responsible for building the relationships between families, school and community. A study by Velki and Ozdanovac (2014, p. 344), aimed at researching preventive programs to reduce peer violence in primary schools in Croatia's Osijek-Baranja County, included 47 school pedagogues and 18 school psychologists and the results have shown that "some members of the school professional team believe that collaboration with community associations (the police, social welfare services, etc.) should be improved, that teachers, children and parents should be more often and better educated, and that the lack or insufficient number of members of the school professional team (psychologists, pedagogues, etc.) represents a problem in some schools."

Nevertheless, in situations where in educational institutions pedagogues exist, we consider it justified to recognize them as key actors in connecting these three domains, as do Bryan et al. (2019), Pažin-Ilakovac (2016) and Walsh and DePaul (2008). Therefore, following the described discrepancy between expectations articulated in theory that recognize the community as an important actor in family-school collaboration, which are not accompanied by adequate empirical findings regarding real practical situations or the structural and organizational conditions in the educational system that would support the practical implementation of these theoretical expectations, in the rest of the paper we will focus on a critical consideration of potentially contradictory requirements school pedagogues are exposed to in this aspect of their professional role.

THE DOUBLE BINDS OF PEDAGOGUE'S ACTIONS IN CONNECTING FAMILIES, SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY

The previously described theoretical discourse sees the family-school-community collaboration as the integration of community resources with the aims of strengthening school programs and family practices (Epstein, 1995), achieving student success and adopting positive attitudes about school and education (Epstein, 2013), increasing student resilience and encouraging their academic, socio-emotional, and professional development (American School Counselor Association, 2012, Bryan & Henry, 2008, 2012, as quoted in Bryan et al., 2018). As we described in the previous chapter, the National Curriculum for Primary Education (Nacionalni kurikulum za osnovnoškolski odgoj i obrazovanje, 2017), as one of the key educational documents in the Republic of Croatia, parallels the progressiveness of this theoretical discourse, but a progressive understanding of the possible relationships between family, school and community is not transferred into legislation. In Croatia's Act on Education in Primary and Secondary Schools (Zakon o odgoju i obrazovanju u osnovnoj i srednjoj školi, 2008), collaboration between schools and external stakeholders is operationalized through collaboration with social welfare institutions, health care institutions and employment services (section 57), and through collaboration with authorised institutions in cases where their actions are required (section 70). If we consider law to be one of the instruments that construct everyday pedagogical work, such a legal framework speaks of a reduced understanding of community collaboration, and this kind of superficial consideration of the possibilities collaboration offers can, in cases like this, constrain the potential of schools as transformation-oriented institutions, as critical pedagogy understands them to be (Bartulović & Kušević, 2016).

We noticed this discrepancy in the research conducted by the first author of this paper we already referred to, in which the role of pedagogues in the family, school and community collaboration was opeproactive rationalized through forms of and reactive activities. Proactive activities included, among others, devising a plan for school-community collaboration, creating informative content for families about community resources, involving family and community members in the implementation of school programs and projects, connecting with other educational institutions in mentoring programs, connecting families with resources that provide learning and leisure opportunities, organizing professional and financial support for families, informing family members about their own possible contributions to the community, enabling community members to conduct their activities on the school premises and exchanging collaborative experiences with other pedagogues in the community. In contrast, reactive activities included involving specialized services to provide support to families, organizing visits to the family home and organizing financial assistance for families (Štefuli, 2021). The empirical part of the research has shown that the "reactive community involvement in the collaboration between pedagogues and families is more frequently considered than the preventive involvement in the responses generated from the participants" (Štefulj, 2021, p. 55). There is therefore a discrepancy to be noted between the understanding of family, school and community collaboration as a space that can be used to contribute to the progress of society as a whole, which families and schools are part of, and the legislation and the empirical findings, which are both largely focused on community involvement in family-school collaboration in situations when family dynamics need to be "modified" in some way by collaborating with authorised institutions. This raises the question of whether the reason for this lies in the limited time capacity school pedagogues have, in the lack of financial resources to implement collaborative activities, the pedagogues being insufficiently prepared for this aspect of their professional role, in the inherent understanding of the professional role of pedagogues as dominantly corrective with regard to students and their families, or somewhere else. In the rest of this paper, we will return to some of these assumptions as plausible causes of the problems we detected. The discrepancy we observed prompted us to think about problematic

situations pedagogues in schools find themselves in, which we have here called double binds. We use the phrase double bind, created in the context of psychotherapy, to denote a state in which two messages sent to an individual produce certain paradoxes and incongruences (Bateson et al., 1963). Although it is a concept of psychotherapeutic provenance, the double bind is used today as a frame of reference to analyse contradictory expectations in different human interactions, that is, outside of the field it was initially articulated in. In the following pages, we analyse two points of contention concerning the expectations from pedagogues in family, school and community collaboration.

The first point of contention, related to the introduction into this topic, analyses the pedagogue's role in collaboration with community members as prescribed in legislation, according to which they need to react when they perceive oversights or insufficient resources regarding a family, yet a focus on those oversights puts them at risk of observing families from a deficit model perspective (Goodall, 2021, sees poor families as especially exposed to such scrutiny). We were interested in whether there is, apart from in legislation which prescribes reactive activities more clearly, a source of such a focus in the understanding of the pedagogue's profession itself as being correctively-remedial. Certain studies provide a basis for further contemplation on this argument. For instance, Paulson and Edwards (1997) conducted a study aimed at understanding parental expectations from school counselors (a profession comparable to the one of pedagogues) in Canadian schools, and the results have shown that participants regard school counselor's ability to identify and solve students' and families' problems, as well as to refer parents to necessary resources as important, and they agree to a large extent that school counselors should perform these tasks in their work. A study carried out by Clark and Amatea (2004) investigated the perceptions and expectations of American teachers from school counselors, and the participants recognized the importance of school counselor's role in, among other tasks, identifying and solving unfavourable (family) situations and helping teachers solve problems. For this subject, we consider research studies conducted in contexts where the pedagogue's profession is recognised within the tradition of continental pedagogy to be particularly significant. The results of a study conducted by Žužić and Markušić (2017) on the perception of pedagogues from the perspective of high school students have shown that students believe helping to solve problems is one of school pedagogue's important tasks, while in a qualitative research study aimed to describe the similarities and specificities of the roles of pedagogues and psychologists, Skopljak et al. (2020) recognized fostering partnership relations with both internal and external school stakeholders as part of pedagogue's and psychologist's roles, however, the focus group participants, pedagogues and psychologists, considered pedagogues to be focused more on corrective work and psychologists on preventive work.

The results of the studies mentioned above indicate that different actors of the educational process see the pedagogue's role as closely related to problem detection and problem solving. Despite the fact that the way others perceive the pedagogue does not necessarily mean that they indeed mainly deal with those activities, if additional empirical research would confirm the professional focus on problem detection in the pedagogue's collaboration with families and the community, we pose the question whether such a focus can be viewed as inherently problematic, i.e. whether the emphasis on problem solving is indeed inherent to the essence of the pedagogical profession or whether the pedagogical profession is, in contrast, dominantly directed towards a horizon of possibilities, or towards recognizing the points that enable us to support the potential of individuals we find ourselves in pedagogical relationships with. Analysing the pitfalls of putting the focus of the school-family collaboration on pathology, Amatea et al. (2006) ask themselves how constructive can it be to focus on those aspects of family functioning which are basically unchangeable (e.g. poverty or family structure) and consequently call for a focus on family strengths which can support the child's development, whereas Zembylas (2020), writing about criticism in education and disapproving of critical pedagogy's emphasis on the negativities, problems and crises, points out that a negative standpoint can even be regarded as anti-educational, while an alternative one, this being the use of affirmative criticism in education, places an emphasis on what is good and common to individuals at a given moment (Hodgson et al., 2017, as cited in Zembylas, 2020), and states that this approach "encourages teachers and students in schools to engage in affirmative practices that move beyond binaries of true/fake, us/them that perpetuate oppositions and animosities" (Zembylas, 2020, p. 12). By that the author does not claim that such a positioning makes noticing problems unjustifiable, but rather insufficient, which we also hold crucial for the topic we are dealing with: balancing between two polarities – on the one hand, to notice on time the challenges families are facing and to adequately and promptly address them with professional support, particularly having in mind that the profession itself is perceived as one which detects and solves problems, but at the same time not to allow that recognizing these challenges is the principal pedagogue's positioning in contacts with families and the community, because this prevents fostering caring relationships based on strengths and potentials – we believe to be a particular challenge not only in the context of this subject but also in the pedagogue's work in general (e.g. with students or teachers).

The second point of contention we wish to describe arises from the fact that the pedagogue's role is to connect family, school and community, however reducing that role to a sort of "managerial coordinating" of the relationship between the three domains, which is the only thing many pedagogues have time for in their schedule, exposes them to a technocratic construction of their own

profession, where in a performativity-oriented context they attempt to maximize favourable effects by using as few school resources as possible. We would like to introduce this discrepancy by contemplating the different ways in which the disparity between theory and practice of the family, school and community collaboration we described above could hypothetically be fixed. If we consider, due to an increasing diversification of schools, families and communities, the direction of schools closing up towards parents and communities to be unlikely, in advancing the relationships between family, school and community we consider two possible directions. In the first one, which we think is optimal, we view the pedagogue as a representative of primarily students, and then also of the institution they are employed in, who approaches their work as an *intellectual* activity immersed in the cultural and social context of a particular community (Giroux, 1999). Connecting family, school and community in such a context is not only carried out as a response to isolated incentives from the community itself or as a reactive remediation of "family problems", but as a result of regarding their own role as a powerful intellectual activity which shapes "the conditions under which future generations learn about themselves and their relations to others and the world." (Giroux, 1999, p. 147). Following this, the pedagogue's task is then to support a critical, active and transformative behaviour of all students, as well as other actors in the educational process, toward the world we are part of and which is permeated by different relations of interest, power, but also interdependence, which the school in isolation or in a dyadic communication with the family simply cannot capture. Moreover, such actions are legitimized by an understanding of parenting (and consequently of collaboration with families) as being strongly contextually defined (Bronfenbrenner, 1977; Belsky, 1984). Interpreted in that manner, family, school and community collaboration becomes not a theoretically progressive addition pedagogues need to add to their list of professional tasks, but the only way in which relationships between family and school can be conceived. Hence, to observe what already exists in the community that can also help to better understand all actors in the educational process is an inherent part of the everyday pedagogical work.

Nevertheless, stating that something is an inherent part of pedagogical work without taking into account the systemic limitations concerning time, energy and other capacities of pedagogues is a demonstration of a sort of contextual unawareness. As one obstacle to a more intensive collaboration with other members of the school's professional team, the pedagogues and psychologists in the study by Skopljak et al. (2020) mentioned a lack of time and an overload of administrative tasks, while the anecdotal communication of the authors of this paper with school pedagogues also suggests they are preoccupied with various, often administrative, tasks that are continually propagated. In such a context, a turn toward managerial competencies of coordination, delegation and supervision, instead of taking responsibility for a specific domain, is not

surprising. In relation to this, Giroux (1999, p. 144) writes about how teaching corresponds less and less to the vision of intellectual activity we described above and is becoming more of a "depoliticized, de-skilled clerkship". This direction of developing the pedagogue's role in the family, school and community relationship, in which the pedagogue would be merely an information gatherer and a link between different contexts and individuals, seems likely given the circumstances we described, and we see it as part of a wider trend of organizational rationalization of educational systems, aimed at ensuring their more efficient functioning (Mehta, 2013). Strongly criticizing the organization of schools as efficiency-oriented corporations, Giroux (1999) also warns about the dangers educational systems with insufficient resources are exposed to, and this is the danger of losing autonomy as a consequence of collaborating with corporative actors, which can transform them from public spheres into commercial ones. As a flip side to this problem we see the fact that, in a relationship between the family, school and the community understood in this way in which the pedagogue connects different interested parties as a manager, parents themselves can become service users ("clients"), which creates a fertile ground for a reproduction of social inequalities, i.e. the creation of elitist and non-elitist local environments . Much like the discrepancy we described earlier, this divide between adequately satisfying the needs of families, school and the community within limited contextual conditions on the one hand, and understanding the pedagogical profession as not based on delegating and coordinating, but rather on fostering authentic and profound pedagogical relationships with different subjects, we see as a problem that goes beyond the subject of this paper and touches on the essence of constructing the pedagogical profession in the circumstances of the neoliberal logic penetrating the educational system.

CONCLUSION

Based on the preliminary analysis undertaken in this paper, we recognize a vast space for further theoretical and empirical research on this subject, which would contribute to a better understanding of how school pedagogues, who are confronted with different expectations which we described in the paper, react to such expectations and what their (re)actions consequently mean for the perception of the role of the school pedagogue as one of the key actors in connecting family, school and the community. The *double bind* situations we pointed out, which we recognize as authentic dilemmas that can occur in pedagogue's everyday work, bring along different practical implications. Due to requests put in front of them, such as, among others, an increasing amount of administrative duties, lack of time and the orientation towards educational rationalization, practitioners can when collaborating with families and the community fall into the traps of a deficit perception of families, of blindly following legislation (which

visibly lags behind the theory and limits the family-school-community relationship to resolving difficulties that impede students' development) and of perceiving their own role as mainly an organizational one, whereby the pedagogue's role is dissociated from that of an expert for development and advancement of the educational process, with family and community collaboration being part of it. Through a holistic consideration of this paper's subject, what seems to us as particularly worrying is the danger of limiting the role of pedagogue to a double abstraction: to referring "insufficiently functional" families to different institutional forms of "support" and improving their functionality on the on hand, and referring "highly functional" families to different resources which they can additionally utilize for the benefit of their family on the other. If we add to that a third party, the community, which could in this relationship show certain market-oriented interests, as mentioned above, we believe that in a pedagogical sense community collaboration can, if not carefully considered, even have a negative impact on schools' transformative work and on the inclusive and just philosophy of education, despite the fact it was not as a theoretical idea conceived or developed as such.

As a first step toward a better understanding of the pedagogue's positioning in this form of collaboration we see the conducting of further theoretical and, particularly, empirical research in the Croatian context, in which as key interlocutors and research participants we envisage pedagogues themselves, as they can give an insight into the different ways of interpreting, practicing and modifying their own professional roles in an attempt to connect the three spheres of influence students are exposed to, though the perspectives of parents and different actors from different communities could certainly make valuable contributions. To be more specific, in this paper we regarded the concept of community as nationally homogeneous and self-explanatory, however, we have come to realize that the different communities are the ones that can have a significant impact on what their relationship with families and schools will look like. Gaining such knowledge would certainly bring us closer to an answer to the question of how to bring the family-school-community relationships closer to the ideal of families and schools being immersed in the context they exist in, and which provides all actors authentic living and mutual support, away from the logic of surveillance and correction.

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